

Dog's Shaking Getting Worse

If shaking increases, get dog a neurologic exam.

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Q. My 11-year-old Jack Russell Terrier has always had a small problem with the “shakes,” but I’ve noticed in the last year that Sparky is shaking more frequently. He seems fine other than this. He has had all of his shots, and is in good health otherwise.

His shakiness seems to be in his legs, and he’ll do this at no particular time, so it’s not like he’s afraid or anything. Do you have any idea what causes this, and is there anything we can do for him?

A. Increasing shaking of the legs in a somewhat geriatric dog could be an aging change that indicates some muscular weakness. It could also be a relatively uncommon neurologic genetic disease known as “Little White Shaker Dog Syndrome” that, as you might suspect, affects small white dogs that shake. It usually comes on all of a sudden, instead of gradually, and is worse when a dog is moving than when he is at rest. It also tends to affect younger adult dogs, around 2 years of age. Although I don’t think your Jack Russell has this affliction, it is good for you to at least be aware of it.

If your dog is losing any weight or muscle mass, you might want to consider a diet for active dogs that contains more calories. If he appears to be overweight, get the extra weight off with a weight-loss diet and reasonable exercise.

Very possibly, the leg-shaking demonstrated by your dog may not be a problem, and there may not be much you can do about it, anyway. If it continues to worsen, however, you should get him checked out by a veterinarian. In addition to muscular weakness, it could be caused by a deficiency or excess of a hormone, vitamin, or other substance in the bloodstream. A detailed neurologic exam and screening blood test are a good start.