

Displaysia and Arthritis Problems

How to treat your dog's rear-end problems.

Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 8-year-old German Shepherd Dog has arthritis, hip dysplasia and spondylosis. Her back section is becoming weaker and weaker. It looks as if that part of her body is drunk. Sometimes she can't get any support from her rear legs and drags her back end. She's been on the usual drugs (non-steroidal and steroids) I took her to an acupuncturist and saw some improvement, but then after being outside one day she came in the house dragging her rear area again. She then received steroids (prednisone) that helped a little. We tried another month of acupuncture to no avail. My vet says its the spondylosis and there isn't much we can do. The last time he took X-rays of her back was three years ago, so I don't know how he can tell it isn't something else.

A. It sounds like your German Shepherd Dog could benefit from some specialty care, or at least a consultation and exam. Just like in human medicine, there are board-certified specialists in veterinary medicine who undergo additional training and rigorous testing. However, they are also significantly more expensive than general practitioner veterinarians.

Typically, your regular veterinarian can refer you to a specialist. Most general practitioner veterinarians are aware of specialty care in their area. One of the challenges of pursuing specialty care is deciding what kind of specialist you need.

In your dog's case, it might be a neurologist or an orthopedic surgeon. Just as in human medicine, you may find yourself having to visit more than one specialist. You should ask your regular veterinarian for a referral. You may also be able to find out more about specialty care in your area by searching the American College of Veterinary Surgeons (ACVS) website.

Keep in mind that veterinary acupuncture and chiropractic care is not recognized as a board-certified specialty. In fact, some animal acupuncturists and chiropractors don't have veterinary training, so be cautious.

In any dog, a diet change can cause the populations of bacteria that normally live in the intestine to change, resulting in a GI system that is out of balance. Sometimes, bacteria called Clostridium can overgrow in the intestine and secrete a toxin that causes the lining of the large intestine to bleed. Fortunately, an overgrowth of Clostridium can be seen on a microscopic exam of a stool sample. Treatment is usually successful with the appropriate antibiotics.

Ideally, you will minimize how often you change your dog's diet. Although it may seem boring to you and I, most dogs are quite happy eating the same thing every day. After a diet change, wait several days to see if your dog's stool appears to be normalizing. If your dog still has diarrhea, small amounts of plain yogurt can help repopulate the gut with healthy bacteria.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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