Cervical ventral slot

Cervical disc surgery | Dogs

A disc in the neck can cause severe pain or weakness in all four legs. A ventral slot allows access to selected discs from underneath the neck.

About the procedure

Why does a neck disc cause pain?

A damaged disc may push material upwards into the space occupied by the spinal cord. Your dog may hold its head low, cry when turning, refuse to eat from a low bowl, or have a stiff or wobbly walk. A nerve root can be irritated and cause a front leg to be held up. Severe compression may prevent standing.

How is the diagnosis confirmed?

The vet examines movement, reflexes and pain responses. A CT scan is often sufficient for diagnosis and treatment planning. MRI will provide more detailed information. Imaging determines which disc is affected and whether the material lies where a ventral approach can reach it. X-rays alone are not sufficient for surgical planning.

What happens during a ventral slot?

Under general anaesthesia, the surgeon approaches the spine through the underside of the neck, moving delicate structures carefully aside. A narrow opening is made through the affected disc space and adjoining bone. Disc material is removed to relieve pressure on the cord. The opening is kept limited to preserve the strength of the neck. Material far to one side or compression from above may need a different approach.

What alternatives are available?

Mild, stable cases may be managed with strict activity restriction and prescribed pain relief. Persistent severe pain, worsening weakness or major compression may justify surgery. Depending on imaging, a dorsal approach or a stabilising procedure may be more appropriate. The vet will discuss emergency care if severe weakness develops.

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Recovery, risks and home care

Recovery and home care

Expected outcome

Many dogs improve substantially, particularly when pain is the main sign and nerve damage is limited. Recovery of walking may be slower in dogs already weak or unable to stand. Some pain or weakness may persist.

Home nursing and activity

Keep your dog in a quiet restricted area. Cage rest is recommended and will reduce the chance of complications. Use a chest harness rather than a neck collar unless instructed otherwise. Avoid pulling, twisting or bending the neck, jumping and stairs. Provide food and water at a comfortable height as advised; report trouble swallowing. Support weak dogs and use medication only as prescribed.

Follow-up and recovery

The team may recommend hospital monitoring before discharge. A wound check is often planned in 10–14 days; restricted activity usually continues for several weeks, with gradual increases after reassessment. New or ongoing signs may require MRI or CT.

When to contact the practice

Difficulty breathing, choking, repeated coughing after eating, inability to swallow, sudden worsening of limb strength or severe neck pain need urgent assessment; breathing trouble or collapse is an emergency.

Questions to ask your vet

Why is a ventral approach suitable? What nursing will my dog need? What should I do if neck pain returns?

Discussing risks and complications

As with any surgical procedure, complications can occur. Your surgeon will discuss the possible complications, individual risks and expected outcome for your pet during the pre-operative consultation.

General anaesthesia can cause serious complications, including death. Your veterinary team will explain individual risks and alternatives.

Important information

Follow the personalised discharge plan; this sheet is not a consent form. Contact your own practice or its out-of-hours service for urgent care.