

What is Pug Myelopathy or Weak Rears: Pug Ataxia/Paralysis?

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Pug Myelopathy is a recently recognized spinal condition called by a number of terms. The most recent terminology seems to have settled on “Pug Myelopathy” to describe a complex of lesions that can progress to paralysis of the rear limbs over a period of one to four years. Originally referred to as “Weak Rear”, this has become a widespread problem in Pugs. The rear legs appear to be weak, but the cause is a neurological deficit that develops in the spine.

Affected dogs may initially drag their feet, stagger, have trouble jumping and can be fecal and urinary incontinent. It usually affects just the rear limbs, unlike a very different disease,

Degenerative Myelopathy (DM), which can have similar initial signs, but progresses tragically to complete paralysis and death. In Pug Myelopathy, we are learning there is one (or multiple lesions) that lead to segments of compression of the spinal cord. There are several different names that neurologists have used for this disease including “Pug myelopathy”, “Pug constrictive myelopathy (CM)”, “facet hypoplasia”, “subarachnoid diverticulum (SAD)” and others. Although little is published about this condition, combined often with mid back protruding intervertebral discs (IVDD), this may be the most common cause of mid-back spinal cord problems in Pugs.

Many veterinarians are not yet knowledgeable about this condition as published information is not yet widely available. Dogs that have been seen previously for

symptoms of ataxia or failure of rear limb muscular coordination may have been mis-diagnosed, or incompletely diagnosed. As information about the abnormalities that lead to this problem is discovered, the description of what is wrong with your dog may have changed. Since so little is known, there is no consensus among neurologists about the best way to treat it. Surgery may be appropriate for individual cases, but it must be considered as soon as possible after symptoms first occur and may only delay progression of paralysis.

Other therapy can include symptomatic treatment with medication, rehabilitation exercises to preserve muscle strength and spinal walk, and some forms of integrative medicine. Pugs affected with Pug Myelopathy are usually pain free and can lead excellent long lives with good nursing care. It

is critical the Pug is carefully monitored for its ability to completely empty the urinary bladder several times a day. All aging Pugs require periodic wellness exams to detect and alleviate other problems of aging.

Several other well documented conditions in Pugs also cause symptoms of ataxia, including hemivertebrae (usually young dogs); acute sudden onset Intervertebral Disc Disease (IVDD) or “slipped disc” – usually painful; spinal cord tumors; and spinal arthritis in elder dogs.

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