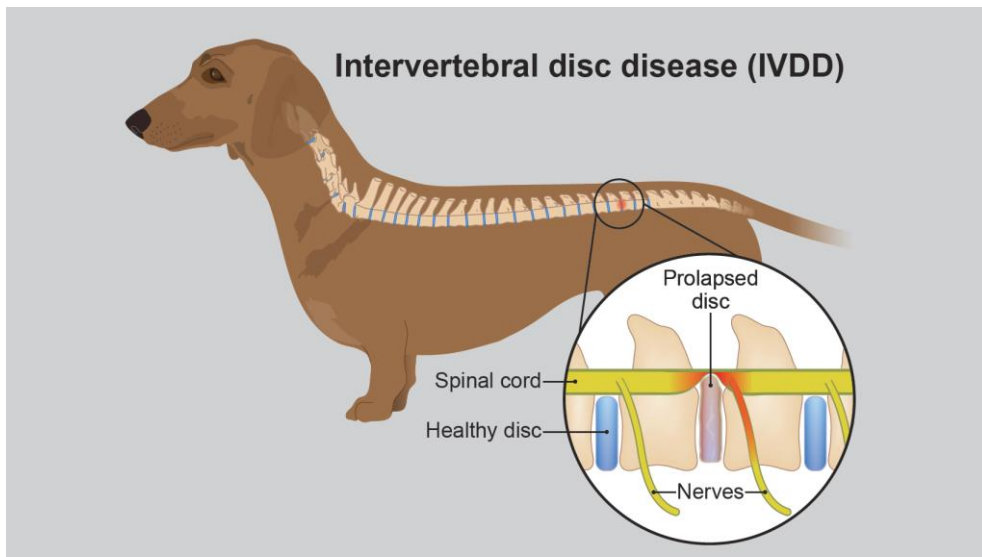


IVDD / Slipped Disc in Dogs

Overview

- Intervertebral disc disease (IVDD) is a condition that causes the intervertebral discs (cushions between the backbones) to lose their sponginess, become hard and fragile, and sometimes slip out of place.
- When an intervertebral disc slips out of place (a slipped disc) it presses on the spinal cord, causes pain, nerve problems, and sometimes paralysis.
- Certain breeds such as the Dachshund and French bulldog are prone to IVDD and slipped discs due to the shape of their spine.
- Contact your vet if your dog has symptoms of IVDD. Phone immediately if your dog is in pain.

General information



Intervertebral discs are little cushions that sit in-between each of your dog's vertebrae (backbones). They absorb shock and provide support as your dog moves around (see image above). Intervertebral

disc disease (IVDD) is a condition that causes these discs to gradually lose their sponginess, become hard and fragile, and sometimes slip out of place. Slipped discs press on the spinal cord, cause pain, weakness in the legs, and sometimes paralysis and incontinence.

IVDD is the most common cause for a slipped disc, but they can also be caused by trauma/an injury.

Symptoms

Symptoms of IVDD can develop slowly or very quickly, and include:

- Back pain
- Wobbliness
- Weak legs
- Difficulty getting up
- Dragging or scuffing feet
- Tripping or falling regularly
- Paralysis

When to contact your vet

Always contact your vet if your dog has symptoms of a slipped disc, it can be a very painful condition that can get a lot worse if it's left untreated.

Contact your vet immediately if your dog is in [severe pain](#) or has developed symptoms suddenly.

- Be careful when [moving your dog](#), especially if they are struggling to walk or get up.
- To prevent further damage, consider moving your dog on a board or blanket. If you can't carry them and they aren't in pain, support them under their belly to help them to walk on their front legs.
- Remember, if your dog might bite if they are in pain, consider using a muzzle or a towel to keep you both safe.

Diagnosis

Your vet might suspect IVDD when they examine your dog, but further tests are usually necessary to confirm the diagnosis. Tests might include:

An MRI scan. An MRI scan is the best ways to diagnose IVDD because it shows the spine, nerves, bones and discs in detail. MRI scanners are very large, expensive pieces of equipment, so are often only available at specialist veterinary hospitals.

X-rays. X-rays will show some but not all of the changes caused by IVDD and a slipped disc, this is because nerves and spinal cord can't be seen on x-rays.

Other. Depending on your vet's findings, your dog might need other investigations such as blood tests, a spinal tap or a CT scan.

