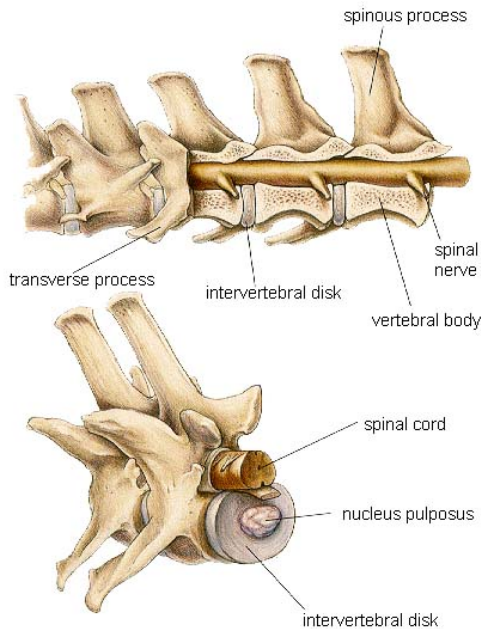


Intervertebral Disc Rupture

*Bruce Smith BVSc, MS, FACVSc, Dip ACVS
Tania Banks BVSc, FACVSc*



What is Intervertebral “Disc” Disease?

The Intervertebral Discs are sandwiched between the bony vertebrae to provide stability and mobility to the spine. A healthy disc has a tough fibrous outer coat (annulus) and a fluid shock-absorbing centre (nucleus). The spinal cord is encased in the bony spinal canal lying immediately above the disc.

Hardening of the nucleus can lead to rupture of the annulus during even normal activity. Rupture results in disc nucleus material entering the spinal canal and compressing the spinal cord. The site of disc rupture is most often the mid-back (Thoracolumbar) or neck (Cervical). Dogs most commonly affected by disc rupture are young mature to middle-aged dogs with short limbs & long backs.

Depending on the amount and force of the disc rupture the signs can vary from discomfort to complete paralysis. While the majority of dog affected by disc rupture can be rapidly and effectively treated a proportion of injuries result in permanent paralysis, urinary & fecal incontinence; and on rare occasions may progress to death.

How is a Diagnosis of Disc Rupture made?

Your veterinarian can screen for the signs and severity of disc rupture based on a spinal examination, however specialized imaging (Myelography) of the spinal is required to confirm the diagnosis.

Myelography is performed under general anesthesia and requires a spinal tap by inserting a needle into the base of the spine. X-Ray contrast material is carefully injected to outline the spinal cord within the spinal canal. Spinal X-rays or CT are then performed to identify the exact location of Disc rupture.

What Treatments are available for Disc Rupture?

For dogs that are suffering mild spinal pain and weakness medical treatment with pain control medication and strict hospital rest can be safely offered. For dogs suffering severe or prolonged pain, severe or progressive spinal weakness surgical decompression of the spinal cord should be considered.

Once the site of disc rupture has been identified most dogs proceed immediately to surgery. A bone window is created into the spinal canal to allow removal of the disc material compressing the spinal cord. For a cervical disc this is a “Ventral Slot” procedure and for the thoracolumbar spine a “Hemilaminectomy” procedure. Both of these procedures require specialized instrumentation and advanced surgical training.



What is the Cost of Surgical Treatment of Disc Rupture?

Currently (2009) the cost is about \$2,500 - \$4,000 for preoperative testing, operation and hospital stay. All patients received advanced pain control and continuous observation in the immediate postoperative period. Variation in estimated cost will occur depending on patient size, level of spinal nursing required and length of hospital stay.

How long will my Dog be in hospital?

All dogs must remain in hospital until they are comfortable, showing steady improvement in limb function and can urinate. Depending on the severity of injury this can take 5 - 10 days. Physical therapy is commenced as soon as practical and you are encouraged to visit and participate in the recovery process.

What after-care will my Dog need?

Home care requires strict confinement and supervised activity only until your dog is strongly walking. Medication is not usually required. Rechecks are determined on an individual basis; typically at 2 weeks postoperatively for suture removal and prior to return to normal activity.

Activity restriction and toilet monitoring is essential dogs to avoid complications. Early controlled activity & physiotherapy is beneficial. Rehabilitation with an animal physiotherapist or hydrotherapist can also be arranged.

Will my Dog return to Normal Activity?

Normal comfort & activity is almost always achieved for dogs other than those with complete paralysis. Complete and permanent paralysis results in 50% of dogs that present with no feeling behind the disc rupture. Unfortunately there are currently no preoperative tests that can be used to identify permanent spinal injury.

Are there any Complications with Surgical Treatment of Disc Rupture?

Disc rupture & spinal cord injury is a serious, potentially permanent and potentially life-threatening situation. While complications from injury during diagnosis or surgery are extremely uncommon they may occur and may alter chances of recovery.

BVSC utilizes two separate companies for external finance to assist with Veterinary expenses, both companies have an application procedure and maybe available to some clients. A deposit may be necessary.

*Prices listed are to be used as a guide only. For a more accurate estimate please phone BVSC on (07) 3264 9400 (consultation is often necessary to give accurate estimate).

Brisbane Veterinary Specialist Centre
Cnr Old Northern & Keong Rd
Albany Creek, Qld 4035
AUSTRALIA
Phone: + 61 7 3264 9400
Fax: +61 7 3319 6398
Email: info@bvsc.com.au