

Intervertebral Disk Disease

General Information

The spine is made up of bony segments called vertebrae, which are joined by ligaments, muscles and fibrous structures called intervertebral disks. The intervertebral disks act as shock absorbers between vertebrae.

A disk consists of a fibrous outer ring and an inner section that is soft and jelly-like. The fibrous outer ring is thinner at the top portion than it is at the bottom. When a disk becomes diseased, either through gradual degeneration or injury, the thinner top portion of the outer ring gives way, and the disk bulges into the spinal canal located directly above the disk. If the disk ruptures completely, the outer ring collapses and the inner jelly-like portion is forced into the spinal canal.

The spinal cord is located in the spinal canal. A bulging or ruptured disk causes pressure or damage to the spinal cord, resulting in pain, weakness, incoordination or paralysis.

Intervertebral disk disease is diagnosed by physical signs, neurologic tests and radiographs (x-rays). In some cases, a dye must be injected into the spinal canal so that areas of damage can be observed on the radiographs (x-rays). This procedure is called myelography.

Important Points in Treatment

1. Both medical and surgical treatments are used for intervertebral disk disease. Such factors as the pet's age, severity and duration of signs, neurologic findings and physical status help determine whether surgery should be performed. In many cases, hospitalization is necessary for effective medical treatment.
2. *Activity:* Exercise should be severely restricted for _____ weeks. Do not let your pet jump up on or down from furniture, engage in rough play, or chase balls.
3. *Medication:* All medication must be given as directed. Please call the doctor if you cannot complete any treatments.
4. *Diet:* If your pet is overweight, weight reduction is desirable because excess weight puts additional strain on the back. In all cases, less food is necessary during the treatment period because of the exercise restriction.

Feed as follows: _____

Notify the Doctor if Any of the Following Occur

- Your pet seems increasingly uncomfortable.
- Your pet loses control of its bowel movements or is constipated.
- Your pet has difficulty urinating.
- Your pet has breathing problems, rigid front legs or seizures.