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What to Do When Your Weiner Breaks - Intervertebral Disc Diseases

Karen McLucas
kmclucas@utk.edu

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- 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
- j. Online Resource: <http://www.handicappedpets.com/pet-services/pet-articles-a-references.html>