

Your Guide to Recovery:

Intervertebral Disc Disease

AQUACANINE
HYDRO & VETERINARY PHYSIO

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An Introduction to IVDD

Intervertebral disc disease is a condition that affects your dog's spine. The intervertebral disc herniates into the spinal canal, either as a result of slow degeneration of the disc material over time, or suddenly as a result of a traumatic event.

When the disc material protrudes into the spinal canal and places pressure on the spinal cord, your dog starts to show symptoms that indicate a lack of nerve conduction to the back of their body.

The severity of the symptoms will depend on how much disc material is in the spinal canal, how badly the spinal cord is being compressed, and at which spinal level the disc prolapse occurs.

High-risk breeds for IVDD

While IVDD can occur in any dog, the breeds that are most commonly affected include:

- Dachshunds
- Pekingese
- Shih Tzus
- Corgis
- German shepherds
- Labrador retrievers

Environmental factors that can increase the risk of IVDD include obesity and inactivity. Keeping your dachshund active and strong is the best way to decrease the risk of developing this condition.

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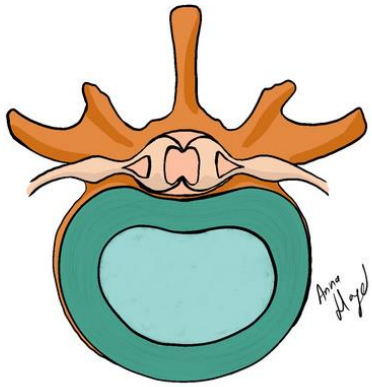
What is IVDD

The intervertebral disc can be compared to a jelly doughnut; the outside of the doughnut is the annulus fibrosus, the structure that determines the shape of the disc, and the jelly is the nucleus pulposus, the inner gelatinous substance with a high-water concentration that allows the disc to absorb shock. The cartilaginous end plates connect the disc to the bony vertebral body on either side.

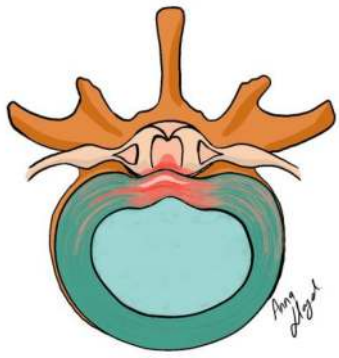


While we like to think of the disc and the vertebrae as separate, they are really a continuation of one another, and we need to consider them as a single unit.

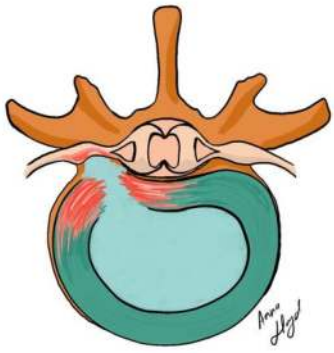
When the disc degenerates, the annulus becomes harder and more brittle until it ruptures, while the nucleus loses its gelatinous quality and calcifies.

Disc Herniation

The disc can herniate into the vertebral canal in one of two ways.



A disc **protrusion** occurs when the annulus remains intact, but the shape deforms and bulges into the spinal canal compressing the spinal cord.



An **extrusion** occurs when the annulus ruptures and the nucleus escapes into the spinal canal.

5 Kinds of IVDD

Hansen Type I IVDD
This is an acute extrusion of the nucleus pulposus through a rupture in the annulus fibrosis. The extrusion may cause both contusion and compression of the spinal cord, with compression often quite significant.

The clinical severity and presentation can have a very wide range, with a good prognosis of recovery for all but the most severely affected dogs.

Hansen Type 2 IVDD
This is a chronic protrusion of the disc, as the annulus stays intact but bulges into the vertebral canal, compressing the spinal cord. This usually occurs at multiple vertebral levels, making it challenging to determine which vertebral levels is the biggest concern.

Acute Non-Compressive Nucleus Pulposus Extrusion (ANNPE)
An acute rupture of the annulus fibrosus leads to the escape of the liquid nucleus that causes contusion but no compression. This can only be managed non-surgically.

Hydrated Nucleus Pulposus Extrusion (HNPE)
In this condition, the annulus fibrosus ruptures with herniation of the nucleus pulposus. This is a high-pressure rupture leading to contusion rather than compression and is more common in the neck vertebrae. It can be managed surgically or non-surgically.

ANNPE and HNPE
Both of these conditions can occur together. These conditions tend to be non-painful, although the symptoms can sometimes begin with the patient yelping in pain during vigorous activity. Treatment is primarily conservative, relying on rehabilitation and physiotherapy.