Treatment options

If your dog only has mild symptoms of a slipped disc it may be best to treat them 'medically' (with pain relief, strict rest and physiotherapy), but if they have more severe symptoms (such as severe pain or being unable to walk) it's likely that they will need surgery. Sadly, some dogs are so severely affected that [putting them to sleep](#) is the kindest option.

Conservative treatment

Conservative treatment means treating your dog with strict rest, painkillers, and physiotherapy. They will also need help going to the toilet if they are unable to pee or poo.

- Strict rest for several weeks is essential for most cases of IVDD. Your dog will need to stay in a crate or suitably small space and only come out (on the lead) for very short toilet trips. It's vitally important to make sure your dog doesn't jump, run or go up and down stairs while they are recovering from a slipped disc.
- [Pain relief](#) is another essential part of conservative management. It can usually be given in tablet or liquid form at home, but if that isn't enough, your dog may need additional

injections of stronger pain relief, or even be hospitalised to control their pain.

- Slipped discs can sometimes cause problems with the nerves that control your dog's ability to pass urine. If your dog is unable to pee, you will need to empty their bladder for them while they recover (your vet will show you how).

Surgery

- If your dog is in severe pain or is unable to walk it's likely that they will need surgery.
- Surgery can be very successful, especially if it's carried out within a few days of symptoms developing.
- However, spinal surgery is a major operation so it's important to talk to your vet about the possible risks, recovery time, and costs before proceeding.

Letting your dog go

- If your dog can't walk, is in uncontrollable pain, treatment isn't possible or your vet thinks they are very unlikely to recover, it's may be kindest to consider [euthanasia \(putting them to sleep\)](#).

If your dog has been diagnosed with IVDD, and you're not sure what to do, speak to your vet for advice, they will be able to discuss all your options with you.

Recovery and Home care

While your dog recovers, you will need to keep them well rested, control their pain, monitor their toileting habits and follow your vet's instructions exactly.

Keep them clean - it's important to keep your dog clean throughout their recovery. If your dog is incontinent, you will need to use an absorbent bedding (such as [puppy training pads](#)) and give them regular bed baths with warm soapy water. Rinse away any soapy residues and dry your dog thoroughly afterwards. You will need to brush your dog if they are struggling to groom, and you may even want to consider trimming their coat if it becomes matted.

Comfortable bedding - a soft place to lie down will help your dog stay comfortable and stop pressure sores developing.

Make sure they don't slip - it's important to make sure your dog doesn't slip or fall when they are being taken out to go to the toilet. Stick to carpets where possible and put non-slip coverings over any hard floors they will be walking over. You might also want to consider using a sling or towel to help them get up, especially in the early stages.

Supportive therapy - your vet might recommend additional treatments such as hydrotherapy and physiotherapy to help with your dog's recovery.

Weight - keeping your dog the right weight will reduce pressure on their spine. Talk to your vet about your dog's weight to check they are in the right body condition. If necessary, your vet will be able to help you get your dog to lose weight without increasing their exercise.

Returning to normality - once your dog has started to recover, your vet will create a plan to get them exercising again. Returning to exercise needs to be very gradual and controlled. It's important to follow your vets instructions exactly and to contact them if have any problems or are unsure about any of the steps.

Outlook

Recovery from a slipped disc can take several weeks to months, but with the right treatment, most dogs with mild symptoms have a good outlook and after recovery, lead a relatively normal life. However, it's important to be sensible with your dog and prevent problems from developing again by avoiding strenuous activities such as chasing, jumping or going up and down stairs.

Sadly, dogs that develop severe symptoms have a slightly worse outlook and sometimes end up with permanent problems such as paralysis, pain and incontinence. If your dog has very severe symptoms, treatment isn't possible, or your vet thinks their chances of recovery are slim, it might be kindest to stop their suffering by putting them to sleep.

Cost

Treatment costs for IVDD vary a lot depending on the treatment needed. Costs can mount up to several thousands of pounds if your dog has specialist treatment or spinal surgery. It's very important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your dog. There are often several treatment options so if one doesn't work for you and your pet then the vet may be able to offer another.

Consider [insuring your dog](#) as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This will ensure you have all the support you need to care for them.

Breeds and IVDD

IVDD is much more common in certain breeds, often due to the length of their back and/or the shape of their vertebrae (backbones). If you are thinking of getting a dog make sure you research the breed thoroughly and get the healthiest dog possible. Breeds prone to IVDD include the Dachshund, Shih Tzu, Bulldog, French Bulldog, Pug, Pekingese, Beagle, Bassett Hound and the Cocker Spaniel.

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