

Intervertebral Disk Disease (IVDD)

What is an Intervertebral Disk?

The spinal cord is an essential component of our body, and any injury to it leads to the formation of scar tissue rather than the regeneration of nerve cells. It is safeguarded by the spinal canal, which is created by the vertebrae, with intervertebral disks situated between them. These disks, resembling jelly donuts, consist of a robust outer layer (annulus fibrosus) and a soft inner core (nucleus pulposus), serving as shock absorbers to enhance movement and reduce friction between bones.

What is Intervertebral Disk Disease (IVDD)?

Intervertebral Disk Disease (IVDD) is a prevalent spinal condition in dogs, though it is less frequently observed in cats. This condition can manifest at any point along the spine, but it is most frequently found in the neck (cervical spine) and the mid-back (thoracolumbar region). Although disk degeneration may not always present issues, complications occur when disk material exerts pressure on the spinal cord or nerve roots, resulting in pain and possible mobility challenges. Disk degeneration takes place when the normally shock absorbing, jelly-like center (nucleus pulposus) becomes calcified.

IVDD is most frequently observed in small-breed dogs, such as Dachshunds, Beagles, Basset Hounds, Shih Tzus, Pekingese, Lhasa Apsos, and French Bulldogs, among others, but any dog or cat can develop IVDD in their lifetime.

How is IVDD Diagnosed?

IVDD is diagnosed based on several factors, including the dog's age, breed, medical history, and a comprehensive neurologic examination. CT scans or MRIs offer a conclusive diagnosis by precisely indicating the location and extent of the disk's impairment.

How is IVDD treated?

Treatment for disk disease is contingent upon the severity of your pet's symptoms and their medical history. There are two primary treatment methods: medical and surgical. Medical treatment is generally the preferred option for pets that can still walk independently and those that primarily exhibit back pain with mild nerve-related symptoms. This method emphasizes the management of pain and inflammation through medications, along with strict rest. Rest is essential – your pet will need to be confined to a crate or a small area for several weeks to facilitate proper healing and avert further injury.

Surgery becomes necessary in various circumstances: when pets experience recurring back pain, when they do not respond adequately to pain medications, or when they exhibit significant nerve-related issues (such as difficulty walking or loss of muscle function). In some cases, pets may require immediate surgery if their symptoms are particularly severe.

What is the Prognosis for IVDD?

The likelihood of recovery is influenced by the type of treatment and the severity of symptoms. When relying solely on medical treatment, the success rates vary from 80% for mild cases to 21% for severe cases. Surgical results for acute herniation is notably encouraging, with a success rate of 80-95% when dogs retain feeling in their limbs; however, this rate decreases to approximately 50% in the absence of sensation.