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Grading made simple

If your dog has been diagnosed with IVDD, your vet may have recommended either surgery or conservative management after discussing your dog's specific symptoms with you. The table below should help you recognise the symptoms, understand the various treatment options available, and the prognosis for recovery for different grades of the condition.

GRADE	SYMPTOMS	PROGNOSIS WITHOUT SURGERY	PROGNOSIS WITH SURGERY
Mildly affected	Back pain. Can walk normally or with a slight wobble and an occasional loss of balance.	80% chance of recovery	90% chance of recovery
Mildly affected	Back pain. Walks with a noticeable loss of balance, wobbly back legs, may have trouble placing their paws the correct way up, or can get their legs crossed over each other without being able to correct them.	80% chance of recovery	90% chance of recovery
Moderately affected	Back pain. Unable to use their back legs to walk and will drag their hind legs. Some deliberate movement is still available in the back legs.	80% chance of recovery	90% chance of recovery
Moderately affected	Back pain. Unable to use their back legs to walk and will drag their hind legs. No deliberate movement is available in the back legs.	60% chance of recovery	90% chance of recovery
Severely affected	Cannot use their back legs to walk. Cannot perform any deliberate movements with the back legs. They have no deep pain in the affected legs.	10% chance of recovery	50% chance of recovery

Table adapted from Dr Marianne Dorn, The Rehab Vet, North Herts, UK http://TheRehabVet.com

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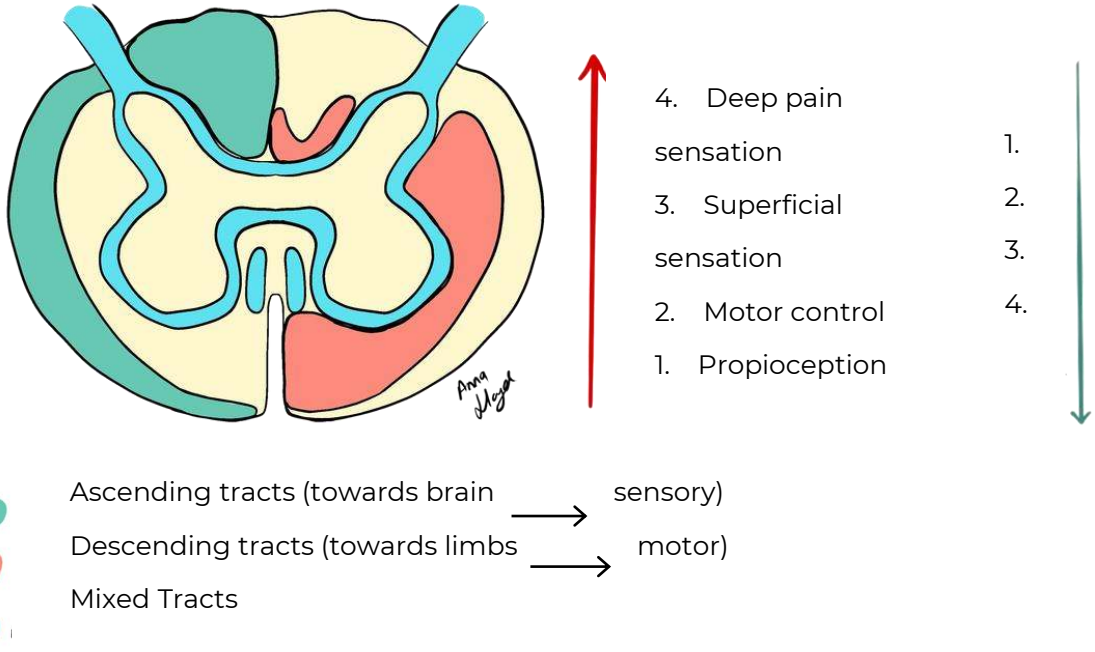
How serious is this injury,
and how can you support your dog's recovery?



When an intervertebral disc herniates into the spinal cord, it will compress the spinal cord from the bottom up. The nerve pathways on the outside and bottom of the spinal cord are responsible for transmitting messages related to **proprioception** – your dog's awareness of where their body is in space. The next level of compression affects the nerves that are responsible for **coordinated movement**. Following that, compression will affect their ability to feel **sensations on their skin** or under their feet, which can put them at further risk of injury. The deepest neural pathways in the spinal cord are responsible for **deep pain sensation** – if these pathways are compressed or compromised, they can no longer feel sensations that are painful. A loss of neural function will always happen from the outside to the inside, and it will come back from the inside to the outside. For that reason, as they start to recover, they will regain first deep pain sensation, then superficial sensation, followed by coordination and finally proprioception.

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Surgical management

Surgery is performed to decompress the spinal cord and to remove any disc material that may be putting pressure on it. Before going to surgery, your dog will need a diagnostic MRI to identify the affected spinal level. There may be a need to remove disc material from more than one spinal level.

