



## Intervertebral Disk Disease

Your pet has intervertebral disk disease. Intervertebral disk disease is a disorder of the spine in which a herniated disk compresses the spinal cord, causing signs ranging from pain to death. Treatment includes rest, pain medication, anti-inflammatory drugs, physical therapy, and surgery. This client education sheet will help you learn more about intervertebral disk disease and will review your veterinarian's instructions for your pet's care at home.

# What You Should Know About Intervertebral Disk Disease

The backbone of dogs and cats is made up of bones called vertebrae. These bones protect the spinal cord, which extends from the brain to your pet's tail. A pad of tough, fibrous tissue called a disk is located between each vertebra. This pad serves as a shock absorber for your pet's spine. The center of each disk contains a semiliquid mass called the nucleus pulposus. In intervertebral disk disease, the disk ruptures. This releases the nucleus pulposus, which often presses on the spinal cord or the spinal nerves or both, causing pain and disorders of the nervous system. Swelling, hemorrhage, and inflammation within the spinal cord worsen the disorder.

## Causes

The cause of intervertebral disk disease is most commonly attributed to degeneration of the nucleus pulposus that leads to disk rupture. Trauma is a secondary cause.

## Diagnosis

Your veterinarian will perform a physical examination concentrating on your pet's nervous system to help localize the site of the ruptured disk. X-rays of the spine, often aided by the use of special dyes that are injected in the neck or back, confirm the diagnosis.

## Treatment and Home Care

Some dogs and cats respond well to rest, anti-inflammatory drugs, and pain medication. Animals treated in this way usually have pain as the only clinical sign. Many dogs and cats treated with rest and medications have recurrent attacks of intervertebral disease.

Your veterinarian may recommend surgery if the onset of intervertebral disk disease was rapid and severe, if weakness or paralysis is present, or if your pet has had repeated attacks. The goals of surgery are to remove any material that may be pressing on the spinal cord and, often, to remove the nucleus pulposus from other intervertebral disks to prevent them from rupturing in the future. After surgery, your veterinarian will probably hospitalize your pet for physical therapy until he or she is certain your pet can urinate by itself.

Home care for patients with intervertebral disk disease is critical. If your pet is being treated with rest and medication, you should confine it. Putting your pet in a cage or a playpen made

for children may be useful. You will also need to watch closely for signs that indicate the disease is recurring.

If your pet has had surgery, you may notice that clinical signs worsen for the first few days after surgery. Following surgery you should give all prescribed medications, check the incision at least once a day for swelling and discharges, and make sure your pet is eating. If your pet becomes depressed or stops eating, or if you notice any changes in the incision, call your veterinarian. You will need to return to the hospital for suture removal according to your veterinarian's instructions.

If your pet was paralyzed before surgery, you will need to make sure it can urinate at least twice a day when it goes home. If you can't express your pet's bladder, you will need to hospitalize your pet until bladder function returns. Water beds, foam rubber pads, and air mattresses for your pet to rest on help prevent bed sores. Whirlpool baths or exercise in your bathtub promotes return of movement to the rear legs.

## Dietary Plan

If your pet has had surgery, your veterinarian may give you special feeding instructions. Many surgical patients benefit from foods with increased levels of protein and energy during the recovery process. Such foods include Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine p/d® and Feline p/d®.

If your pet is overweight, your veterinarian may prescribe a special food to return your pet to its optimal weight, which helps reduce stress on your pet's back. The best food for reducing weight is a nutritionally complete and balanced high-fiber, low-fat, and low-calorie food, such as Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine r/d® and Feline r/d®.

Once your pet's weight returns to normal, your next goal is to maintain this healthier optimal weight. Your veterinarian may recommend a special food with reduced calories and increased levels of fiber to maintain your pet's weight. Such foods include Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine w/d® and Feline w/d™.

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## Home Care Instructions

Client's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Patient's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Therapy \_\_\_\_\_

Feeding/Watering \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up Appointment \_\_\_\_\_

(Hospital Stamp Area Above)