



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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Wobbler Disease

Issue Description

Wobblers syndrome is caused by a narrowing or malformation of the spinal cervical (neck) vertebrae which causes pressure on the spinal cord by the lower cervical (neck) vertebrae due to either a malformation of the vertebra or a malocclusion (when the vertebrae do not come together properly). This causes anywhere from a mild, to a severe affect in the dogs gait.

Other Names

Cervical Spondylomyelopathy, Wobblers Syndrome, Cervical Vertebral Instability, CSM, Cervical Vertebral Malformation, CVM

Causes

The cause of Wobblers Syndrome is unknown, although a link to fast growth and genetics is suspected. According to the Merck Veterinary Manual, "The cause is unknown, although rapid growth rates and nutrition, mechanical factors, and genetics may be implicated." Some breeders say that there has been a marked decrease in the incidence of not only Wobblers Syndrome, but other diseases that occur during the early, fast growth stages of Great Danes, when weight is kept down and growth rate has been slowed nutritionally.

Symptoms

Symptoms of Wobbler disease include general weakness and a crouching stance where the neck is flexed downward. The affected dog can seem clumsy and have problems coordinating its limbs and torso. In some dogs, dragging of the rear leg toes is one of the first signs of Wobbler disease. Eventually, the disease will progress and the dog will start showing symptoms of Wobbler disease from the front legs as well (normally less serious symptoms than from the back legs). Some dogs will also develop neck pain.

Diagnosis

A veterinarian will do a neurological work up on the dog and this often includes not only cervical spine x-rays, but a myelogram x-ray.

A myelogram is not only dangerous to the dog, but is expensive. The owner should thoroughly investigate the advisability of this procedure, especially since if it is Wobblers Syndrome, surgery may not be the best option.

Treatment

Treatment of Wobblers Syndrome can include the use of corticosteroids, a neck brace and surgery. The surgery fuses the 2 unstable vertebrae which relieves the pressure on the spinal cord. Unfortunately this also puts further stress on adjoining vertebrae which can cause instability to recur in them. Many Wobblers can live a long and pain free life with little or no treatment. Others deteriorate quickly and euthanasia then becomes the only kind choice.

Breeds Affected

Dobermans and Great Danes primarily - young Danes more commonly affected. Dobermans - young and old, can grow through the problem as youngsters, more commonly seen in middle aged to older Dobermans (3 to 9 years of age) Other breeds who have a similar if not identical syndrome described include the Boxer, Basset, Bull Mastiff, St. Bernard, Weimeraner, Labrador Retriever, German Shepherd, Rhodesian Ridgeback, Dalmatian, Samoyed, Old English Sheepdog, Irish Setter, and the Borzoi. Males are affected more often, in a ratio of 2:1.

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