IVDD in the neck will require a different form of surgery, and post-op recovery will require additional care and stabilization.
Please follow your vet's recommendations closely in these cases.

One of the most difficult things about surgery for many dogs and owners is that their dog may still be walking before surgery, and will no longer be able to walk immediately after surgery. This is completely normal and occurs because the vet has been disturbing the spinal cord, working to clean the area all around it. Function usually returns within a few days and continues to improve over time.

Recovery of normal or close-to-normal nerve function can take anything from two weeks to six months. When recovery takes longer, you will need to make adjustments to the home and routine for the best possible outcomes. We'll look at home adjustments a little later.

In some instances, surgery is not an option because of financial constraints, age or concurrent health conditions in the individual dog. If this is you, join us as we explore conservative management.



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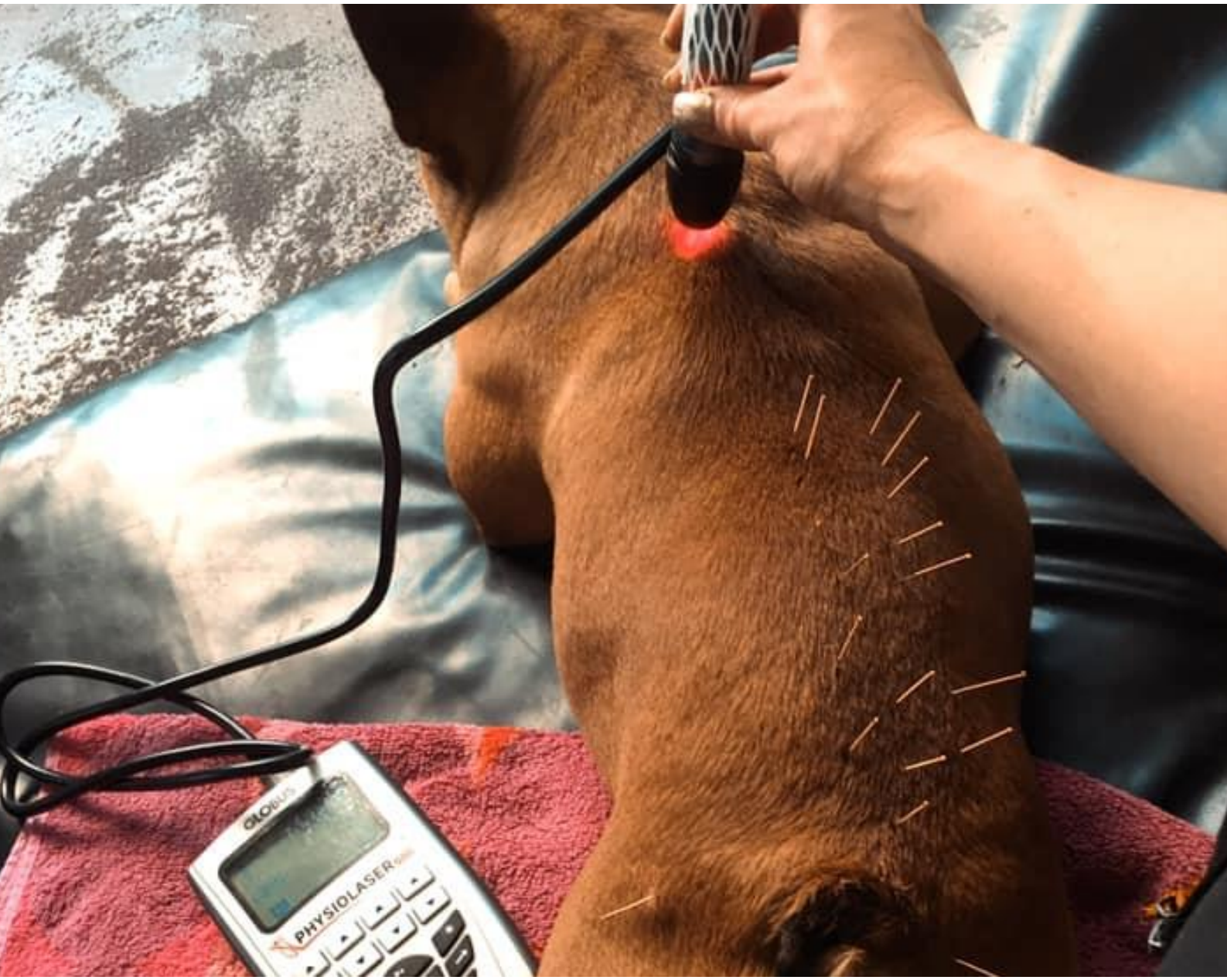
Conservative management

Non-surgical management provides the time and space for the body to re-absorb the prolapsed disc material naturally. It includes protective crate rest, pain management, exercise therapy, and rehabilitation.

