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What to Do When Your Weiner Breaks - Intervertebral Disc Diseases

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INTERVERTEBRAL DISK DISEASE (IVDD)  
Karen McLucas, LVMT

a. Spontaneous degeneration of the disc resulting in sudden disc rupture or herniation

b. Disc herniation can cause compression of the spinal nerves and spine cord

c. Compression of spinal cord causes neurological dysfunction in predictable sequence based on degree of compression:
   i. Pain
   ii. Loss of proprioception
   iii. Loss of voluntary motor function
   iv. Loss of superficial pain
   v. Loss of deep pain
   vi. Myelomalacia or permanent paralysis

d. Clinical signs depend on location of disk herniation
   i. C1-C5: moderate to severe neck pain, tetraparesis
   ii. T3-L3 (most common location): spinal pain, paraparesis
   iii. Severe cases or those that have been lingering may lead to limb paralysis

e. Age of onset is typically 2 years; peak incidence around 4-5 years

f. Breed dispositions
   i. Can happen in any breed but most commonly chondrodystrophic breeds:
      1. Miniature Dachshunds, Shih Tzus, Beagles, Maltese, Pugs

g. Neurologic exam findings
   i. Pain on spinal or cervical palpation
   ii. Proprioception deficits in affected limbs
   iii. Paresis or paralysis of affected limbs
   iv. Loss of superficial or deep pain
      1. Cannot lose deep pain without losing superficial pain
      2. CAN lose superficial pain without losing deep pain
      3. If patient has voluntary motor function, no reason to test for pain

h. Diagnostics
   i. Survey radiographs alone WILL NOT reveal a non-mineralized disc extrusion
   ii. Myelography
   iii. CT – computed tomography – often used in Dachshunds as their disks are usually degenerative and mineralized
   iv. MRI (most sensitive)

i. Treatment
   i. Conservative treatment can be attempted as long as patient has voluntary motor function - consists of strict cage rest for 4 weeks (minimum) in conjunction with pain meds
      1. Owners need to be aware that more disk material can extrude until the disk heals
      2. EXERCISE RESTRICTION IS VITAL
      3. Steroids controversial
         a. Can have serious GI side effects
         b. Will NOT make the disk go away or heal more quickly
         c. Will make the dog feel better
         d. Should not be used without a definitive diagnosis
   ii. Surgery to remove extruded disk material from spinal canal
      1. Hemilaminectomy for thoracolumbar disks
      2. Ventral slot for cervical disks
   iii. Prognosis
      1. Dependent on severity of spinal cord compression
      2. Permanent nerve damage can lead to partial or full paralysis even with surgery in severe cases.

iv. Nursing considerations
   1. Pain management!
   2. Advocate for patient who is not improving
   3. Proper bedding and patient rotation to prevent skin ulceration
   4. Bladder management (expressing if needed)
   5. Protection of dragging limbs from abrasion and injury
   6. Bathing to prevent urine scalding
   7. Sling walking to encourage motor function
   8. Wheelchair in cases of severe paresis or paralysis