

Home Care Information

Conservative or medical management of intervertebral disc extrusions is what we call any treatment regime that does not include surgery. This usually involves 4 main parts: **pain relief, strict rest, bladder management and physiotherapy.**

Pain Relief

Intervertebral disc extrusions are often very painful so normally we prescribe a combination of medications (something termed multimodal analgesia). By using multiple medications, we can more successfully manage their pain whilst also reducing the risk of side effects of each medication. Generally, we prescribe non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. Metacam), paracetamol and gabapentin although this plan is modified depending on your dog's pain score and any other health conditions they may have.

Strict Rest

Strict rest is an important part of conservative management of intervertebral disc extrusions. Most commonly this is recommended to be in a cage but occasionally a pen is more appropriate. The aim of this rest is to reduce the risk of more disc material (the jam from the middle of the doughnut) being squeezed out making your dog's signs more severe and potentially delaying recovery. Whilst rested it is important to monitor your dog for pressure sores (see images below) and urine scold and to report any problems to your vet. Pressure sores can be avoided by using soft, supportive bedding such as a mattress and regularly turning your dog if they are unable to do so themselves. Urine scold is also avoidable by using absorbent bedding and if required, regular bladder expression (see bladder management section).

Longer term, rest also has another function. Many dogs who are not able to walk will learn that using their front legs to manoeuvre is more efficient, giving them less incentive to learn to use their back legs again. For this reason, we often continue to recommend strict rest even after the risk of further material extruding has passed.

Bladder Management

Many dogs with intervertebral disc extrusions who are unable to walk are also unable to urinate. This has the potential to cause serious problems and must be monitored closely. Often dogs will be hospitalised until they are able to urinate consciously, but you still may be asked to express your dog's bladder at home. **Please note that this will always be demonstrated to you by your vet.** Bladder expression can be done with your dog standing or lying down. Using the flat part of your fingers on each side of their abdomen press softly, slowly increasing the pressure. You should feel a small 'balloon' – this is your dog's bladder. As you apply constant pressure to this 'balloon' urine will begin to flow. The pressure should be constant and slowly increased until the bladder is empty, and no more urine can be expressed. It is important to try to always empty the bladder completely to minimise the risk of urinary tract infections. It is usually recommended to do this every 6-8 hours but in some dogs it may be recommended to do this more frequently. Occasionally medication is also prescribed to aid bladder expression.



Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy can be a challenging aspect of home care for your dog. It can involve a wide range of different exercises that are tailored to your dog's specific requirements but will almost always include sling/ harness walks, massage and passive range of motion exercises. These have several functions but mainly aim to improve blood and lymphatic flow to the legs and reduce the risk of muscle contractures. You will be advised which support is best suited to your dog but there are a few rules to remember whichever support you use.

- 1. Ensure the support fits and is sitting correctly before you start**
- 2. Always walk slowly**
- 3. Aim for the underside of the paw to be in contact with the ground. If it is not always stop and replace the paws in the correct position.**
- 4. Don't do too much. When your dog is tiring it is best to stop.**



Massage is often recommended prior to beginning other exercises/ physiotherapy. It is easiest to do this with your dog laying on their side on a soft but supportive surface such as a mattress. Starting at the top of the leg slowly massage over each joint and muscle individually moving down to the bottom of the leg. Extra time should be taken over muscles that feel particularly tight.



Passive range of motion is simply moving each joint through its full range of motion in a slow and controlled manner. Again, this is most easily achieved with your dog laying on a soft, supportive surface. Starting with the toes move each one forward and backwards individually 8-10 times. **It is very important to do this slowly.** Then move up the limb sequentially to the hock, then the stifle and finally their hip. If at any point your dog shows signs of pain stop and report this to your veterinary surgeon.

