

Swimmer's Tail May Cause Dog's Yelping, Panting

Pulled muscle happens while dog is swimming.

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Q. I have two Labrador Retriever mixes that I adopted from the pound over a year ago. Two days after we brought them home, they had to be taken to the vet and treated for parvovirus. Both survived, and they are the most beautiful, loving dogs. The dogs are now 1 1/2. This morning, Murphy woke up to go outside and started yelping. This was followed by muscle shakes, then panting, and walking with his tail down. They recently had their booster vaccinations.

A. You have certainly provided me with a diagnostic challenge. I am going to take an educated guess, and even if I am wrong, readers will learn about an interesting condition that tends to affect Labrador Retrievers.

Limber tail, cold water tail, or swimmer's tail, is an excruciatingly painful condition that seems to affect swimming breeds of dogs such as Labs. Usually the day after they are swimming or have had a bath with cold water, their tails are extremely painful, usually at the base. They will react painfully if you attempt to lift their tail, or touch them near the tail base. Often they will walk with their tail tucked.

When I first a case, I suspected perhaps there had been some abuse, because the dog's tail was so painful. I performed a full workup including X-rays and blood tests, and all was normal. Only after I heard more about it from veterinarians in the Southeast where it is more common, did I recognize the condition.

Somehow these dogs manage to strain or pull the muscles at the base of their tails. The treatment is pain medication in the form of NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) such as Rimadyl and Metacam, and they get better.