

Degenerative Myelopathy

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Overview

Degenerative myelopathy is a slow, progressive spinal cord disorder of unknown cause that is most commonly seen in aging German shepherds and a few other large breed dogs such as Belgian shepherds, Rhodesian ridgeback, collies and Weimaraners. There is currently no cure for degenerative myelopathy. Most dogs slowly deteriorate over 6 to 12 months becoming progressively weaker and more uncoordinated in the rear legs.

The cause of the condition is unknown, although it is believed to be an autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system begins to attack its own nerve cells. The age of onset is 5 to 14 years, with an average age of 9 years. Males are affected more than females.

Diagnosis and Treatment Notes:

- Degenerative myelopathy is generally diagnosed by a thorough history and physical examination including a neurologic exam. Sometime x-rays or a spinal tap are recommended.
- Treatment depends on the severity of the disease, your individual pet, and your veterinarian. There is no specific therapy for dogs with degenerative myelopathy. Some dogs can be helped with steroids, vitamins and other supplements. Discuss treatment details when your pet is diagnosed with this condition.

What to Watch for*:

- Difficulty rising
- Stumbling
- Knuckling of the toes
- Loss of muscle in the rear legs
- Urinary and fecal incontinence

**Please notify us if you notice any of the above signs or if you have any questions!*

