

Dog Who Can't Walk Has Worms in Legs

Rare parasites called mesocestoides can migrate through a dog's skin.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. Suddenly one day, our dog had trouble walking on his back legs, then he could not walk at all. We took him to the vet and they said nothing was broken, but upon further evaluation they found that he had 6- to 8-inch worms in his ankles. One leg had a cut on it, but the other leg did not. The vet said he has never seen anything like this. My dog has a lot of infection and the vet is still trying to let it all drain. Do you have any idea what kind of worms these could be?

A. Sometimes I get a question that's so bizarre I think one of my friends sent it in as a joke. This question struck me that way at first, but then I remembered a case I saw in the ER, where a dog came in with a swelling under the skin on his neck. After sedating the dog, we opened up the swelling and discovered worm-like parasites known as mesocestoides.

These are relatively rare parasites that can migrate through the skin. They don't usually cause severe signs, such as inability to walk, but it's certainly possible if they infiltrate an area around nerves in the legs and feet. Once the parasites are physically removed, your dog should be given a deworming medication to ensure any remaining parasites are killed.

It's hard to speculate how your dog may have acquired these worms, but hopefully he will make a full recovery.