

DR. TODD W. RIECKS
Orthopedic Columnist

Intervertebral Disc Disease - What Is It?

By **Dr. Todd W. Riecks, DVM** Practice Limited to Small Animal Surgery
Colorado Canine Orthopedics at The Veterinary Specialty Center

Intervertebral disc disease (IVDD) is most common in canines. By far, the most common breed affected is the Dachshund, with other high risk breeds including the Beagle, Pekingese, Shih Tzu, and Lhasa apso. Clinical signs include spine-associated pain, ataxia (“drunken-sailor walk”), and paresis (weakness) or plegia (paralysis). Persistent trembling, stiff walking, hunched back or stiff neck, anorexia, or random vocalization can be signs of spinal pain. Walking on the tops of paws (knuckling), tripping/falling/crossing over of limbs, dragging of one or both hind limbs, and/or holding a limb up at a time of rest can indicate spinal associated weakness. Signs can be acute/sudden in onset or insidious with progressive weakness over time.

There is an intervertebral disc (“between” vertebra) at every

shock absorbing capabilities. In the predisposed breeds, this happens at a very early age (eight months –two years of age) with 75% of intervertebral discs undergoing some degree of degeneration by year one.

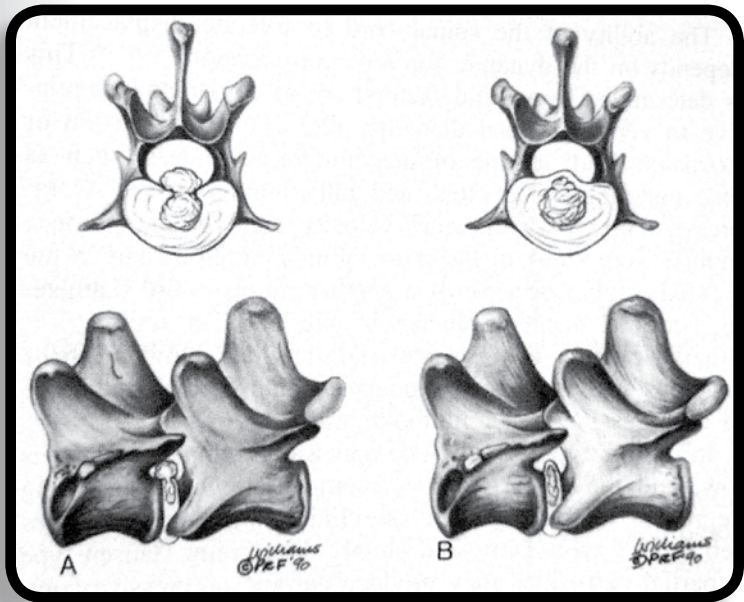
80% of dogs with clinical signs attributed to IVDD, 85-90% have a chance for full recovery. Owners must be aware that spinal cord healing is prolonged, with an average recovery time of six weeks even with surgical correction. Dachshunds as a breed have a 25% chance of having another herniated disc in their lifetime while all other breeds have a 10% risk of recurrence.

“Persistent trembling, stiff walking, hunched back or stiff neck, anorexia, or random vocalization can be signs of spinal pain.”

Once disc degeneration occurs, they are predisposed to slowly “bulging” due to a combination of a weakened annulus and hardening nucleus (Figure 1A) or acutely herniating with a sudden rupture of the annulus and projection of the nucleus into the spinal canal (Figure 1B). Either way, clinical signs as described above are a result of the ongoing compressive force on the spinal cord (a mass occupying space in the spinal canal) and/or the percussive force to the

spinal cord that occurs with acute herniation. How can we as owners prevent or slow disc degeneration? Obese dogs are logically putting more strain on all joints including vertebral. Keep your dog active and at their ideal weight and the risks are reduced.

For more information about orthopedic conditions and treatment visit www.CanineOrtho.com.



vertebral space in the canine spine, save the cervical vertebral space at cervical vertebra one and cervical vertebra two (C1-C2). The discs are positioned below the spinal canal and facilitate shock absorption and fluid movement of the vertebral spine. Their basic anatomy is similar to a “jelly-donut” with a dense fibrous outer layer or annulus (donut) and a gelatinous center or nucleus (jelly filling). The outer annulus has an intimate association with its vertebral bodies on either side providing spinal column stability. These discs can degenerate over time, losing their water content and thus their

intervention involves removal of the disc within the spinal canal that is causing spinal cord compression. Surgical decompression requires a high level of expertise and specialized surgical equipment. Which decision is right for your dog should be explained to you by your family veterinarian and a consultation with a surgical specialist.

Of all possible presentations of severity ranging from pain only to paralysis representing

OLD TOWN
PET SALON AND BARKERY

“Where your best friend is family”

SUMMERTIME!!!
HOT DOGS and COOL TREATS

Mention this ad and receive \$5.00 off your summer grooming or bath.
Existing customers, don't forget to refer a friend to receive your \$5.00 off.

Cool down your dog with an end of summer grooming and natural treat for the ride back home!

BE SURE TO CHECK OUT OUR BARKERY.

Old Town Pet Salon and Barkery

5012 North 30th Street
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80904
(719) 578-1149
www.CanineCafeBakery.com