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## WOBLER SYNDROME

Cervical spondylomyelopathy (CSM) or most commonly known as “Wobbler Syndrome” is a common disease of the cervical vertebral column (neck) of large and giant breed dogs. Even though the disease could essentially affect all breeds, the Great Dane and Doberman represent approximately 60-70% of all affected dogs. Dogs with CSM typically have a “wobbly” gait mostly in the hind end (thus the name “wobblers”). This wobbly gait may only be visible on slippery floors or when the dog walks slowly. They may walk with their head held down, which is usually a sign of neck pain. In the more advanced stages of the disease the problems become obvious in all four legs, and they may have trouble getting up, appear very weak, and even “buckle over” with the front legs.

There are two basic categories of dogs which may be affected by wobbler syndrome

1. Immature or young adult large breed dogs that have bony narrowing of the vertebral canal which is directly responsible for spinal cord compression. This is typical for giant breed dogs such as great Danes and Mastiffs.
2. Middle-aged or older dogs that have degenerative changes of the disks, vertebral column, ligamentous structures, and/or joints of the spine. These dogs have a vertebral column stenosis (or narrowing) which predisposes them to a disc-associated compression of the spinal cord. This causes further narrowing or impingement of the spinal cord and worsening symptoms. Disk-Associated Wobbler Syndrome (DAWS) is most common in the Doberman.

Signs of Wobbler Syndrome can include:

Weakness and an uncoordinated gait usually first seen in the pelvic limbs

Front limb gait can appear “choppy” or short-strided. This is called a “two-engine” gait because it appears at the front legs are operating at one speed while the back legs are operating at a different speed.

- Front limbs may also have a spastic or “floating” gait
- Pelvic limbs usually have a wide-based stance
- Scuffing of nails, abrasions on the tops of paws
- Neck pain, muscle stiffness or muscle spasms
- In more severe cases partial or complete paralysis



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RI is the gold standard diagnostic test for dogs with CSM. MRI allows assessment of the spinal cord to more easily visualize the vertebrae and localize the site of spinal cord compression.

For dogs with more severe symptoms, surgery may be required. Surgery to address wobbler syndrome is an intensive and invasive process. Surgery may involve spinal cord decompression (laminectomy) and/or vertebral column stabilization (“fusion”). Post operatively, patients may require a prolonged hospital stay with a long recovery period. These patients also require extensive at home nursing care and intensive physical therapy/rehabilitation. The prognosis after surgery is fair-good with approximately 75% of dogs benefiting from a surgical procedure. However, many dogs can have progression of disease at other sites in the future.

Conservative or medical management is a viable option for many dogs with CSM. Medical management can include NSAIDs or corticosteroids, pain medications, muscle relaxants, exercise restriction, physical therapy and therapeutic exercises, integrative therapies (cold laser therapy, acupuncture), and the use of a harness instead of collars.