

Taper Back Prednisone for Dog's Back Problem

Long-term, high doses of prednisone for dog's back problem can have serious side effects.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. How long can I leave my 6-year-old Dachshund on prednisone? She has been on it for at least two months with no side effects. I don't want her to have surgery. I am sure this covers up the problem, but she eats, sleeps, poops and pees just fine.

A. Prednisone can be an effective alternative treatment to surgery for dogs who are having disc problems in their backs. Generally, if a dog is walking, surgery is not needed. Medical treatment with a steroid like prednisone makes sense. Prednisone helps relieve the swelling of the spinal cord that can lead to back pain and difficulty walking.

If a dog is unable to walk due to a disc problem in the back, or is partially paralyzed, surgery is usually the first choice, treatment-wise.

Although prednisone can have inconvenient side effects such as increased water intake, urination, increased appetite and panting, there can be some serious effects on the liver over time that you may not notice. The steroids can cause liver inflammation and a hormonal imbalance that can lead to Cushing's disease.

To prevent causing liver damage and Cushing's disease, your dog should be gradually weaned off the prednisone by reducing the dose over time. Eventually you may not need to give it at all. The reason for tapering the prednisone dose is that if you stop it suddenly, the adrenal glands may not be able to adjust to making it again so abruptly, leading to serious hormonal imbalances.

Ask your veterinarian about tapering the prednisone down to the lowest possible dose, or eliminating it entirely. You can always restart it if your Dachshund's back problem returns.