



Cervical Disc Disease (Neck Pain)

Cervical Disc Disease is a very painful disorder that occurs when there is swelling around the spinal cord in the neck. Causes for swelling can be injury, disc protrusion or changes in the bones or supporting structures of the spine leading to instability. Cervical disc problems can be seen in any dog at any age, but middle aged beagles, dobermans and breeds of dogs with short crooked legs (chondrodystrophoid) are more at risk.

The primary symptom of cervical disc disease is PAIN: sudden, severe, often immobilizing pain. They are unwilling to raise their head or turn it side to side. Some dogs will also have front leg lameness if the problem is in the lower part of their neck. Fortunately, there is a lot of "extra" room around the spinal cord in the neck, therefore neurologic problems associated with spinal compression are not commonly seen.

Treatment for neck pain is primarily based on the use of anti-inflammatory medications, muscle relaxers and sometimes opioid pain medication. Another crucial key to managing neck pain is REST. Enforced rest means confinement to a small kennel or crate except when carried or escorted outside to eliminate. Once dogs start to feel better they increase their activity and potentially re-injure themselves if not confined by their human caretakers.

Surgery for neck pain is not commonly needed. In rare circumstances of unrelenting pain, neurologic deficits or actual trauma (such as hit by car), a pet will need to see a surgery specialist to decide if surgery is the best option. These pets will need to have a myelogram or CT scan.

Home care of a pet who suffers from neck pain involves restriction of activity, the use of a harness rather than collars around the neck and the judicious use of anti-inflammatory medication and muscle relaxers.

The prognosis for dogs suffering from cervical disc problems is usually good. Approximately 30-40% will have relapses and some will need chronic medications.