



# **Intervertebral Disc Disease & Physiotherapy**

**What you should know**

**OPTIMA ANIMAL PHYSIO**

**Optimising Function. Enhancing Performance.  
Maximising Potential.**



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Katrinka is a qualified Physiotherapist, a member of the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APAM), and representative for APA Animal Physiotherapy Group. She has recently completed her Masters' degree in Veterinary Physiotherapy.

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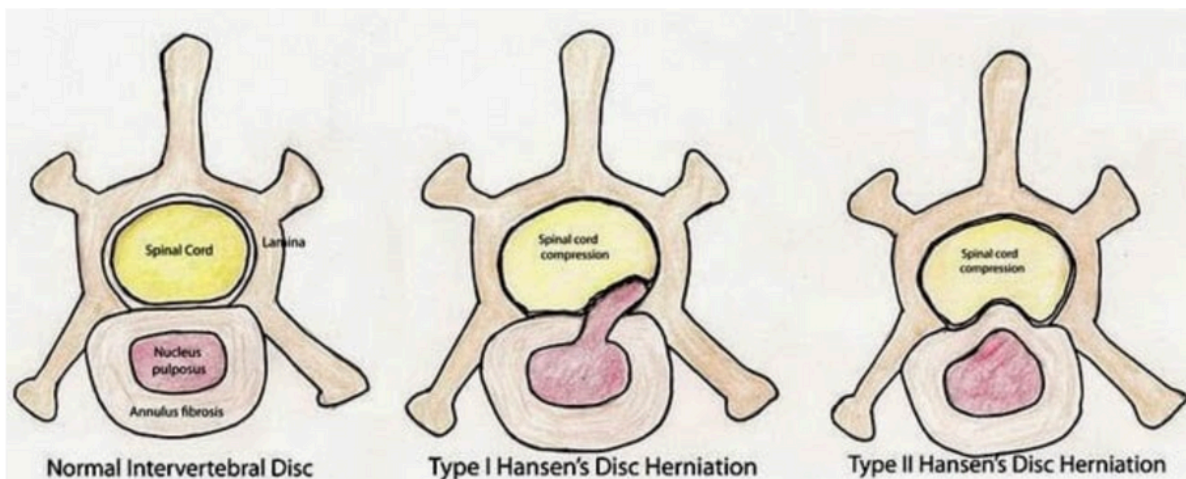
# What is Intervertebral Disc Disease?

**Intervertebral Disc Disease (IVDD) is a spinal condition that commonly affects dogs with long backs and short limbs, such as Daschunds, French Bulldogs, Cocker Spaniels, Corgis, Beagles and Pugs.**

The intervertebral disc is positioned between the vertebra of the spine, providing cushioning and shock absorption to the spine when moving. The intervertebral disc is composed of a fibrous outer layer (annulus fibrosus) and a gelatinous material (nucleus pulposus) inside. Like a jam donut !



Intervertebral disc herniation is the most common type of IVDD that we see. During an IVDD event, the gelatinous material inside the disc extrudes and compresses the spinal cord above, causing spinal cord injury. IVDD can result from a slip, fall or injury, but can also be sudden onset, with **no obvious warning signs**.



**IVDD can affect any part of the dog's spine and symptoms will vary somewhat depending on location. Common symptoms are:**

- BACK or NECK pain: This is one of the first signs we see
- Reluctance to go for a walk, or slowing down on walks
- Unco-ordinated movements of the limbs
- Fatigue, lethargy, a desire to sleep more
- Unable to stand or walk
- Difficulty with toileting
- Unusually quiet or withdrawn
- Dragging of the paws or audible scraping of the nails on the ground when walking



Time is critical with this condition, so if you see these signs or symptoms in your dog it is best to have them assessed by your veterinarian or physiotherapist. They can direct you as to next steps from here.

See the back of this handout for more information on how to contact us.

