

Facing Westie Lung Disease/IPF with Facebook and Friends

By Teresa Barnes



(photos and posting approved by Linda Shelley)

Dealing with a sick dog isn't easy and when the diagnosis is Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF)/Westie Lung Disease (WLD), owners are often at a loss for who to turn to and what to do for their pet. Thanks to a Facebook page dedicated to helping Westie owners navigate options, helpful suggestions from an empathetic and compassionate group of Westie lovers are just a click away.

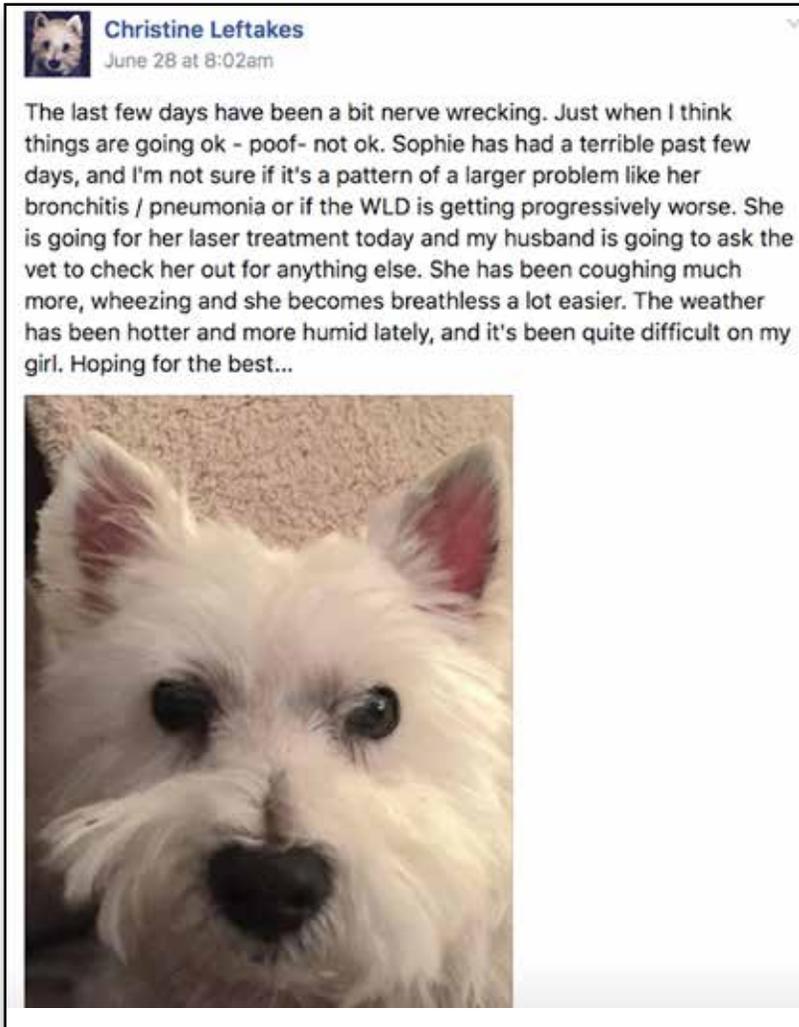
Linda Shelley joined the group soon after her Westie, Molly, was diagnosed with IPF in late June. She posted: "Thank you so much for adding me to the group. My Molly was diagnosed with WLD last week, she also has Cushings so the vet is trying to sort out a balance of medication for her."

Shelley says she recommends the group to others who are seeking information and need support after their dog's diagnosis. "To know there is always someone to ask advice from and offer support means a lot," she said.

In a recent post, Christine Leftakes asked questions about her Westie's symptoms to get input from others regarding their experiences with advancing lung disease. "Sophie has had a terrible past few days and I'm not sure if it's a pattern of a larger problem like her bronchitis/pneumonia or if the WLD is getting progressively worse," she wrote.

Some join the group for comradery in dealing with their dogs' health issues while others join to seek answers to their questions during extremely difficult times. They compare notes on symptoms and issues related to their dogs, sharing videos, photos and supportive words for each another. Others find counsel while they grieve as they comment on their loss of a Westie family member.

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(Photo and posting approved by Christine Leftakes)

Group administrator and page creator PJ Kessler recently wrote on the group's page: "I know so many of you are in the same boat and miss your babies. The grief comes in waves and when you love them so much, it hurts for a very long time. Friends...please post when you need some love and support. We all care."

Kessler created the group in January 2015 after her Westie, Tyler, was diagnosed with IPF and had undergone laser therapy. "She put the group together to provide a forum to share information easily with others," she said.

The closed group, "Westie Lung Disease--IPF in USA (Treatments, Symptoms, Studies, Etc.*)" now has more than 600 members. The page provides a few documents as resources to help new members gather information quickly. They include a welcome letter that provides an overview of the disease and the current state of affairs related to treatments, a fact sheet on the lung condition, and a protocol for laser therapy provided by a veterinarian who is a representative of the manufacturer of K-Laser.

Two veterinarians who serve as advisors to the group and regularly respond directly to members' questions are Lindsay Merkel, DVM, of the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center and David Bradley, DVM, who is also employed by K-Laser, the manufacturer of a laser that is being more commonly used for Westies with IPF.

The Facebook group's administrators have each had one or more Westies diagnosed with IPF. In addition to Kessler, other admins, Renaye Delano, Sandy Gilmer, Janet Kurnick and Dena Zimmer regularly respond to participants and do posts of their own to engage their members. Kessler encourages members to communicate with the admins. "They are here to assist you and answer questions regarding diagnosis, treatment and caring for your IPF Westie. Please don't hesitate to contact them".

You may find the WLD closed Facebook page at: westielungdisease.net.