

Staggering or Stumbling Dog

The causes and treatments of a dog's stumbling or staggering.

CAUSES OF STAGGERING OR STUMBLING

Infectious diseases: Distemper; rabies; other bacterial, viral, or fungal diseases that cause meningitis or encephalitis; otitis interna (bacterial, fungal/yeast infection secondary to otitis externa). Note: Never handle a dog who may have rabies. If possible, without touching the dog, confine him in a room, pen, or yard and call your local animal control for assistance.

Toxicity: Metaldehyde (slug bait), anticoagulant rodenticides such as warfarin, bromethalin (rodenticide), or ANTU (rodenticide); bread dough; alcohol; ethylene glycol, or lead.

Congenital/Inherited disorders: Intervertebral disk disease (in Dachshunds, Pekingese, Beagles, and other small breeds); caudal cervical spondylomyelopathy ("wobbler syndrome" in Borzois, Basset Hounds, Doberman Pinschers, Great Danes); degenerative myelopathy (in German Shepherd Dogs, Welsh Corgis); degenerative lumbosacral stenosis (in German Shepherd Dogs); vertebral malformations; ataxia of Jack Russell Terriers and Smooth Fox Terriers; atlantoaxial subluxation (in toy and miniature breeds, occasionally in Doberman Pinschers, Rottweilers, and other large breeds); or spinal muscular atrophy.

Tumors: In brain or pancreas.

Nutritional: Hypoglycemia or puerperal hypocalcemia (decreased blood calcium level during lactation).

Drug reactions: Ivermectin (in sheepdog breeds), ibuprofen, chlorpheniramine (antihistamine; large amounts), naproxen, or mitotane, a medication used to treat hyperadrenocorticism (Cushing's disease) or adrenal tumors.

Parasites/Parasite-borne diseases: Chronic ehrlichiosis or tick paralysis.

Endocrine disorders: Hypoparathyroidism.

Allergies/Hypersensitivities: Anaphylaxis.

What to do: Staggering or stumbling may or may not be an emergency, depending on the duration, severity, and other signs of illness, if any. Contact your veterinarian or emergency clinic immediately for specific advice about your dog's situation.

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Have a health question about your dog? Ask our vet expert or ask other dog owners on our forums.