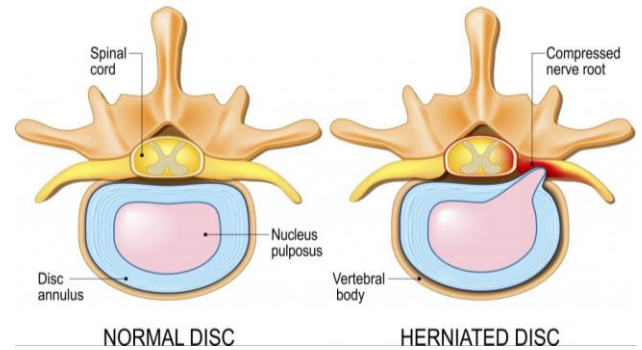


Intervertebral Disc Disease (IVDD)

Just like people, pups can develop bad backs - and anything related to a spinal injury or disease makes us cringe. The spine is literally the “backbone” of our being. So, what is IVDD and what should you know if your dog is diagnosed with this disease?

What is IVDD?

IVDD stands for **intervertebral disc disease**. It is a condition where the intervertebral discs between the vertebrae bulge or burst. Bulging or bursting intervertebral discs can enter the spinal cord space and put pressure on spinal nerves. This can cause wobbling and incoordination, pain, nerve damage, and even lower body paralysis.



While this is a gradual, degenerative disease, it can lie dormant for many years. This condition rears its ugly face when there is an injury resulting in inability of the spinal cord to function at normal capacity due to a disc herniation.

IVDD and Small Breeds

All dogs are susceptible to IVDD, but some smaller breeds are more prone to the disease. Ground hugging pooches like Dachshunds, Corgis, and Basset hounds) have a genetic trait that gives them that body type, but it also affects cartilage growth (the main component of intervertebral discs) throughout their bodies. The result is disc calcification – the hardening of the intervertebral disc. This can begin as early as two years of age, but onset usually starts between 3 and 6.

Symptoms of IVDD

The onset of IVDD is often accompanied by pain and a change in the way your dog moves. The bulging disc pressing against the spinal cord disrupts nerve signals to the limbs and bladder. This causes a range of mild to severe symptoms. The more the disc presses into the spinal cord, the more aggressive the symptoms can become. Owners should take notice of changes in the way their dog walks; they may seem unsteady, drag one or both limbs, or lose control of their bladder

Symptoms of IVDD may include:

- Head held low
- Arching back
- Shivering or crying
- Unsteadiness in all legs
- Inability to walk normally
- Crossing back legs when walking
- Inability to walk normally
- Dragging rear legs
- Inability to support their own weight

The slow onset of these symptoms is usually due to a slow rupturing disc that is progressively damaging the spinal cord. However, some ruptures can happen extremely quickly with tremendous force. A dog that might have been living normally may suddenly become completely paralyzed within moments of an IVDD event.

How is IVDD Diagnosed?

If your pet pal is displaying these symptoms, your veterinarian should be consulted immediately. IVDD can be very painful for dogs and early treatment is essential for preventing the condition from becoming more severe or causing irreversible damage. Tests for diagnosing typically include x-rays, a neurological exam, and/or MRI to help locate the disc or discs causing your dog's symptoms.

Treatment of IVDD

The diagnosis and treatment needs to begin as early as possible; delays in treatment could lead to irreversible damage.

• *Medication*

In less severe cases, some dogs may benefit from anti-inflammatory medication to reduce swelling in the spinal cord, which can reduce pain and allow the spinal cord to begin healing. Strict crate-rest and minimal movement for up to six weeks are usually required. Many pups will respond well to non-surgical intervention and can get back to regular activity. Still, harnesses may be recommended for walking, along with steps or ramps to minimize jumping.

• *Surgical Intervention*

Surgery is typically recommended for dogs suffering from more severe cases of IVDD where rest and medication are not enough. Surgery outcomes are most successful in dogs that have not lost their ability to walk. During surgery the hardened disc material which is pressing on your dog's spinal cord will be removed.

• *Physical Therapy*

Following surgery, your vet may also recommend physical therapy for your dog in order to work on muscle strengthening and to help get your pet moving comfortably again.

Prevention

Old age is the primary culprit of IVDD, but there are things pet parents can do (especially with susceptible breeds) that can help keep the disease at bay:

- Keep your dog's weight within a healthy range for their breed.
- Use a harness rather than a neck collar to minimize stresses to the neck.
- Do not let them sit up on their bottom in a begging position.
- Raise food bowls so they can eat at a level.
- Keep nails trimmed – extremely important for healthy back posture.
- Joint & Omega 3 supplements.
- Non-slip mats can help protect your IVDD/senior dog from slipping in high use areas of your home.

