

INTERVERTEBRAL DISC DISEASE

(Slipped-Disc)

The bones of the backbone that protect the spinal cord are called vertebrae. Soft cushions are located between these bones which serve as “shock absorbers” protecting the very delicate nerves that lie within the spinal column. These cushions are called **discs**.

The disc may be damaged from an injury, such as jumping off furniture, resulting in the condition called a ‘slipped disc.’ In this condition, the disc has been forced out of its normal location and pushes against the spinal cord itself causing pressure on the nerves. Pressure on these nerves results in pain, weakness, incoordination, and possibly paralysis of the legs, bladder, and rectum. Disc protrusion against the spinal cord can also result from a deterioration of the disc as the pet ages or arthritic changes within the bone itself.

Disc disease can occur anywhere along the spinal canal. “Pinched nerves” in the neck area are usually very painful and may cause front leg lameness. The pet often is presented with a reluctance to move the head up and down, usually keeping the head tucked low to the ground. Lesions further down the spinal column cause varying signs depending on the particular nerves compressed by the involved disc. All four legs can be affected in severe cases.

Medical treatment may relieve pain and inflammation, but surgery is often required to relieve severe pressure in some cases. Surgery involves scraping out the diseased disc material to relieve the pressure and prevent future episodes of pain. Neck lesions usually require surgical intervention whereas lower spinal problems may or may not require surgery.

The problem tends to reoccur in other disc locations, especially if the pet continues to do a lot of jumping and is overweight.

Diagnosis is based on clinical signs and x-rays. Signs seen include rear leg weakness, rigid abdomen, pain when picked up, reluctance to move, and/or loss of urine and bowel control. Signs may develop gradually or suddenly.

**The disease is commonly seen in poodles, dachshunds, and other breeds with long backs.
Jumping off furniture also predisposes the pet to development of this condition.**

Early treatment increases the chances of recovery. In mild cases, drugs are given to decrease inflammation and swelling of the spinal cord. Muscle relaxants, antibiotics, and pain-relieving medications are also given. Your pet **MUST** be kept **QUIET** and **CONFINED** for healing to take place. Excessive movement will cause further injury to the spinal cord making signs worse. Some cases require surgery. Complete recovery may take several weeks, or even months.