

Wobbler Syndrome

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The most common malformation that produces compression is a narrowing of the spinal canal that holds the spinal cord. The opening is smaller than normal and will mildly compress the cord. Other abnormalities are an overgrowth of the body of the vertebrae that protrudes into the canal, misshapen vertebrae and vertebral joints, and subluxation of the vertebrae. Such anomalies may not cause immediate symptoms at birth, but over time can create compression or cause an intervertebral disc to rupture.

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The condition is seen most often in older Doberman Pinschers and young Great Danes. Studies suggest the cause for such skeletal malformations is linked to genetics, but no specific genetic factors have been found. Studies also suggest that nutrition could factor into Wobbler syndrome; diets high in protein, calcium, and phosphorus accelerate growth, which may contribute to skeletal changes seen in Wobbler dogs.

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What are the symptoms of Wobbler Syndrome?

Clinical symptoms are usually slow and gradual in onset and not associated with any known trauma. Weakness and lack of coordination in the rear limbs are the most common symptom. Dogs will walk with their legs spread farther apart, sway side to side, and take longer strides to compensate for the symptoms mentioned above. Scuffing of the back feet can be seen as well as a hunched posture.

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Forelimb involvement can vary greatly depending on the abnormality and severity of the case. Some dogs have no clinical symptoms in the front legs, while others have a stiff front

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gait. Difficulty in turning corners or stopping short while running may be the first or only clinical signs in the forelimbs. Neck pain may also be present. An affected dog may cry in pain when turning its head from side to side, or up and down.

How do you diagnose Wobbler Syndrome?

Radiographs of the cervical spine in an extended and flexed position should be taken. Radiographs will show if the dog has a severe malformation of the vertebrae, but cannot definitely diagnose the condition. An MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) or myelogram will be needed to determine the site of the problem and the extent of associated cord compression.

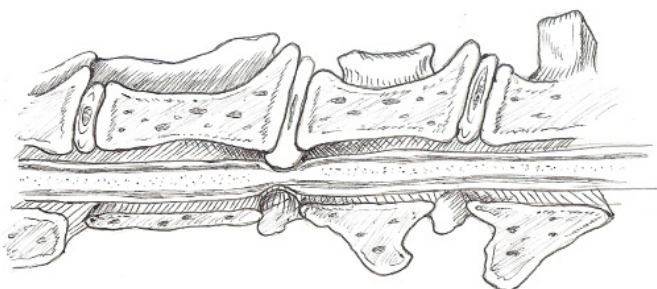
It is important to rule out other potential causes of a dog's weakness or discomfort. Radiographs should be taken to rule out hip dysplasia, intervertebral disc disease, degenerative myelopathy, osteochondrosis dissecans (OCD) of the cervical vertebrae, and hypertrophic osteodystrophy (HOD) as these conditions can result in similar symptoms. Do you have any recommendations?

What is the treatment for Wobbler Syndrome?

Initial treatment for Wobbler's syndrome will usually consist of a course of corticosteroids to reduce spinal cord swelling associated with compression. Surgery to decompress the spinal cord and correct vertebral abnormalities will be the next step for dogs whose symptoms persist or re-occur.

What is the prognosis for a 'Wobbler' Dog?

The prognosis depends greatly on the severity of the malformations and spinal cord compression. Dogs who are severely affected to the extent that they are unable to stand or walk have a guarded prognosis even with surgical intervention. Dogs who are mildly uncoordinated have a much greater chance of recovery. The goal of surgery would be to improve function, and our ability to do this depends greatly on the extent of permanent spinal cord injury, the dog's general attitude, and the owner's ability to perform the intensive post-operative care and physical therapy.



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