Conservative management can be pursued for Grades 1 to 3 disc prolapses with a good prognosis. In higher grades of IVDD, the prognosis decreases for both surgical and conservative management.

It is important to note that even if your dog does not fully recover function in their hindlegs, they can still live a full life. We discuss the long-term management of the paralysed dog later in this document.



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Neuroplasticity

Although nerves don't heal as well as muscles or some of the other tissues in our bodies, they do have some capacity to heal, especially if we provide them with the support to do so.

Neuroplasticity is one of the features of the nervous system to adapt, to grow and to heal. In the first 6 weeks after an injury to the spinal cord, neuroplasticity will be at it's highest – or in another way, the spinal cord has the best possible capacity for healing in the first 6 weeks after injury to the spinal cord. As Vetrehabbers, we want to stimulate and facilitate neuroplasticity in the first 6 weeks after injury by activating and challenging the nervous system in a way that is safe for the patient – we don't want to risk further injury – and progressive.

We can stimulate healing by using modalities such as laser therapy and pulsed electromagnetic field therapy. We can stimulate neural activity by providing **novel sensations** to the affected paws and areas of the body, and we can stimulate motor control by gently challenging the muscles of the hindlimbs to activate.

For neuroplasticity to occur, the nervous system needs to be **stimulated and challenged**. This is one of the reasons it is important that daily exercises are performed with your dog, especially in the first 6 weeks after injury. Your rehabilitation team will help you and your dog to learn how to do this safely and effectively, and how to continue to challenge the nervous system week after week to ensure the greatest possible opportunity for healing!



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Wobbly dogs
Mildly affected – Grades 1 and 2



Symptoms

Grades 1 and 2 IVDD dogs can usually walk without assistance, with some signs of neurological dysfunction. These might include:

- hind legs collapsing to one side or the other occasionally;
- losing balance when rounding corners;
- hind legs getting left behind when your dog starts running;
- hind legs crossing over each other and getting ‘stuck’;
- hind legs getting left behind or stuck when climbing up or over a step or obstacle;
- inability or hesitancy to jump onto the couch or usual sleeping spots;
- generally wobbliness or lack of balance.

You may also notice a change in posture, such as a rounded or hunched back, tucking the hindlegs in underneath the body more as they walk or run, or leaning more on their forelegs.

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Treatment and prognosis

Dogs with mild signs of IVDD have a good prognosis of recovery regardless of the treatment pathway chosen.
They are usually good candidates for conservative management.

Conservative treatment

Conservative treatment aims to protect the spinal column from further damage, encourage natural healing of the spinal cord, stimulate neurological function of the hindlimbs, and improve strength and coordination of the back and hindquarters.

Therapies would include:

- pain management prescribed by your vet;
- crate rest ;
- protected exercise;
- laser and PEMF (pulsed electromagnetic field therapy);
- therapeutic exercise; and
- hydrotherapy

Your dog will need regular check-ups with your vet and will benefit from intensive rehabilitation with a rehabilitation therapist or physiotherapist. Throughout recovery, be aware of any signs of deterioration, as this can indicate a worsening of the prolapse, or an additional disc degeneration. Reoccurrence is common for this condition.



Post-op care

It is normal for a dog's condition to seem worse for a few days after IVDD surgery. Usually, they recover quickly and regain their normal mobility, but if you are concerned about this aspect, please discuss it with your vet who can help you make the best decision for you and your dog.

Post-op care will include pain management, crate rest, protected exercise, and a home exercise program. An intensive rehabilitation program is highly recommended to help dogs regain their maximum functional ability.

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Moderately affected dogs
cannot walk without help – Grades 3 and 4



Symptoms

Grades 3 and 4 IVDD dogs usually cannot walk without assistance, and may present with some or all of the following symptoms:

- dragging the hindlimbs when walking or running;
- rounded or hunched back;
- some voluntary movement in the hindlegs to adjust their position or try to stand, but without the ability to stand or walk;
- no movement at all in the hindlegs; and/or
- a leaking bladder, or a full bladder that they cannot empty on their own.

You may also notice a change in posture, such as a rounded or hunched back, tucking the hindlegs in underneath the body more as they walk or run, or leaning more on their forelegs.

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Treatment and prognosis

This group of dogs still has a good prognosis for recovery, especially if they have some voluntary movement in their hindlegs. Surgery offers them the best chance of recovery, although conservative management could still be an option for some of these dogs.



