

Dog's Spinal Injury Requires Nursing, Therapy

An expert answers your question about spinal injuries and the road to recovery.

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Q. My 5-year-old hound dog was hit by a car. She had dislocated her spine down by the tail; the doctor snapped it back into place easily. She has feeling and can move both her legs (one is sluggish), but she can't stand up. She still has pain in her backside. Could that be the reason she can't get up?

Her tail is numb and simply hangs. She also cannot control her bowels, though she seems to know when she is going. She has made progress since the accident; she can flip herself over and she can scoot around. I do massage and stretch her legs daily. I want her to get well so badly.

I would like to know if anyone else has had a dog in this situation that has gotten well. Are there any good exercises I can do? Is there hope?

A. You are truly a kind, patient and caring person and obviously a dog lover. Don't give up hope while your dog's spirits are high and progress is being made.

The tail dislocation can account for the tail paralysis but not the rear limb signs or incontinence. The latter are most likely due to spinal cord damage between the mid-back and pelvis. The pain suggests possible spinal fractures, instabilities, nerve entrapment or rupture of one or more intervertebral disks.

Pain medication should be administered and your dog kept quiet until it is further evaluated. Be cautious once the pain medication is started because the dog might try to be more active than her condition allows.

Next, get full assessment of the condition of the spine, pelvis and possibly the spinal cord. Any unstable areas will be identified through X-rays, magnetic resonance imaging and possibly a myelogram dye study of the spine and spinal cord. Surgery may ensure the dog's maximum recovery.

Your veterinarian should perform a neurologic exam every two to four weeks to evaluate her progress and need for medications. Nursing care and physical therapy will be essential elements of your dog's recovery.