

Dog's Leg Weakness Likely Caused by Tumor

Prednisone and pain meds will keep Pug content for now.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I have a 10-year-old Pug. She is weak in her back legs to the point where if you move her left leg to a certain position she won't move it. The vet says there is not much we can do for her. She might have a tumor on her spine or it could be a neurological disease. I was just wondering what your opinion might be. She is still eating and drinking normally. The vet has her on her second round of prednisone.

A. It sounds like your Pug definitely has neurologic disease that seems to be localized over the portion of the spinal cord that branches out to the back legs. Your veterinarian is correct in surmising that this is most likely some kind of spinal cord compression due to a tumor of some sort.

The only way to diagnose it would be through advanced imaging such as an MRI or CT scan. Don't discount these as being impractical, because, once diagnosed, many of these tumors can be surgically removed. There is no question, however, that such a course of diagnosis and treatment is expensive, and can only be done in larger metropolitan areas or at a veterinary college.

If your Pug is not in pain, continue to provide supportive care and continue the prednisone as directed. Prednisone, a steroid, can help reduce swelling of the spinal cord, but will eventually be ineffective. As you increase the dose, you may notice undesirable side effects such as increased urination, panting, and a pot-belly appearance due to muscular weakness.

There are also some effective pain medications with few side effects, such as Tramadol and GABA-Pentin. Ask your veterinarian about these if you think your Pug might be in pain.

In the meantime, keep her food and water nearby, provide good footing (by using carpet runners if necessary) and help her go up and down stairs. Although she may not win any competitions at a Pugfest, she may provide you with many months of loving companionship.