

## **Dach-Facts: *Back Disease (IVDD)***

Health & Welfare Information from the  
Dachshund Breed Council

### **Intervertebral Disc Disease**

Dachshunds have a condition known as CHONDRODYSTROPHY - “chondro” means cartilage and “dystrophy” means disorder. Chondrodystrophy refers to the abnormal development of bone from a cartilage skeleton during growth from a puppy to an adult. The long bones of the body tend to be affected the most and this results in short limbs. It is “genetically programmed” in dwarf breeds such as Dachshunds.

Discs have an outer fibrous capsule (annulus) and inner gel nucleus. Discs degenerate with age in all animals – they lose water, become more fibrous and sometimes mineralised (calcified). The fibrous annulus can also rupture. Degeneration takes place much earlier in chondrodystrophic breeds, i.e. from 12-18 months, compared with 6-8 years in non-chondrodystrophic breeds.

Disc disease (IVDD) can and does happen at any age, but is most common in dogs between 4 and 7 years old.

### **Reducing the risk of injury**

While there is not much that can be done to prevent disc degeneration, there are things you can try to do to reduce the risk of injury:

- Regular exercise -
  - Build up gradually from puppyhood to 12 months; 5 minutes of “formal” exercise per day per month of age
  - Keep in fit, well-muscled condition, as Dachshunds were meant to be; adults require 45-60 minutes of mixed exercise per day (free-running and on-lead)
  - Being overweight can put more stress on the spine, as well as leading to other potential health problems
- Lift your Dachshund using two hands, one supporting the chest and one supporting the back

- Be very cautious in allowing them to jump on and off furniture, including beds; running down stairs can also put compression strain on the spine
- Consider very carefully whether to have your Dachshund spayed/neutered as there is evidence that this increases the risk of IVDD; early spay/neuter (before 12 months) further increases the risk

### **Predicting back problems**

Sometimes, even though a Dachshund may not exhibit a back problem, X-rays may disclose disc calcification. There is evidence that the degree of calcification at 24 months can be an indicator of later IVDD problems.

A study by the Royal Veterinary College suggested that longer-bodied dogs are more at risk of back disease than taller, shorter-bodied dogs.

### **Signs of disc problems and available treatments**

Signs that may occur with cervical (neck) disc disease:

- Crying, when eating or drinking, or for no apparent reason
- Poor appetite due to pain (mainly due to difficulty in lowering head to eat)
- Muscle spasms, and reluctance to move due to pain
- One or both front legs could be lame

Signs that may occur with thoracolumbar (mid & lower back) disc disease:

- Crying and/or shaking
- Reluctance to move, jump or to go up/down stairs
- Poor appetite due to pain
- Tense abdomen – called referred pain – can mimic the symptoms of other diseases
- Hunched appearance
- Paralysis to rear legs
- Loss of bladder and bowel control – severe signs of disc disease

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**WHEN YOU OBSERVE ANY OF THESE SIGNS, GET YOUR DACHSHUND TO A VETERINARY SURGEON IMMEDIATELY.**

Time is of the essence and could make a difference as to whether the problem can be corrected. You may opt for surgery, in which case a myelogram or preferably, an MRI, can be done to determine the location and extent of the disc rupture. Many, if not most, dogs who have surgery within 24 hours of becoming paralysed have more rapid and complete recoveries than dogs who have surgery at a later time. If a dog is paralysed, but still has deep pain sensations, surgery can often result in a complete recovery or a reasonably good recovery with minor neurological deficits. Discuss this with your vet. Surgery is best performed by a specialist, (either a neurologist or an orthopaedic surgeon). You will need a referral from your vet to a specialist. We recommend a consultation with a specialist whenever possible.

### **Alternatives to surgery**

- Cage rest (typically 6-8 weeks) and anti-inflammatory medication and painkillers  
**Always discuss medications with your vet, including benefits, risks, side effects, and any required laboratory monitoring**
- Acupuncture treatments
- Hydrotherapy and towel walking after healing has taken place and only when approved by your vet and under the supervision of a chartered physiotherapist

### **Cage rest is critical**

At the first sign of a back problem and during recovery, confine your dog using a small crate. Place the crate in an area of the house where the dog feels a part of the family. When going outside, place a small wire crate on the ground with the bottom removed. You can also use an exercise pen folded up to 3' x 3' or be sure the dog is taken out on a leash. 6-8 weeks of strict cage rest is usually recommended.

### **Canine Rehabilitation**

Whether your Dachshund has surgery or not, your dog will benefit from rehabilitation by a qualified canine rehabilitation therapist (either a Chartered Physiotherapist or Veterinary Surgeon). Services are usually available by referral from your own vet or referral specialist. Canine rehabilitation consists of a thorough evaluation and a progressive treatment plan that addresses strength, range of motion, pain or discomfort, balance, coordination, quality of mobility and walking, and overall function. The therapy plan is continually re-evaluated over several weeks, updated and follows all restrictions set by the referring vet or specialist. The therapy plan may consist of balance, coordination and strengthening exercises, manual therapies, gait retraining, acupuncture, joint mobilisation, and modalities such as laser, muscle stimulation, swimming or underwater treadmill.

### **There is hope!**

There are a variety of treatments available, so do not give up hope if your dog develops signs of back problems. Most dogs can live pain-free, happy lives after a back injury.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Dachshund Breed Council is grateful to Linda Stowe, founder of DodgersList.com, for permission to reproduce content from their information brochure on IVDD for use here in the UK.

### **Disclaimer**

This information is presented for educational purposes and as a resource for the Dachshund community. The Dachshund Breed Council and DodgersList coordinators are not vets or health care professionals. Nothing herein should be interpreted as medical advice for your particular dog and you should contact your own veterinary surgeon for specific advice.

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### **Useful websites**



**Dogs can live pain-free, happy lives after a  
back injury**  
[www.dodgerslist.com](http://www.dodgerslist.com)

**Website & Facebook group offering  
education and support for owners and all  
dogs suffering from disc disease**

DodgersList gathers information on current treatments and alternatives for Inter-vertebral Disc Disease (IVDD). Website information reflects what is commonly recommended by experts in neurology, orthopaedic and physical therapy fields.

#### Education:

<http://www.lbah.com/word/canine/disk-disease-ivd/>

<http://www.dachshundclubofamerica.org/ivdd-booklet/>

### **Dachshund Rescue**

If an owner is unable to care for a disabled Dachshund, our Dachshund Rescue group may be able to help.

<http://www.dachshundrescue.org.uk/>

### **Where to find out more**

Visit [www.dachshundhealth.org.uk](http://www.dachshundhealth.org.uk) for the latest information and advice on Dachshund health, in general.

For UK-specific IVDD advice and information about our UK X-ray Screening Programme, please visit:

[dachshund-ivdd.uk](http://dachshund-ivdd.uk)

