

CANINE WOBLERS

Caudal Cervical Spondylomyelopathy is a condition diagnosed in dogs caused by pressure exerted on the spinal cord in the lower part of the neck. It is most commonly seen in the larger breeds such as Great Danes and Dobermans.

The condition is a result of instability between the vertebrae in the lower part of the neck. This instability causes the ligaments at the top and bottom of the vertebrae to thicken thereby decreasing any excessive movement between the affected vertebrae. As these ligaments continue to thicken, they eventually touch and begin to exert pressure on the spinal cord. This pressure prevents the individual nerve fibers within the spinal cord from being able to transmit impulses to the brain, as they should.

Clinical signs of this condition include a wobbly gait when walking or running. The rear legs are usually affected first. Advanced stages may stumble when walking. The instability between the vertebrae can also cause the spinal disc (cushion) between the vertebrae to rupture potentially putting sufficient pressure on the spinal cord to cause paralysis in all four limbs.

Radiographs (x-rays) showing the abnormal alignment of the vertebral column confirm DIAGNOSIS. Special contrast studies where contrast material (dye) is injected around the spinal cord to outline the points of pressure may be required. This contrast study is called a “myelogram.”

TREATMENT is recommended after review of the radiographs to determine the best alternative for each individual case and may include:

1. Anti-inflammatory drugs
2. Pain relievers
3. Neck braces
4. Surgery

Most successful outcomes require that the pressure be removed from the spinal cord and some type stabilization of the unstable vertebrae be performed. If surgery is performed at the time of mild incoordination, surgical success is much better than if paralysis has already occurred in all four legs.