



Referral Animal Hospital, P.A.

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Cervical Disc Disease

Your dog has experienced an episode of cervical disc disease. While not limited to small breeds of dogs, there is a much higher incidence of cervical disc disease among Beagles, Poodles, Dachshunds, Pekingese, etc. than the larger breeds of dogs. This is primarily due to genetic factors, i.e. the discs of certain breeds are predisposed to premature senile changes which result in eventual rupture.

Cervical disc disease can be an extremely painful problem for your pet. A mild disc rupture oftentimes results only in neck pain, while more severe ruptures can cause neurologic problems. Dogs with mild nerve damage may only manifest it by limping or holding up one front leg. Animals more severely affected may eventually become "wobbly" on all four legs or eventually paralyzed. The severity of your pet's problem will dictate what needs to be done. The medical management of cervical disc disease is generally unrewarding for all concerned. The pets remain symptom free while on steroid medication but as soon as the medications are discontinued, the neck pain typically recurs. Also, steroids may not be used for long term therapy due to severe side effects. Most commonly the long term resolution of neck pain can only be achieved by surgery.

Prior to surgery, a myelogram is done to outline the spinal cord and delineate exactly where and how much disc material is putting pressure on the spinal cord. This area is often approached by a ventral cervical slot technique which provides limited access to the spinal cord and facilitates removal of the offending disc material. However, some patients require an approach from above the spinal cord (dorsal laminectomy). As with any spinal injury, the results of treatment (surgical or medical) are sometimes difficult to predict. Your veterinarian, following the preoperative neurologic examination, can best explain your pet's chances for recovery. There is a remote possibility that your pet's neurologic status may be worsened by a myelogram and surgery. This chance is small, however, and the potential benefits of surgery generally outweigh any risks involved. These setbacks are generally not permanent, but can prolong the postoperative rehabilitation time and provide an added source of stress to the owner, doctor, and pet. In general, dogs which require a dorsal laminectomy have a slower recovery.

Following surgery it may take up to six weeks before your dog regains normal neck mobility and is free of pain. Some animals significantly improve in a much shorter time period. There is the occasional dog which does not improve, for unknown reasons. During the rehabilitation phase, it is important for you to keep your pet quiet for four weeks following surgery. Medications should be given as directed. Typically, pets that have had neck surgery should be confined to the house for four weeks, then yard confined for weeks four through eight. No heavy exercise should be allowed for at least three months and then only if your pet's neurologic status has returned to normal. Decks and stairs can be especially dangerous and difficult to navigate for neurologically compromised animals. You should prevent access to these structures until your pet has regained good coordination. Choker chains or neck leashes are inappropriate following surgery; the use of a chest harness is recommended.

If you have any questions or problems during your pet's rehabilitation, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are available to answer questions during regular office hours as well as evenings and weekends via our voice mail system. Please leave a message and a member of our staff will return your call as soon as possible. Thank you for trusting us with the care of your pet.