Wobbler’s Syndrome

Signs of Wobbler’s Syndrome
If your dog is not walking normally or is unsteady, watch closely for additional symptoms:
• Rear limb weakness / lack of coordination especially on slick floors or stairs (often the first signs).

Dogs with “wobbly” legs, lost coordination may have Wobbler’s Syndrome
If your large-breed dog is losing coordination and becoming “wobbly” on his or her back legs, there is a chance that your pet could have Wobbler’s Syndrome. This term encompasses several conditions that cause compression to the spinal cord in a dog’s lower neck leading to a disruption in the signals between the brain and legs. The first sign that a dog has Wobbler’s Syndrome is wobbliness on the back legs. This condition is also known as Caudal Cervical Spondylomyelopathy.

What causes Wobbler’s Syndrome?
Veterinarians are not sure whether Wobbler’s Syndrome is hereditary or due to other factors such as diet, breed, body mass or rapid growth. In all cases, the animal’s spinal cord becomes compressed in a couple of ways:

• Progression of the above to all four limbs (can occur over a few weeks or several months).
• A “two-engine” gait in which the front legs move with short, choppy strides while the rear limbs move with long, wobbly and delayed strides.
• Neck pain exhibited by a lowered head and reluctance to lift the neck (does not occur in all dogs).

What are the symptoms?
• Rear limb weakness / lack of coordination especially on slick floors or stairs (often the first signs).
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Which breeds are affected?
Wobbler’s Syndrome is commonly seen in large breeds including Great Dane, Doberman Pincher, Bull Mastiff, Bernese Mountain Dog and Dalmatian.

Diagnosis of Wobbler’s Syndrome
Diagnosing Wobbler’s Syndrome requires advanced imaging techniques performed by a veterinary neurologist. These include MRI or myelogram combined with a CT-scan.

A myelogram uses a special dye injected into the spinal fluid to make the spinal cord visible on an x-ray or CT-scan. The MRI allows the neurologist to not only see compression of the cord but also changes inside the spinal cord. This is important when evaluating the prognosis for a Wobbler’s dog.

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• Vertebral (bony) stenosis in which the spinal canal is narrower than normal. Vertebral stenosis is typically seen in young dogs in which the neck bones have not formed properly and do not provide enough space to accommodate the spinal cord.
• Soft tissue stenosis in which soft tissues swell up (hypertrophy) causing the spinal canal to narrow, compressing the spine. The cause of this soft tissue hypertrophy is not well understood.

A combination of vertebral stenosis and soft tissue stenosis is typically seen in older dogs as it takes time for the soft tissue to swell.

Apollo, pictured with board-certified neurologist, Michael Wolf (right) and assistant Jamie Krumm, was referred to Animal Neurology & MRI center by family veterinarian Wendy Headland of Deporre Veterinary Hospital due to onset of holding his head low, panting and occasional crying out. Following surgery and rehabilitation, Apollo has made a remarkable recovery.
Your pet neurologist is available 24/7

The veterinary neurologists at Animal Neurology & MRI Center are board-certified specialists available to you 24/7 to treat your dog or cat. We also provide around-the-clock monitoring and treatment for pets that need continuous care.

Non-surgical management of the symptoms is typically recommended for dogs with mild and short-lived signs of Wobbler’s Syndrome that may follow some type of minor trauma. The dog is restricted to no running, jumping, stair climbing or off-leash activity, and must use a chest harness instead of a collar. Anti-inflammatory medications are prescribed.

Unfortunately, most dogs with Wobbler’s Syndrome have neurologic problems and respond only temporarily, if at all, to non-surgical management. Surgical decompression is recommended for most dogs to relieve the spinal cord compression that causes Wobbler’s Syndrome. Surgery is successful in 70% to 90% of dogs. How well your dog responds depends on the severity and duration of the symptoms and the number of areas in the neck that are affected.

Dogs with Wobbler’s Syndrome that are able to walk have a generally better prognosis. Dogs that are weak and cannot stand are more prone to complications, at greater risk of pneumonia or gastric problems, and may be weaker after surgery.

FOR THE VETERINARIAN

Early diagnosis and treatment is essential for the successful management of dogs with spinal cord disease. Dogs with wobbler’s syndrome can often be recognized by their unusual gait, often referred to as a 2-engine gait. Video of a wobbler dog with a typical 2-engine gait can be seen on our website www.animalneurology.com. For your convenience, we always have a neurologist available for phone consultations. If you have video of a patient, one of our neurologists would be happy to review and discuss it with you.

The Animal Neurology & MRI Center is centrally located in the Metro Detroit area

Board-certified neurologists caring for pets 24/7.

- One trip is all our clients need to make. A cozy long-term waiting room offers Internet, television, and a couch to keep them comfortable. When available, clients may stay overnight with their pets.

- A doctor is with your pet 24/7. This sets us apart from other facilities. Patients are cared for by board-certified neurologists by day and ER veterinarians skilled in caring for neurological patients at night.

- We are one of the few centers in the U.S. with highly advanced on-site diagnostics including MRI & CT scans read by board-certified radiologists.

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Office hours: Mon - Fri: 9am - 6pm, Sat: 9am - 6pm
We are open for emergencies 24 hours a day, 7 days a week including holidays.