

Dodgerslist.com

Helping dogs with Intervertebral Disc Disease

The body can do most of the healing work itself naturally

Many people relate their pet's back problems to experiences with their own painful backs. In most cases, with pain medication and some rest, the pain is gone in a few days. Dogs' backs are built differently than peoples and they might not bounce back from back pain so easily. With that difference, a huge potential for serious damage to the spinal cord can occur if the very first signs of a disc disease problem go unnoticed and the dog is not immediately crated and provided prompt veterinary care, so it is best to treat back pain seriously.

Just eight years ago, if a dog was diagnosed with Intervertebral Disc Disease (IVDD), owners often were only given the choice of surgery, if available, or putting the dog to sleep. This is exactly what happened to the owners of a young dachshund named Dodger. In Dodger's case, surgery was not an option and he was euthanized. When Linda Stowe learned the heartbreaking news that Dodger was never even given the opportunity to heal and return to happy days with his family, she vowed to do something to educate dog owners about disc disease and the options for treatment.

Neither Dodger's owners, nor the veterinarians treating Dodger, knew about conservative treatment for IVDD, which is medical management through limited movement and medicine. A high percentage of people never need surgery to recover from back pain and it can be the same with dogs. Today, more and more vets are

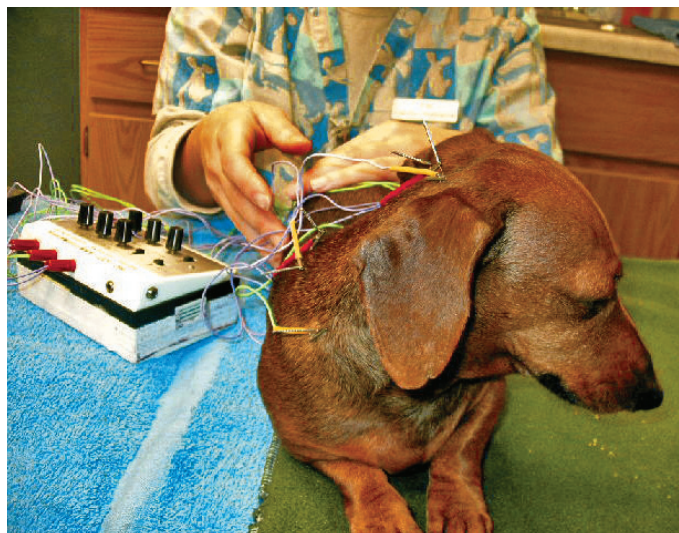
seeing that dogs with IVDD, even Dachshunds, can heal with rest and medication.

Not all dogs are healthy enough to withstand surgery and, for some owners, surgery is just not an option financially. Educated owners and veterinarians who know there are two treatments for IVDD will know that it is not a death sentence. Even the most severely affected can still heal and go on to lead a good quality of life, in the same happy, fun, and loving way as always. Wheelchairs allow dogs to enjoy all the aerobic activities they previously enjoyed prior to injury.

In 2002, Linda Stowe founded a website and email list. Today, Dodgerslist is a central place to share information with dog owners about treatment options for

IVDD. Information, culled from the foremost veterinarians with success in treating IVDD, is made available to the public via the website. The email group, also called Dodgerslist, provides emotional support for owners to cope with the disease, plus at-home care information to make sure each dog has the very best opportunity to heal.

Some of the more successful conservative treatment modalities for IVD include laser light therapy and acupuncture. They both control pain and stimulate nerve regeneration and tissue healing. Acupuncture achieves these effects via placement of very thin needles into the soft tissue to activate nerve endings and collagen fibers. Laser light therapy promotes higher metabolism at the cellular level. While nerve regeneration



Acupuncture can be started at any time. It can not only relieve pain and provide relaxation but also stimulates nerves to heal. (Photographer: Cris Lewis)

EMERGENCY SIGNS OF IVDD:

Not wanting to eat. Tight/tense tummy.

Yelping when moving or picked up.

