

Spondylosis

Spondylosis in dogs and cats (spinal osteoarthritis) is a degenerative disorder that can cause loss of normal spinal structure and function. Aging is normally the primary cause but the location on the spine and rate of degeneration is different for each pet. The cervical (neck), thoracic (mid-back), or lumbosacral back (rear 1/3 of the back) may all be affected together or individually.

Canines over the age of 10 are at a greater risk for this condition, and some vets believe that all older dogs develop it in some capacity if they live long enough. While there is still some debate about the exact causes of spondylosis, the main reasons bone spur growth begins on the spine are believed to be repetitive bone wear and stress, major injury and genetic predisposition.

Symptoms:

- Stiffness
- Limping
- Restricted movement and rotation
- Sensitivity to touch
- Back pain
- Growths that you can feel along the spine

Diagnosis & Treatment:

To diagnosis spondylosis, your veterinarian may perform a physical, and will likely take X-rays of your dog's chest and abdomen. There is no cure or process to reverse spondylosis. Once it has been has concluded your dog has this condition, a treatment plan based on your dog's symptoms will be recommended.

In less severe cases of spondylosis, no treatment may be needed. Doctors can prescribe drugs to, and most pets can go on living a relatively normal life. In patients where mobility and/or bladder, bowel, or rear limb function is severely compromised by spondylosis, treatment with non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) is often helpful. If NSAIDs cease to be effective or were never even effective to begin with, some of these patients will respond to treatment and maintenance on a corticosteroid or more severe cases of spondylosis in which the bone spurs are causing tissue or nerve damage or severe pain, surgery to remove them is an option.

Dogs diagnosed with spondylosis should have regular checkups. To maintain optimal health, vets may recommend physical therapy, weight loss, and exercise fitting for your dog's body type and age. If your dog is overweight, the extra pounds may exacerbate this condition. Swimming is sometimes recommended as a safe, low-impact exercise for dogs with spondylosis that also helps strengthen muscles along the back.

Many affected dogs and cats live satisfactory lives, though somewhat limited in flexibility and range of motion. Fortunately, by the time spondylosis becomes noticeable in clinical signs, the pet may be considered "retired" from his activities of running around, jumping, and doing the other things typical of a younger animal but if they are still active it is a good idea to keep these activities to a minimum, especially during flare ups.