Surgical management

Spinal surgery should be performed by a veterinary neurologist as it is a specialised procedure. A good surgeon will always provide your dog with the best possible outcome. After assessing your dog, a neurologist will confirm the level (position) of the damage as well as the extent of the damage through an MRI or similar imaging, and then perform surgery to remove disc material from the spinal canal. Dogs should start walking again within three weeks, although mobility can take much longer for some dogs.

At home, you will need to be prepared to take care of your dog and help them rehabilitate. This will mean:

- crate rest;
- supported lead walking with a sling;
- potentially expressing the bladder; and
- therapeutic exercises to improve nerve function and control

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Conservative management

Non-surgical management can still be successful for these dogs, but recovery can take longer, and will require an intensive rehabilitation programme to retrain the nervous system. Conservative management aims to control pain, protect the spinal cord from further damage, encourage the re-absorption of disc material, stimulate neuroplasticity, and encourage a return to functional movement.

This will mean:

- pain management prescribed by your vet;
- crate rest;
- protected exercise;
- laser and PEMF;
- acupuncture;
- therapeutic exercise;
- hydrotherapy

Regular check-ups with your vet will be necessary, as well as close monitoring of your dog's progress.

Cautions during recovery

Deterioration can occur in the first few days, especially in dogs that are mildly affected. This is because the disc slowly deteriorates and leaks into the spinal canal over a period of days instead of all at once. This is why protection through crate rest and controlled activity is so important in the early phases after injury.

We want to prevent any fast and uncontrolled movements, such as running, jumping on or off of objects, navigating stairs, play, and high levels of excitement. Whenever your dog is outside of their crate, they should be in your arms or on a lead with a supportive sling.

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Severely affected dogs

no deep pain – Grade 5



Grade 5 comprises the most severely affected dogs, whose prognosis for full recovery is unfortunately low. These dogs have no available function in their hindlegs and often don't have any bowel or bladder control. If their deep pain sensation is absent, it means that the spinal cord has been severely compressed up to the deepest levels. Surgery offers the best chance of recovery.

Electro-acupuncture has shown promise as a treatment for deep pain negative dogs, and can be used as a part of conservative or post-op rehabilitation and treatment.

Here are some statistics that can help you find the best way forward for you and your dog:

- After surgery, 50–60% of Grade 5 dogs recover.
- Learning to walk can take nine months, although we hope to see improvement between 6 and 12 weeks post-op.
- A percentage of Grade 5 dogs will develop a secondary condition called **progressive myelomalacia**, usually within the first week post-op.
- Preliminary studies evaluating electroacupuncture in Grade 5 dogs has shown positive outcomes and can be a viable treatment approach with or without surgery.

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For Grade 5 dogs, no treatment option will guarantee that they walk again. Their home care will be intensive as they will need to be kept clean, bladder and bowel expression will need to be regularly performed, daily therapeutic exercises need to be performed, and regular vet checks are necessary.

If this care won't be possible for you, euthanasia may be the kindest option for your dog. If you do want to learn the skills to manage your dog long term, you might consider a wheelchair, with which many dogs continue to live long and happy lives. Your rehabilitation therapist can help you explore this option and ways to incorporate the wheelchair into your life.

Progressive myelomalacia

In a percentage of dogs with severe IVDD, they go on to develop a condition known as progressive myelomalacia. This condition usually develops in the first week following injury, and results in a fast progressing softening and dying off of the spinal cord.



Signs:

- Increasing pain levels
- Further loss of muscle tone and reflexes in hind limbs
- An increased body temperature
- Loss of function of the front limbs as it progresses
- Respiratory distress as the respiratory muscles become paralysed.

For dogs who develop progressive myelomalacia, euthanasia is the kindest option.

Home care and environment

Whether you opt for surgical or conservative management, recovery will almost always require adaptions to your home and daily routine, coupled with a combination of therapies. The biggest part of your dog's recovery truly lies in your hands. The following tips are relevant for the recovery of all Grades of IVDD dogs.

Specific guidelines for your dog's recovery will be determined by your vet's post-op recommendations; where the advice below differs from their recommendations, please either follow your vet's directions, or discuss the difference with your vet to find the best way forward.

In this section, we look at each of the following areas of home care in more detail:

- crate or safe room;
- bedding;
- daily movement;
- exercise;
- urinary or faecal incontinence;
- protecting against skin sores or complications; and
- complications that require medical attention



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Crate rest tips and tricks

Your home environment needs to provide your dog with a safe place to rest and heal. You will want to ensure that the environment helps you to help your dog. Here are some ways in which you can do that:



A confined space

How you set up a confined space for your dog will depend on you, your home, and your dog's activity level.

