

Ask the physiotherapist

## **LUMBAGO-SCIATICA**

A relatively common back disorder and condition in dogs that is often under diagnosed or an undiagnosed condition.

### **LUMBAGO-SCIATICA – pain in the lumbar regions radiating to the legs - could my dog be suffering from this?**

It is so young, it ought to be healthy. Who should I consult regarding follow-up after a diagnosis with respect to future action, treatment, physiotherapy, chiropractic therapy or some other alternative?

My dog has been limping lately – it appears it has problems with one of its rear legs, probably from pain in the hip or knee. The dog is so young – some people have said it is probably growing pains. It is not easy to know or say what is wrong with it.

When training in terrain a limp is clearly visible or stiffness when searching and if the training session or hunting trip lasts for quite a while the limping appears, as do the symptoms.

It looks like it can't get its legs underneath itself properly. The problem appears to be chronic, it turns up again every time we are slightly more active than usual, walk in terrain, or go on somewhat demanding trips or training sessions.

What can it be? What is wrong with my dog? I didn't think a dog as young as this could experience symptoms like these?

The problem appeared after a tough training session on uneven terrain – the dog suddenly faltered and after this it had problems treading properly on the one back leg.

It took sometime to diagnosis this, i.e. at first it was thought that the dog had a problem with its knee or some other joint, but after much to and froing we discovered that the dog had suffered a back injury.

**LUMBAGO-SCIATICA:** means pain originating in the lumbar regions that radiates to the back leg(s) when the nerve tissue is affected, i.e. radiated pain due to pressure on a nerve that runs down the back leg(s).

This condition can arise on one side, which will cause the symptoms to manifest in one back leg or on both sides, which will cause the symptoms to manifest in both back legs.

The intensity of the symptoms in the one leg or both legs depends on the extent of the injury, as well as the structure involved, and these together form the pathology and disorder.

**CLINICAL EXAMINATION:** a clinical examination together with other examination procedures will be able to confirm the diagnosis and condition. When the dog trots or runs, you will be able to see that something is functionally wrong, that it can't move normally. Its pattern of movement will have changed.

**FUNCTION:** one will often see a change in a dog's pattern of movement in which the load put on the sick side is reduced, it isn't used as much, and the dog does not get its leg underneath itself as well as it did when it was well, it doesn't tread on its leg as well, and it hesitates in doing so because of the pain in its lumbar regions that is radiating into the leg.

One will also often see a loss of muscle mass over a period of time if the pressure or compression is on that part of the nervous system that leads to the musculature in the back leg.

**ATROPHY:** atrophy, or loss of muscle mass, may also occur due to the inactivity or lower level of activity brought about by the pain.

**PALPATION:** one can often confirm and localise the painful area by palpating the back until the area where the irritation, injury and increased activity is located. Here one will find tenderness or a pained response to pressure or touching of and around the dog's dorsal vertebrae or/and the spaces between the dog's dorsal vertebrae.

**MUSCULATURE:** the musculature in the area around these points will often be tenses and tender. The dog will often react by subjecting the area to less load or moving the leg, manifesting symptoms when you touch the point(s) on the back, i.e. the back segments from where the symptoms are originating. Furthermore a dog will often sit down to avoid pressure in this area when it is being examined. Other dogs may also growl indicating "It hurts just there! Don't touch me!"

In a few cases dogs may have problems urinating or defecating, either incontinence or constipation/inability to urinate. This means that the condition is serious and a vet must be contacted immediately to obtain the proper help for a dog with this condition.

**AGGRAVATION OF SYMPTOMS FOLLOWING CLINICAL EXAMINATION:** one will often see a post back examination reaction if one has found the correct area of the back disorder's origin. Dogs may react with more stiffness, more problems with walking and general functionality (walking, trotting and running) and also often have problems getting up again after the tissue has been provoked.

If such a diagnosis has been confirmed, the severity of these symptoms will depend on the age of the dog. This condition can manifest itself differently depending on the degree of disorder, i.e. the extent to which the back is injured and how much pressure the nerve (sciatica) is being subjected to, which is the nerve bundle located in a dog's lumbar regions and which runs into the legs, one into each of a dog's back legs.

**FURTHER EXAMINATION:** further examination of a lumbago-sciatica condition in a dog may involve x-rays of the dog's lumbar regions, possibly a CAT scan (computer tomography) and myelography with contrast injections – often done with operations in mind (last resort).

**DIAGNOSIS + FUNCTIONAL DIAGNOSIS:** when the diagnosis and functional diagnosis has been made one has to choose the form of treatment and healing. Some dogs undergo operations for this, some with good results, others with not so good results. After operations dogs need rest and gradual rehabilitative training to gradually regain their former levels of activity.

**PHYSIOTHERAPY:** physiotherapy may be indicated to ease a dog's recovery back to normal functionality and levels of activity. In those cases where the treatment is conservative, i.e. no operation is indicated or topical, dogs may also greatly benefit from physiotherapy.

Pain alleviation treatment and various treatment methods aimed at alleviating pain in a dog's lumbar regions and legs, as well as methods that attempt to loosen up some of the increased muscle tension in a dog's back and back legs.

One might also consider, in consultation with a vet, acupuncture or chiropractic therapy.

**TIME FACTOR:** one must prepare oneself for the fact that this type of back disorder is a condition that takes time, i.e. there is a time factor when it comes to the expected healing process. This applies to both dogs that have been operated on and dogs that have been treated conservatively (not operated on).

**HUNTING AND TRAINING:** this means that hunting and training will have to give way for a good while and that instead one will have to concentrate on getting the dog well again and in good working condition once more so that at a later point in time you can go out into the terrain with your four legged friend and seek out birds, train it to seek out birds, and do the preparatory work for hunting and training.

**I HOPE YOUR DOG GETS BETTER SOON – GOOD HEALTH – GOOD HUNTING**

*Happy hunting!*

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