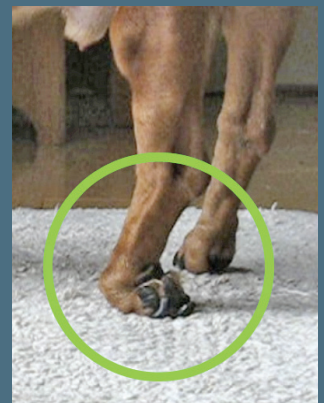
Reluctance to use stairs, jump, or go for a walk.

Head held high or nose to the ground.

Arched back.

Shaking, shivering, or trembling.

Legs weak: wobbly or nails scuffing the floor, paws knuckle.



As the spinal cord receives increased damage from the disc, neurological functions diminish. This dog knuckles his paw. He can no longer place his foot in the correct position. The next function to be lost will be complete paralysis of the legs if the dog is not crated right away and prompt vet help is not sought.

(Photographer: Paula Milner)

takes place, laser light therapy can safely stimulate muscles that are without nerve function.

Without understanding all of the treatment options, many dog owners lose all hope that their dogs will walk again and euthanize their pets unnecessarily based on their own interpretation of how a dog perceives ambulation. It is important to note that dogs are not embarrassed or depressed by paralysis. They do live happy, normal and fulfilling lives with the assistance of a wheelchair until such time as neurologic function might return.

Today, Dodgerslist consists of over 3500 members including Dachshund lovers, breeders, veterinarians, and owners of other breeds with IVDD. Dodgerslist Disc Disease DVD features a medical segment by Dr. Mark Lawson DVM of Alpine Animal Hospital and provides strategies for living with and caring for an IVDD dog. Groups and veterinary hospitals use this DVD for educational purposes for clients, members, and staff. More

information is available at Dodgerslist.com.

Dodgerslist is an all-volunteer organization of five moderators who offer strong professional talents and contribute to writing, website development, and the design of educational materials including a quarterly newsletter. Each has years of personal experience with IVDD plus a big heart and the patience to help panicked owners. The moderators are Sharon Duncan, Cris Lewis, Paula Milner, Stephanie Neighbour, and Lisa Sullivan.

IVDD success stories are numerous and varied. Hope exists for every dog to return to a good quality of life, no matter what physical degree of recovery the dog is able to achieve. Self education about IVDD plays a powerful role and with the support of Dodgerslist, owners can learn the tools to help their dogs recover from IVDD.



DACHSHUND TIPS

One in five Dachshunds are born with IVDD. Vets and owners are often unsuspecting until the first sign of this degenerative disease shows itself, typically between the age of three to seven. These lifestyle tips may help prolong the time until the first symptoms of IVDD appears or perhaps prevent it altogether.

Eliminate stairs or jumping in your home. Make your home back-friendly with baby gates to block off stairs. Construct a simple plywood ramp covered with a non-slip surface. Place ramps so your dog can access couches and your bed. While it is certainly easier to train a puppy to use a ramp, it is also possible to teach older dogs new tricks.

Train your dog to feel comfortable in his own personal den. Wire crates are just one of the many restriction options used when a dog has a back problem. Get ahead of the game by making sure your dog feels like a crate is a good thing - his special place to go to take a nap or chew on a bone. Doing so will make crate rest go much more smoothly for your dog and for you.

Collars should only be used to hold dog tags. Whenever a leash needs to be used, attach it to a harness. Harnesses distribute the pulling stress onto the strong part of the chest rather than the weak neck and spine.

Teach your children and friends how to pick up a Dachshund to protect its back. Use both hands and support both ends of the dog and keep the back horizontal to the ground. Picking up a dog under the armpits like a baby supports only one end and causes stress on the spine.

Pamela Johnson
Certified Trainer CPDT-KA
619-888-3139
www.pamsdogacademy.com

AS SEEN ON
YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/pamelamarxsen>

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Wheelchairs allow dogs to enjoy all the aerobic activities they previously enjoyed prior to injury. (Photographer: Stephanie Neighbour)