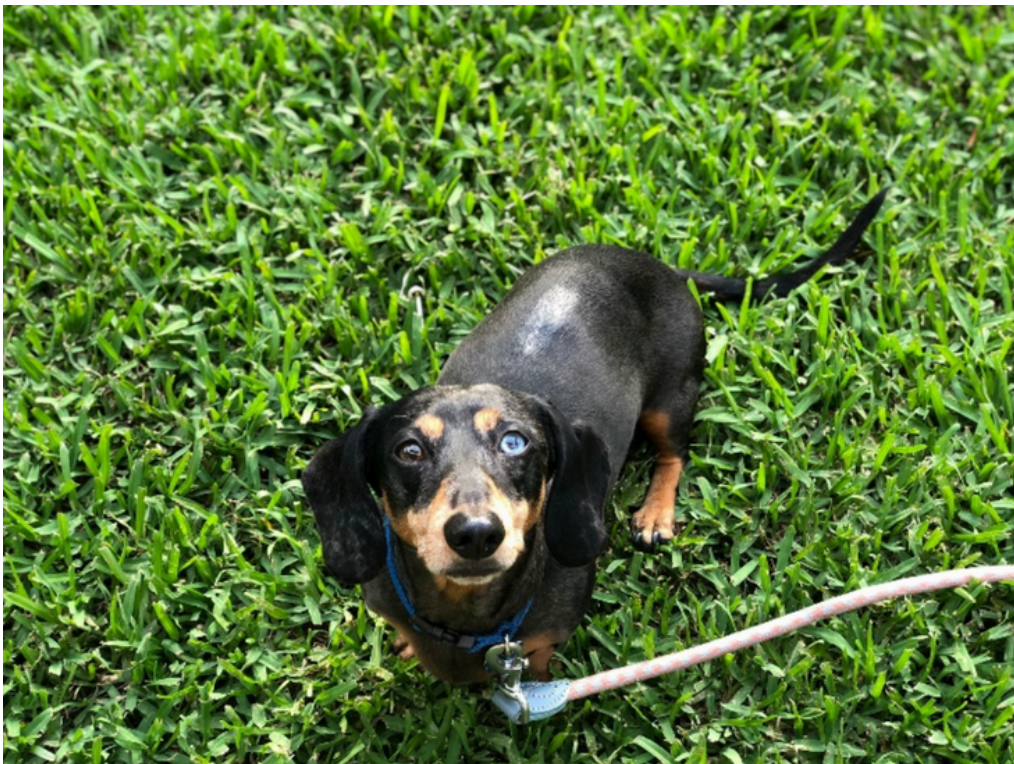


# How does physiotherapy help?

Physiotherapy should be pursued for all dogs suffering from IVDD:

- Early physiotherapy intervention may prevent surgery
- Physiotherapy should be considered an essential option for owners who do not wish to pursue surgery
- Where surgery has been necessary, physiotherapy is essential to achieve the best outcomes for recovery
- Physiotherapy provides long-term management and prevention of IVDD relapses

**Regardless of the extent of injury, all dogs benefit from physiotherapy.  
For some dogs, it is essential in order to be able to walk again**



# IVDD Physiotherapy Management

## Physiotherapy and Brain Neuroplasticity

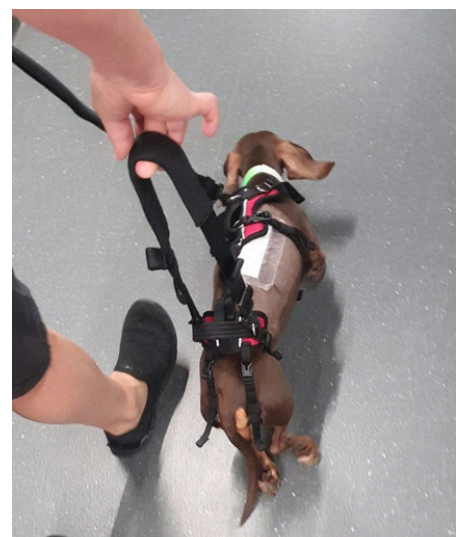
The body has enormous capacity for healing and recovery. The brain is capable of relearning movement patterns, including walking. Physiotherapy capitalises on this fantastic innate body system by retraining normal movement patterns, and the more you practice, the more progress can be made.