- A **crate** is the safest and most restricting option. If your dog is already crate-trained, that's great! If you have a very active dog or a large-breed dog, a crate is the safest way to restrict mobility, as they are unable to jump or pick up speed.
- A **playpen** is a great alternative for small-breed dogs who won't try to jump over the side, and it is easier to lift them up and over the top of a playpen than to lift them out of the door of a crate.
- A **small room** offers an alternative, if you have a dog that will be calm and relaxed, where they can sleep through most of the day. The room will have to have a non-slip floor, and no furniture that your dog will be tempted to jump onto.

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Factors to consider

As you consider the best space for your dog, think about **where you will be** during the day. Your dog will always want to be close to you, and proximity helps you keep an eye on them. If you work from home, a pen next to your desk or somewhere in the room where you work will be perfect. If you are away from home for several hours each day, a crate will be a safer option for your dog.



Think about how you and your dog will **access** their safe space; the pathway from their space to outside should be short and easy to navigate if they are to walk it. Avoid stairs, slippery floors, and passageways that are too narrow for you to provide physical support from a sling.

Consider **the daily activity and traffic** in your home, and how your dog responds to it. For example, does your dog love to lie by a window and look out at the street or garden? If so, placing their bed or crate where they can watch the world go by is perfect. However, if they become excited when they see activity, positioning them away from the window will be necessary, to help them remain calm through the day. By simply placing your dog's bed or crate in a spot in the home where they will be happiest (generally close to you), you can significantly reduce anxiety during their rest period. The ideal spot will depend on your home and your dog.

Lastly, pay close attention to the **flooring** in your home. Any surface where your dog can or does slip can make recovery more difficult. Consider placing carpets, runners or yoga mats on the floor to provide traction for your dog as they walk. Products such as toe grips or sticky paws can be placed onto your dogs feet to help prevent slipping or scuffing of the feet, as well as providing stimulation to the paws.

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Equip yourself

There are a few simple pieces of equipment that can provide great benefit to you and your dog, and make the journey of recovery much easier.

- **A sling or hindquarter harness** such as the help ‘em ‘up harness or Gingerlead slings will allow you to support their hindquarters while they walk, keeping their spine in a neutral alignment and preventing them from losing their balance. A sling is great for your back and posture as well, as you will be able to remain upright while walking with them.



- **Hot packs** can provide pain relief and passively warm up the muscles in the back and hindquarters before activity. A hot pack that covers the length of the back is the ideal size. It can be used from three to four days after surgery, or from the beginning of conservative management.



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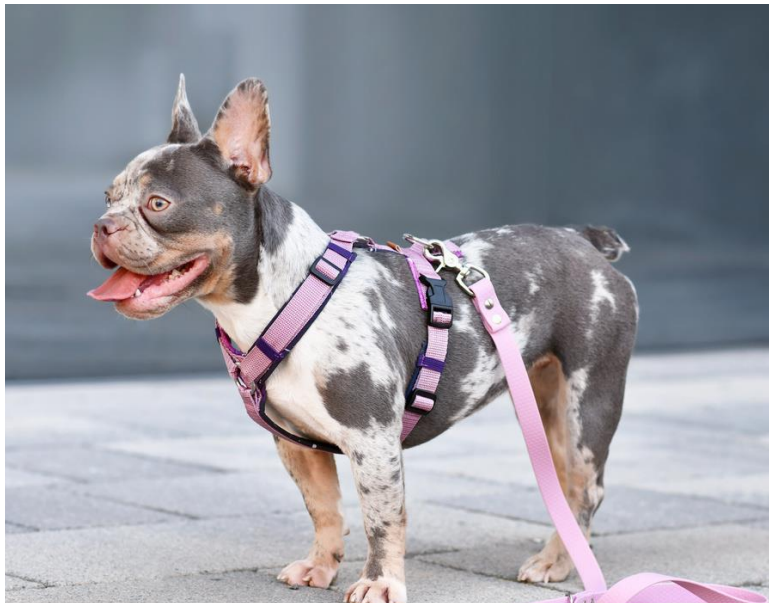
- A comfortable **harness and lead** is essential. Your dog will be on a lead any time they leave the house for the next few weeks. A harness provides multiple benefits over a collar during this period. A well-fitted Y-harness will allow you to provide the maximum support to your dog. Your lead should be a comfortable length.



- A **comfortable bed** is also essential – allowing your dog to get on and off easily while providing a supported and comfortable surface. You will want a bed that is flat, even, and relatively firm. An orthopedic bed is highly recommended, especially for heavy dogs, or dogs with other health concerns. A good orthopedic bed is an investment that your dog will benefit from for the rest of their lives.



- A **back brace** such as the Wiggleless back brace can offer additional stability to the spine during the early phases of healing, protecting it from further injury while allowing your dog to move with a greater degree of freedom. This will be especially useful for Grade 1–3 IVDD dogs.



