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CHIROPRACTIC AND YOUR DOG

What is a Subluxation?

Chiropractors use the term **SUBLUXATION** to describe a specific problem of the musculoskeletal system, especially of the spinal column. It involves subtle misalignments of the bony system that interfere with the normal function of the nervous system. Subluxations result in loss of flexibility, stiffness, resistance, muscle spasm, lack of coordination and balance, and other dysfunctions of the nervous system.

How does my dog get subluxations?

Traumatic (both macro- and repetitive micro-trauma) and stressful situations present themselves daily to both the companion and performance dog. Collars, handlers, confinement, sustained vigorous activity, or lack of exercise and activity can all cause problems in the spinal cord.

The following may cause subluxations:

- **Trauma:** Both macro trauma and repetitive micro trauma, i.e. falls, slips, missteps, “deck dog”, etc.
- **Conformation traits:** Creates a predisposition to subluxations, i.e. long backs.
- **Traveling:** Extended or multiple rides, poor suspension, auto accidents.
- **Birth:** Trauma during delivery causes initial misalignments in the soft and plastic spine of the newborn dog. Also developmental contractures may result from a poor position within the womb.
- **Confinement:** “Crate Dog”. Constant confinement decreases balance and coordination predisposing to “accidents”. Lack of mobility also results in weak and contracted muscles, tight joints and further loss of mobility.
- **Performance Type:** Each type of use (for example jumping, racing, agility, obedience, or conformation) can affect dogs in different ways, and each may predispose the dog to specific types or patterns of subluxations.
- **Handler Ability:** Lack of experience, knowledge, or ability in a handler may cause subluxations as the dog has to compensate for the handler’s unbalanced leash correction.
- **Equipment:** Poorly fitting collars and/or harnesses may cause problems in the spine.
- **Age:** As dogs age, the spine will accumulate multiple large and small injuries and compensations, while their bodies become less able to deal with injury or the late affects of injury.
- **Foot Care:** Lack of proper attention to toenails or overaggressive toenail trimming will create problems in the spine.

What are the symptoms of a subluxation?

Subluxations of the spinal column may produce many symptoms in the dog. The most common problem is pain. Dogs in pain will compensate in gait or posture and may resist or refuse to perform. Compensatory movements may cause other problems such as added stress to the joints.

The following is a list of symptoms that **may indicate pain from a subluxation:**

- Abnormal and varying posture when standing or sitting
- Discomfort when on lead or when being handled
- Evasions, such as extending head and neck, or hollowing back
- Dead tail or ear infections
- Refusal or resistance in performance, such as refusal or unwillingness over jumps, lateral or collected movements, reluctance or inability to initiate or maintain a sit/stay
- Development of unusual behavior patterns
- Facial expression of apprehension or pain
- Sensitivity to touch

Subluxations may cause **changes in muscle coordination and flexibility** that affect the performance ability of the dog. These symptoms may include:

- Lack of coordination in gaits
- Unusual, perhaps indefinable gait abnormalities which vary from limb to limb and change depending on the gait
- Difficulty flexing in the neck or head
- Decreased stride length or shortened stride in one or two limbs
- Stiffness when coming out of a crate
- Stiffness in lateral movements of neck or back
- Muscle atrophy
- Side winding or crabwalking
- Inability to lengthen topline or poorly developed topline
- Difficult to stack
- Crooked or bent tail
- Uneven pulling on leads
- Not using hind end in movement
- Not using back in movement (leg movers)
- Reluctance to jump in one direction

Subluxations **may cause problems in the nerves** that supply other cells such as those of the skin, glands, and blood vessels. Some of the symptoms that may result are:

- Unusual body or tail rubbing
- Increased sensitivity to heat or cold
- Coat changes, i.e. asymmetrical hair loss, "cowlicks" or dandruff, greasy or oily hair, "hot spots"
- Bad breath or body odor

Who do I go to for Chiropractic care?

Go to either a veterinarian or chiropractor with extended, post graduate education and certification in animal chiropractic. In Illinois a chiropractor may work on your dog by referral of your primary veterinarian.

The American Veterinary Chiropractic Association trains and certifies chiropractors and veterinarians in the art and science of animal chiropractic. They can be reached for a referral to a certified practitioner in your area by visiting:

www.animalchiropractic.org