

## The Truth about IVDD in Dogs

### What is Intervertebral Disc Disease (IVDD) in dogs?

### What are the causes & symptoms? How to prevent IVDD?



Intervertebral disc disease (IVDD) in dogs is a condition where the cushioning discs between the vertebrae (bones) of the spinal column either bulge or burst into the spinal cord space. This is commonly called herniated disc or slipped disc.



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### Causes of IVDD

IVDD is a disease that effects the spinal cord over time, but it might not be apparent until there is a trigger. Unfortunately, a dog who appears to be completely healthy one day may take a fall or jump in such a way that a disc becomes ruptured. IVDD is degenerative (gradual) process, but a jump or fall can damage a disc that has already been weakened by IVDD and bring on an acute phase of the disease.

The disease is caused when the cushioning disc (which function like shock absorbers) between the vertebrae of the spinal column begin to harden. Eventually, they may harden to the point that they can no longer adequately cushion the spinal vertebrae.

Consequently, a forceful jump or bad landing can cause a disc (or discs) to burst and press into the nerves running through the spinal cord. This can be painful and cause nerve damage and/or eventual paralysis.

Alternatively, the hardening of the discs can eventually cause them to bulge and compress the spinal cord. This can damage the nerve impulses such that bladder and bowel control can be impaired, in addition to potentially causing paralysis.

### Checklist of IVDD Symptoms

Symptoms can emerge gradually or be intermittent or sudden. While any dog breed can experience IVDD, some breeds are more prone to the disease. Early intervention is crucial in order to minimize the possibility of permanent nerve damage. Here are some common symptoms of IVDD:

- Stiffness of neck, limbs or back
- Dragging rear leg(s)
- Knuckling under
- Obvious weakness or pain
- Lowered head when standing
- Increased sensitivity to movement or touch
- Impaired gait
- Paralysis
- Incontinence
- Back/muscle spasms

### Which Dogs are most susceptible?

Certain breeds are more likely to get IVDD due to a disorder of cartilage formation called **chondrodystrophy or dwarfism**. The disease generally occurs in these breeds between the ages of 3 and 6 years old. French Bulldogs fall into this category.

Overweight dogs are additionally more likely to suffer from the effects of IVDD.

## Diagnosis and Treatment of IVDD

A veterinary examination will generally include a neurological exam, X-rays, and/or special images (myelogram, CT scan, MRI) to locate the source of spinal injury.

If the diagnosis reveals mild to moderate injury, treatment may include the administration of steroids and anti-inflammatory medications to reduce swelling and pain, with confined rest required for four to six weeks or so.

Post-surgical physical rehabilitation is often recommended for muscle strengthening. If surgery is not successful, a wheelchair maybe helpful to facilitate mobility.

Alternative treatments that maybe helpful include acupuncture and laser therapy. Supplements such as green lipped mussel may also be added to conventional medications for possible anti-inflammatory benefits.

## Prevention

There are some easy and practical things a pet owner can do to minimize the risk of a disc rupture in their pets:

- Keep your dog's weight down to reduce neck and back stress, especially for breeds predisposed to the disease
- Use a harness for walks to reduce neck stress with collar
- Minimize jumping on/off furniture or heights and avoid activities that may put undue stress on your dog's back

## Living with IVDD

There are many ways to give your IVDD dog a better quality of life, particularly when they are in recovery:

**Diet** – maintain your dog's healthy weight to reduce stress on their back and neck.

**Food** – moisten kibble or feed wet food. Chewing can cause stress on the jaw and neck, which can result in pain. Same goes for chew toys or treats. Abstain from these during recovery period.

**Eliminate stress on back and neck** – raise food and water bowls so that your dog doesn't have to bend down to eat or drink; keep the crate your pup is recovering in at a higher level so that he doesn't have to raise his head to look at you or his surroundings.

**Acupuncture Therapy** – this is particularly good for dogs that respond poorly to or cannot tolerate medication. Surgery may not be an option due to health or finances. Acupuncture may be one option to look into. Acupuncture regenerates neurons mobilizing stem cell regrowth.

**Laser Therapy** – LT has been proven to reduce tenderness, pain and speed up the tissue healing process.

**Handling** – Make sure you know the proper way to pick your dog up in order to avoid further injury. Do not pull your dog out of the crate, but instead gently lift him. Support and lift the chest and hind end at the same time. Keep his spine aligned by holding him against your chest. Then, gently put him on the floor.

**Walking** – It is important to remember to reduce stress on the neck and spine. When walking your dog make sure NOT to walk your dog using a collar or head halter. Always use a harness to reduce neck stress.

**Back support** – after a period of recovery, it is important to keep your dog's back stable and straight. Wearing a back brace puts less pressure on your dog's spine and may help him/her to have a more enjoyable and normal life.

**Pain and Discomfort** – Targeted Pulse electromagnetic Therapy has shown to be very effective in the reduction of pain and swelling, and using it over the affected area of your dog's back can greatly increase his comfort level and reduce inflammation in the spine. tPEMF™ technology enhances production of Nitric Oxide, which is the body's own way of healing itself when it is injured.

**Environment** – lots of love, comfort, warmth, encouragement, and a peaceful environment when recovering. Dogs can suffer from stress just like humans do. Stress makes it hard to heal. Gentle touch ... resting your hand lightly on your pup's body sends healing energy and love.

## Assistive Devices-

- Ramps to get up and down from furniture, decks, porches and cars
- Belly bands, Doggie diapers and bed pads for bladder or bowel control issues
- Supportive and protective wraps, braces, footwear and lift harnesses
- Doggy wheelchairs