

Neck or Back Pain and IVDD

Neck and back pain may originate from the ligaments, muscle, or discs that support the spine, or from a lesion on the spinal cord itself. Muscle or ligament strain can occur from overexertion, trauma, or twisting/jarring the neck or back. It can also be an exacerbation of osteoarthritic changes may result in acute back or neck discomfort. These sources of pain tend to improve with rest and pain management.

More significant diseases including intervertebral disc disease, meningitis (inflammation of the protective membranes of the spinal cord), diskospondylitis (infection of the intervertebral discs or vertebral endplates), and spinal tumors can all cause neck or back pain. Intervertebral disc disease is relatively common in dogs and may present with acute or more chronic signs of pain.

If your pet's back or neck pain persists or worsens despite rest and pain management or you note worsening neurologic function including weakness, stumbling, paralysis, changes in behavior, seizures, or difficulty breathing, your pet should be re-evaluated emergently and consultation with a veterinary neurologist should be pursued. Additional information about intervertebral disc disease is provided below.

Intervertebral Disc Disease in Dogs:

Intervertebral disc disease (IVDD) refers to a herniated disc in the neck or back and is commonly diagnosed in dogs. It is seen more in some breeds, including Dachshunds, Beagles, Corgis, and French Bulldogs, but any dog or cat can present with IVDD.

In dogs, the intervertebral discs sit between vertebrae and just below the spinal cord. These spongy discs allow for increased flexibility of the spine and act as shock-absorbers between vertebrae. Discs are composed of a fibrous ring with a jelly-like center.

Disc disease can occur in one of two ways:

- Material from the disc can acutely extrude up and into the spinal cord
- Discs can begin bulging and pressing on the spinal cord

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In either case, compression of the spinal cord can result in pain, spinal cord injury, and weakness or paralysis; the severity of neurologic dysfunction depends on the severity of spinal cord injury.

Dogs that are showing signs of significant back pain, weakness, stumbling, or paralysis should be evaluated emergently and a consultation with a veterinary neurologist should be pursued. IVDD and spinal cord injury are best evaluated with advanced imaging of the spine (MRI). If there is significant compression of the spinal cord, surgery with a neurologist or surgeon may be advised. The goal of surgery is to alleviate spinal cord compression and improve your pet's pain level and ability to walk.

Medical management, if chosen, includes strict rest (cage-rest) for several weeks and pain management with a combination of pain medications and anti-inflammatory medication. Pets with significant compression or spinal cord injury may not improve with medical management alone.

Pets that are unable to walk often require assistance urinating, as well. Chronic urinary issues should be discussed with your primary care veterinarian or neurologist, as urinary tract infections and urine scald are potential complications.