This is especially so within the first three months following injury or surgery. At Optima Animal Physio, our goal is to return your dog to pre-injury health and fitness.

We do this by focusing on key areas essential to successful rehabilitation, which include:

- **Pain Management: laser, acupuncture, TENS, massage**
- **Strengthen areas of muscular weakness**
- **Improve balance & co-ordination**
- **Improvement in Functional Activities**
- **Retrain walking**





# Crate resting and Confinement after Surgery or Injury

Whether your dog has suffered IVDD as an injury (or re-injury) or has had surgery, they will require a period of restricted activity for up to 6 weeks.

This will require set-up of a **crate, play pen, modifications to the home**, or a combination of all. Planning ahead and being prepared for when your dog comes home will significantly reduce the stress involved with creating a safe place for them to rehabilitate at home.

The purpose of setting up the right environment is to prevent exuberant activity that would impede your dog's recovery from injury or surgery.

## Bladder and Bowel Management

Spinal cord injury caused by IVDD can lead to urinary and faecal incontinence depending on the severity.



Many dogs require help to become fully independent with managing their bladder and bowel.

Physiotherapy will teach you strategies to manage this, including:

- Creating a toileting regime
- Fitting and use of continence aids such as belly bands and dog nappies

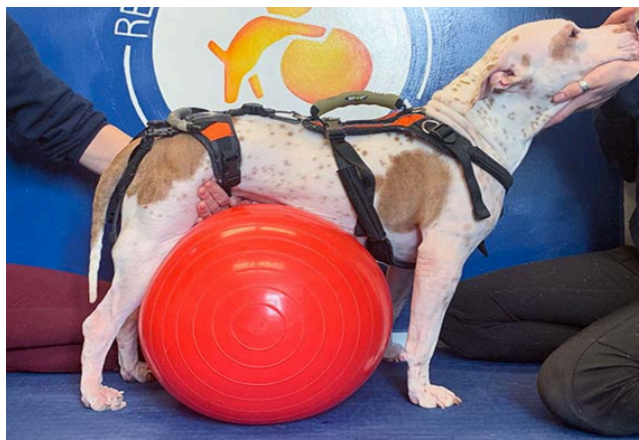


# Harnesses and Wheelchairs

Harnesses are extremely helpful to support your dog when walking and should be used at all times for dogs during their IVDD recovery.

You can find a range of slings and harnesses to support dogs on our website.

Wheelchairs are an option for dogs that are unable to walk, allowing them to get outdoors for pleasure, enrichment and fitness.



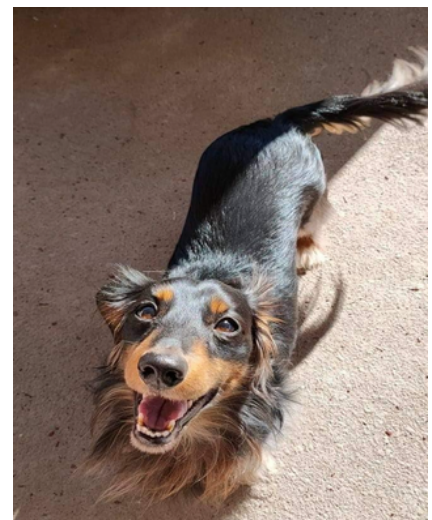
## Prevention

IVDD is a disease process that has the potential to affect multiple intervertebral discs of the canine spine. This means a good management plan is essential.

This consists of:

- Walking programme
- Home environment considerations
- Nutrition and dietary elements

Lifestyle changes are essential in order to protect your dog from developing IVDD and to ensure they **maintain a healthy, happy and functional spine lifelong.**





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Katrinka has a special interest in postoperative rehabilitation of animals following orthopaedic and spinal surgery, as well as performance dogs and horses, and beloved family pets. Katrinka is passionate about animal physiotherapy and its unique complement to veterinary medicine, and thrives in helping patients return to their optimal function and performance.



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