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Daily movement

Probably the most important part of rehabilitating the nervous system is movement. If your dog spends their day in the crate with little to no exercise, their nervous system won't have the opportunity to heal.



They need to practise functional movement and posture every day for the best chance of recovery. This includes lead walks with the sling, simple range-of-motion exercises, postural exercises, and functional movement exercises. Let's discuss a few simple exercises that will benefit your dog.

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Supported lead walking

Supported lead walking is important for all grades of IVDD, allowing you to protect your dog from falls, keeping their spine in a neutral alignment while walking, and providing them with the perfect opportunity to start using their back legs – or practise using those back legs – without the risk of falling or losing their balance.

There are two main types of slings – a belly strap and a hip lift harness. **The belly strap** is very simple, and can be made at home with a variety of materials such as a towel, scarf or extra lead. You want to place a supportive band beneath their belly right in front of the hindlegs, travelling up to your hand from either side of their body. This should be long enough so that you can stand comfortably upright while holding the straps.

The second kind is a **harness sling** that fits around each of your dog's hind legs. This kind of sling can be great for male dogs as it doesn't get in the way when they urinate.

Your dog should always have their harness and lead on while you are walking with them. Use the harness and lead to control their speed and keep them at a slow pace. Provide just enough lift to the sling so that they stay upright while walking. As they use their hindlegs more and more, provide less lift to the sling and allow them more autonomy.

This set-up allows them to practise walking, stimulating their nervous system and muscles while protecting your back at the same time.



Supported standing



This exercise is most easily done with two people, or with the help of a LickiMat or similar tool in front of your dog. Ask your dog to stand in a straight and neutral posture. Support their hind end while they stand facing forward. Having a second person in front of the dog to speak to them and keep their attention in front of them is helpful, as a neutral and relaxed posture is important.

How you support the hindquarters will depend on your dog's symptoms. The best way to learn this exercise is with the guidance and support of a rehabilitation therapist.

You want to place each paw so that it is firmly on the ground, and encourage the joints to straighten out. This can be easily done by supporting the hock (the joint that corresponds to our ankle) by gently pushing forward, and supporting the stifle (knee joint) by gently pushing back on it. In this way your dog's legs will be straight and carry their normal weight, while you simply support them in that position.

Once this position comes easily, you will probably notice that one hind leg stays in position more easily than the other.

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Continue strengthening and developing both legs, but this information is important to take note of.

From this balanced and correct standing position you can gently shift your dog's weight from one side to the other, which will help the brain to start interpreting movements that require rebalancing. Hopefully, you will start to see the muscles activate as your dog shifts weight from one leg to the other to remain upright as you gently and slowly push from side to side.

You can also shift weight from the shoulders straight back to the hindquarters, and from the top of the hips down to the ground.

While these gentle shifts may not feel like much, they are essential in retraining postural awareness and balance and, most importantly, for finding and exercising the neural pathways available to your dog.

If you are having trouble with this exercise, please book an appointment with us. We'd love to teach you how to do this and other valuable exercises on this journey of recovery.

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Passive range of motion

Passive range of motion is an essential exercise to maintain mobility, and joint and muscle health in the limbs. If your dog is unable to use their hindlimbs at all, you will do this while they are lying down, ideally relaxed on their side. As you and your dog improve at this exercise and the one above, you can start to combine them, performing passive range of motion while your dog is standing.

To start, gently flex and extend each individual joint in your dog's back leg. Start with their toes, then hocks, stifles and finally the hip. You want to move slowly through each movement, flexing and extending one joint at a time within the range that is comfortable for your dog. They should find this comfortable and even relaxing.

Now flex and extend all the joints of the limb by gently describing a circle with the entire leg as the dog stands or lies comfortably. The movement should look similar to the movement involved when the dog walks: Gently pull the leg straight and back along the imaginary ground, bend the joints as you bring the leg towards the dog's body and forward, straightening the leg as you pull it back to the initial position, and repeat. A large, gentle circle is what you are aiming for, involving both straightening and bending.

If you are having trouble with this exercise, do book an appointment with us. We'll show you the ideal way to perform the movement, and others, so that you provide the ideal conditions for full recovery.

There are so many exercises that will help! The key is to perform them correctly and often. The more variety you include and the more correctly each exercise is performed, the easier it will be for your dog's nervous system to relearn all of this incredible information.

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Urinary and faecal incontinence



If your dog experiences any urinary or faecal incontinence, you will need to learn to express their bladder. This is fairly easy in most dogs and can become a simple part of your daily routine. You will want to express their bladders multiple times a day to prevent any leakage or spillage on bedding, although this may not be entirely avoidable. To learn how to safely and effectively express your dog's bladder, please speak to your veterinarian.

