



UPSTATE VETERINARY SPECIALTIES PLLC

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IVDD

INTERVERTEBRAL DISC DISEASE

Intervertebral disc disease or IVDD is the most common spinal disease in dogs. There are intervertebral discs under the spinal cord between each vertebrae in the neck, back, and many of the tail bones. There is an outer fibrous portion and an inner gelatinous portion of the disc. These discs act as shock absorbers or cushions between the vertebrae. As we age, the inner gelatinous portion loses its water content and becomes mineralized. Weakening of the outer portion of the disc can lead to a disc bulging or herniating causing varying degrees of compression to the spinal cord.

The most common breeds we see IVDD in include: Dachshund, Pekingese, Shih Tzu, Lhasa Apso, French bulldogs, Corgi, Basset Hound, and Beagle. These breeds are considered chondrodystrophic breeds, meaning they have short legs and longer backs making them genetically predisposed to IVDD, though IVDD can occur in large breed dogs as well.

Signs and symptoms of IVDD vary depending on the location and severity of the disease, but can include:

- Pain with or without vocalization
- Hesitation or reluctance to walk/jump/climb
- Low head carriage
- Hunched back posture
- Incoordination
- Scuffing, knuckling, crisscrossing of limbs
- Weakness/lameness or even paralysis
- Urinary or fecal incontinence



The best imaging modality available to diagnose IVDD is MRI. CT may be acceptable in certain situations. Radiographs show the vertebrae of the spinal column but unfortunately do not show the discs or changes within the spinal cord.

Depending on the severity of the clinical signs, some patients can be treated with medical management including: anti-inflammatories, pain medications, and muscle relaxants. Additionally, these patients will need strict rest and confinement. If the symptoms are more severe, for instance if a patient is unable to walk, then spinal surgery may be warranted. The goal of spinal surgery is to decompress the spinal cord by removing the pressure applied by the offending herniated disk material. Surgery has a good to excellent prognosis as long as the patient still has feeling to the affected limbs (intact nociception or so-called “deep pain”). Unfortunately, once a patient has lost pain



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sensation to their affected limbs, the prognosis is guarded to poor (50% prognosis for regaining ambulation and bladder function).

Full recovery from spinal cord injury can take weeks (6-8 weeks) to months (up to 3-4 months). Some pets never fully regain control of their limbs, but that is uncommon (~10-15% of cases). After surgery, patients will require extensive nursing care at home which can include: bladder expression, passive range-of-motion and physical therapy exercises/massage, and sling-walking or carrying your pet up and down stairs, etc. Clinically significant recurrent intervertebral disk disease can occur in approximately 20% of dogs.