



Always consult with a veterinarian that you feel comfortable with before diagnosing or treating any disease on your own. This information is for reference only.

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Intervertebral Disk Disease

Issue Description

Intervertebral disk disease (IDD) in the dog is a clinical disorder manifested by pain, ataxia, paresis, motor paralysis, or sensor motor paralysis. It occurs most often in the chondrodystrophoid dogs but also affects the nonchondrodystrophoid breeds. There are two different types of intervertebral disk disease: type I and type II. The treatment protocol for intervertebral disk disease varies, and the treatment required depends on the severity of the disease. While many cases of intervertebral disk disease can be successfully treated, in extremely severe cases of the disease the quality of the pet's life can be affected.

Other Names

IDD

Symptoms

Any breed of dog can have a disk herniation, especially when external trauma is involved. However, because of the unique metabolic differences of their disks, the chondrodystrophoid breeds are far more likely to develop significant intervertebral disk disease in their lifetimes. Analysis of the frequency of occurrence of disk disease within particular breeds shows that standard and miniature dachshunds are at the highest risk of all dog breeds followed by Pekingese. Approximately one in every four dachshunds will have some degree of disk related problems in their lifetimes. The age of incidence for chondrodystrophoid breeds is highest between three and seven years, as opposed to eight to ten years for nonchondrodystrophoid breeds. No sex predilection has been identified. Clinical signs seen in dogs with intervertebral disk disease vary highly depending on which disk herniates, the amount and speed at which disk material actually protrudes, and which nervous system structures become involved and to what extent.

Signs may include:

- reluctance to move the head up or down
- rear leg weakness
- rigid abdomen
- pain when picked up
- reluctance to move
- and/or loss of urine and bowel control.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis of disk disease is based on clinical signs initially. To prove that a disk is pressing on the spinal cord, a special X-ray study known as a myelogram is often necessary. To perform a myelogram, first a spinal tap is done. Next, a dye or contrast agent is injected around the spinal cord to outline it. This usually shows where the spinal cord is damaged, and helps the surgeon to know exactly where the surgery should be performed. For both the myelogram and the spinal tap the animal needs to be very still, therefore anesthesia is necessary to perform these tests.

Treatment

Treatment almost always includes the use of anti-inflammatory medications such as cortisone (a steroid). These products help shrink the herniated disc and swollen tissue, and at the same time relieve any inflammation that may have occurred within the spinal cord. Pain medication may also be prescribed. Do not use pain relievers without consulting first with your veterinarian. Today more than 90% of all ruptured disc cases in this area of the back are handled with medical therapy alone.

Surgery to either remove the protruding disc material or cut away a portion of the bone that surrounds the spinal cord is sometimes necessary. To be effective, however, surgery must usually be done within the first day or so following the injury. Whether medical, surgical or a combination of the two treatments is used, it may be several weeks before the actual outcome of the case can be determined.

A grading system is used for disk disease in the lower back to help owners understand chances of recovery:

- Grade 1 dogs are painful, but all function is normal.
- Grade 2 dogs have mild limb deficits.
- Grade 3 dogs have moderate limb deficits.
- Grade 4 dogs have lost limb movement (paresis) but have intact deep limb pain sensation.
- Grade 5 dogs have lost deep pain sensation and have total limb paralysis.

Dog Breeds Prone to Intervertebral disk disease:

- Beagle
- Clumber Spaniel
- Dandie Dinmont Terrier
- French Bulldog
- Papillon
- Pembroke Welsh Corgi
- Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen
- Sussex Spaniel

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