It is important to understand that dogs who suffer from urinary or faecal incontinence have no control over their bladder or bowel movements, and that any accidents in the house are not their fault. Try to find a simple system to keep your home clean in the event of spillages – paper towels and a convenient spray bottle close at hand will allow you to quickly mop up any spills that do occur on trips in and out of the house.

You will quickly come to recognise what your dog needs and what their pattern is, which will help you to keep them and your space clean.

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Preventing complications

Skin sores can easily develop if dogs are allowed to drag their hindlegs over rough terrain or too often over any terrain, especially if urine on their skin is not cleaned off regularly, and if they remain in one position for too long. Skin sores need to be treated quickly and effectively as they can worsen significantly over time.

In dogs with compromised bladder control, a **urinary tract infection** can easily develop. You can reduce this risk by regularly expressing the bladder, but even so, you want to keep a close watch for any signs of an infection to ensure that it is quickly and effectively treated.

Additional signs that your dog may be suffering from complications include a loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhoea, or a change in drinking habits. If your dog experiences any of these symptoms, it's time for a checkup at the vet.



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Create a predictable routine

A predictable routine will help both you and your dog in the weeks ahead. Spend some time creating a rough schedule that adheres to the guidelines given by your veterinarian, including when medication needs to be administered, feeding times, bowel and bladder expression where necessary, exercises, and walks.

Here is an example of what a routine might look like for a severely affected dog:

AM: Wake up in the morning, supported walk outside for bowel and bladder expression, then go back inside and to the crate.
7:00 AM: Breakfast and medication.
7:30 AM: Apply a hot pack to the back for 10 minutes, followed by five minutes of passive range of motion, and five minutes of walking and sniffing outside, followed by five minutes of specific exercises prescribed by your vet or rehab therapist. Return to crate.
10:00AM: Supported walk, bowel and bladder expression.
12:00PM: Supported walk, bowel and bladder expression. Five minutes of standing exercises.
3:00PM: Supported walk, bowel and bladder expression
5:00PM: Dinner and medication.
5:30PM: Apply hot pack to the back for 10 minutes, followed by five minutes of passive range of motion, and five minutes of walking and sniffing outside, followed by five minutes of specific exercises prescribed by your vet or rehab therapist. Return to crate.
8PM: Supported walk, bowel and bladder expression before bed.

There is a lot of room for adjusting this schedule to suit your daily commitments, and as your dog recovers the routine will change. Walking times can become longer and exercises might become more involved. One session per day might be long, while others are short.

In providing you with this schedule, I hope to give you an idea of what your day could look like.
Please adjust it according to your needs and routine.

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When treatment does not provide recovery

and what you can do

Not every dog with IVDD will recover, and with the financial cost of surgery, the time necessary for rehabilitation and home care, there are many things to consider for an owner with a severely affected dog.

While many dogs live long and active lives while permanently disabled with the use of a wheelchair, this option is not always practical for every dog and owner. If you are considering whether you will be able to take care of a permanently disabled dog requiring a wheelchair, please get in touch with us. We would love to guide you through the process of decision-making, fitting, finding the right cart, and gradually introducing your dog to their cart to ensure that they have the best possible experience. For dogs that have a good chance of recovery, a cart should not form a part of their rehabilitation as it can delay or halt their recovery. Wheelchairs (carts) should only be used during the late phases of rehabilitation, when it is clear that recovery of neurological function will remain limited. There are many factors to consider, such as whether your dog has any other health conditions or challenges, their temperament, environment, and your lifestyle.

There are many cases where euthanasia is simply the kindest option for your dog, and the only option for your family. Before opting for surgery or rehabilitation, consider the financial implications and requirements, the time that will be necessary for recovery, and any health conditions or limitations that you or other family members may have. If you have back problems or work away from home for long days, taking care of a severely affected dog will be impossible, especially if there is a loss of bladder control.

If you are unsure about whether or not to consider euthanasia, please speak to your vet or to us – we will be able to discuss the prognosis, care and time required, and help you decide what is best.

This is not a decision that you need to rush into. Take your time. As heart-breaking as it may seem, sometimes euthanasia is the kindest release we can offer to our dogs, a final expression of our love for them.

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Get the support of a rehabilitation therapist



The journey ahead can feel overwhelming, and we completely understand that. But you don't have to walk the road on your own. Surround yourself with a team that will guide you, advise you, and advocate for your dog every step of the way. You should have a vet and a rehab therapist that you trust and that listens to your concerns.

Book a consult today if you would like us to be a part of your team.

Book an appointment

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Kirsty Hamilton

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Committed to providing the highest standard of care, respect, and dignity for every patient. We work closely with your primary and specialist veterinary teams to ensure a seamless, professional approach to your dog's treatment and ongoing wellbeing.

Book an appointment

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