

# BACK TROUBLE

MORE PREVALENT THAN DIAGNOSED IN PETS

---

**Brought to you by**

William Pollak, DVM  
Fairfield Animal Hospital  
1115 E. Madison Ave  
Fairfield, IA 52556

*"Holistic & traditional approaches to support the best of animal health."*

Available online at

<http://www.healthyvet.com>

Last updated on 12/7/2003

# BACK TROUBLE

## MORE PREVALENT THAN DIAGNOSED IN PETS

---

Holistic approaches to disease includes far more than an apparently appropriate medicine. Disease propagates out of dis-ease on any level and through continued dis-ease the required strength is gathered over time enabling the discomfort to manifest in physical form (as bodily disease)..

Daily routine and the physical surroundings play a crucial role in encouraging health or disease. Back trouble in dogs (and to some extent in cats) offers a perfect example of how the environment and the structure of the body interface on a daily basis resulting in ease or dis-ease.

Back trouble in all dogs; not just the wiener types, is more common than is assumed. Sudden severe back trouble is seen as weakness in the back limbs, a hunched up attitude when walking and many times there is a strong desire to hide. There is also reluctance to walk up and down steps, the appetite is off, with possible vomiting in extreme situations. This is often diagnosed at the vet, the prescription is encouraged rest, vitamins, muscle relaxants and pain relievers. Upon discussion with the owners in retrospect there were warning signs and indications of trouble before the serious episode occurred. A more mild on again, off again chronic condition set the stage for the serious episode.

Mild back pain is more insidious, a general uncomfortable behavior is seen. The pet is just unsettled, there is a dislike to be petted or the pet is very affectionate. The appetite can be sporadic, the pet appears indecisive or just wants to hide. There can be a mild hesitation to go up or down steps, inclines or furniture. There can also be a reluctance to play and jump as before, or not wanting to go in the car or truck for a ride that is very much enjoyed by the pet. These more subtle changes in behavior and attitude arise from a sensitivity in the spine (intervertebral disc area) usually just behind the ribs, halfway between the front and back legs. This area is regularly stressed by the environmental/ home situation.

These general signs of mild pain are not always seen as specific to the backbone area and these non specific symptoms can lead on a wild goose chase trying to find some more exotic disease that fits the presentation of signs.

Back trouble in any dog (and to some extent in the cat) is predominantly caused by environmental situations that can be rectified with sound, logical management. The periodic long term reoccurrence of non specific symptoms is due to chronic reinjury as the pet feels better, returns to normal activity but tissue healing is incomplete. The following is a list of the major causes for pet back trouble from most common to least:

- Roughhousing with other dogs, usually similar sized, younger or larger. This can be a daily or weekly occurrence.
- Steps; especially wood and vinyl, with similar landings, steep, regularly used, to go to sleep or be fed.
- Slippery floors; especially wood and vinyl, usually throughout the house and no choice for using carpeted areas.
- Jumping up and down on furniture; sofas, beds, chairs, cars and trucks.

Other less common causes are:

- Nutritional deficiencies
- Metabolic disease
- Other diseases

Regular exposure to any of the above environmental circumstances can lead to a mild, chronic back condition. Aspirin and/or muscle relaxants without eliminating several or all of the above circumstances will oftentimes make the condition worse or keep the condition moderate and longstanding.

Treatment is simply removing all of the environmental conditions stated above; not for a day or two, but for at least 10 days. Improvement is quick and oftentimes dramatic. Removing all of the above conditions (ideally a carpeted cage, a private hospital room so to speak) reduces the likelihood of reinjury to the area especially during healing.

The healing of the back, including tendons and the important intervertebral ligaments can take anywhere from 2 to 8 weeks. Nutritional support is vital if healing is to be successful over the long run. Slowly returning the pet to normal life by reintroducing things back is fine. Oftentimes the offending situation is then clearly seen.

A top grade meat based commercial pet food devoid of fillers and artificial chemicals, along with fresh raw foods and sometimes calcium and vitamin D support is what is needed to strengthen the back area. But MOST importantly, adequate TIME without back strain is the best healer of all.