

Disc Disease

As pet owners, we all hope that our dogs never have to experience disc disease. However, this is a fairly common condition in some breeds and in many geriatric pets. Discs are essentially cushions that help to absorb tension and pressure between the vertebrae. Humans have this same mechanism and can also suffer from disc disease. By acting as shock absorbers, discs help to protect the very delicate nerves found within a dog's spinal column.

There are several reasons that may cause your dog to develop disc disease. In many cases, disc disease occurs due to a trauma, such as falling, jumping off of furniture, being struck by a car or even rough-play. Discs can also degenerate as a pet becomes geriatric. Obese dogs are very prone to developing disc disease as well due to the extra pressure on the back caused by the fat. Certain breeds, such as Daschunds, Basset Hounds, Cocker Spaniels and other breeds with long backs can be more prone to developing disc disease especially if overweight.

The symptoms of disc disease are normally rather obvious. These signs will vary; however, depending on which disc is affected as this disease can occur anywhere on the spinal cord. For example, if your dog leaps from the bed and a disc in the middle back becomes slipped (known as a slipped disc), they will have greater pain in this area and the rear legs may be more affected. The abdomen may become rigid, the dog may tremble and in some cases they may even lose control of their bowel and bladder. In cases where a disc in the upper vertebrae around the neck is affected, the dog will likely have difficulty holding its neck and head up. In any case, the dog will be weakened and often lethargic. In severe cases, disc disease can also lead to paralysis. If you notice any of the above symptoms in your dog, you should seek immediate veterinary attention. Your veterinarian will perform a thorough exam and will likely need to take X-Rays to further assess the health of your dog's vertebral column. If caught early, disc disease can be successfully treated with medications. Antiinflammatories, antibiotics, pain medications or a combination can be used to treat this condition. Be sure to closely follow your veterinarian's instructions on how to administer these medications.

Treatment does not just involve giving medications. Your pet's activity may need to be restricted and jumping and rough-play are definitely prohibited. This means no more leaping from furniture! If your pet is overweight, it will also be very important to begin a high quality diet that promotes weight loss. Your veterinarian will recommend a diet that is right for your pet. Once your pet has been cleared for increased exercise by your veterinarian, regular walks will greatly benefit your dog's weight and overall health.