



Lumbosacral Disease

Lumbosacral Disease (Cauda Equina Syndrome)

Lumbosacral disease occurs when there is compression of the nerve roots and/or spinal cord in the lower back of a dog near the hips, causing severe pain. It usually occurs in larger dogs during middle age, although it can also be present at birth or develop in younger dogs. German Shepherds are affected most often, but it can also affect Great Danes, Airedale Terriers, Irish Setters, English Springer Spaniels, Boxers, and Labrador and Golden Retrievers.

Symptoms

- Pain in the lower back between the hips
- Pelvic limb weakness, lameness, or a stiff gait in the hind limbs
- Inability to lift tail or painful on manipulation of the tail
- Reluctance to jump and difficulty rising
- Exercise may make the symptoms worse
- In severe cases, urinary and fecal incontinence may occur

Causes

Nerve roots may be compressed by several conditions, including arthritis, infection, cancer, or most frequently, intervertebral disk rupture.

Diagnostic Testing

- Thorough neurologic examination to check for evidence of pain over the lumbosacral region or with manipulation of the tail, as well as testing reflexes, proprioception, and anal tone.
- Radiographs (x-rays) to evaluate the spine for evidence of arthritis, infection, or cancer.
- An MRI or a CT scan will be necessary to evaluate the degree of compression of the actual nerve roots.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the severity of the symptoms. Dogs who are exhibiting mild symptoms may initially be treated with rest and pain medications. In more severe cases, or for dogs who do not respond to conservative medical therapy, a dorsal laminectomy surgery is often recommended. This surgery involves removal of the roof (dorsal lamina) of the spinal canal to relieve the compression of the nerve roots and treat the ruptured intervertebral disk. Rarely, the vertebrae may also need to be stabilized with implants.

Post-Operative Instructions

Strict rest should be enforced for 6 weeks after surgery. This means no running, jumping, or playing. Activity will gradually be increased to normal after the period of rest. Physical therapy is often not necessary. Obese patients may be put on a diet to reduce their weight.

Outcome

As is the case with most neurologic conditions, the long term prognosis is dependent on the pre-operative severity of signs. Dogs with mild signs undergoing surgery will often make a complete, quick recovery. Dogs with more severe signs for a longer period of time will likely require a longer time to improve. Some dogs with neurologic impairment, may never regain normal neurologic function but will have the painful symptoms alleviated with decompression surgery.

Please note that this information does not replace a direct consultation, with the patient and all clinical data, with a veterinary surgeon. **To schedule an appointment at Animal Specialty & Emergency Center, please call (310) 473-5906.**

More detailed information can be found at

<http://veterinarymedicine.dvm360.com/vetmed/article/articleDetail.jsp?id=169902>

