

Wobbler Syndrome in Dogs

Overview

If your dog is limping, you're probably wondering why.

There are lots of reasons why dogs limp, such as hip dysplasia and other conditions that cause general lameness and difficulty moving about. One of these conditions is known as Wobbler Syndrome, which quite literally causes a dog's hind legs to wobble as he walks about.

Known clinically as cervical spondylomyelopathy (CSM) or cervical vertebral instability (CVI) – admittedly, both mouthfuls – Wobbler Syndrome is a painful and debilitating neurological disease that's caused by the compression of the spinal cord. This usually occurs due to a slipped disk or the malformation of the vertebrae.

Risks and Symptoms

Wobbler Syndrome is most common in [Doberman Pinchers](#) and in some larger dog breeds, including [Great Danes](#) and Irish Wolfhounds. The most common sign is a distinct wobbly gait, but other signs include:

- Neck pain
- Weakness
- Difficulty getting up
- Partial or complete paralysis

Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function, as well as sugar levels Diagnosis/Treatment

If your veterinarian suspects your dog might have Wobbler Syndrome, he or she will perform a complete physical and neurological exam and take a detailed history of your dog. Diagnostic imaging is a virtual certainty, so be prepared for your pooch to undergo x-rays, myelograms, CT scans, and/or MRIs. Cerebral spinal fluid analysis may also be recommended. Your veterinarian may refer your furry friend to a specialist for some of these tests or for a second opinion.

To rule out other conditions and evaluate the overall health of your dog, additional diagnostic tests may be run, including:

- Electrolyte tests to make sure your dog isn't suffering from an electrolyte imbalance
- A complete blood count to screen your pet for infection, inflammation, or anemia and other

blood cell-related conditions

- Urine tests to screen for urinary tract infection and other diseases, and to evaluate the ability of the kidneys to concentrate urine Screening tests to rule out infectious disease

Treatment

When it comes to Wobbler Syndrome, there are a lot of different treatment scenarios that ultimately depend on the severity of the condition. Some dogs can be treated medically while others may need surgery.

If treated medically, your veterinarian will prescribe anti-inflammatory medication and pain medication. You'll also be encouraged to limit your furry friend's activity – while exercise is normally good for dogs, you'll have to make sure your dog has adequate rest and doesn't exert himself too much. When walking your dog, your veterinarian also might recommend a harness as opposed to a traditional collar to prevent further neck pain. Also, your veterinarian may prescribe the use of a catheter so that your furry friend is able to rest and doesn't need to go outside to do his business.

With surgery comes the best chance of improvement, though there is some risk of complications. After surgery, your dog will have to take it easy on exercise, and physical therapy is essential to avoid muscle atrophy and other complications.

Prevention

For the most part, Wobbler Syndrome can't be prevented because it is genetic in nature. However, sometimes the condition arises when puppies grow too fast, so monitoring your dog's diet to prevent rapid growth can help you avoid, or reduce the severity of, Wobbler Syndrome.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.