

Peripheral Vestibular Disease in Dogs

Overview

If you spin around in circles as fast as you can and then attempt to walk in a straight line, you'll experience what your dog probably feels like if she's suffering with vestibular disease. There are two types of vestibular disease: **peripheral** and **central**. In this article, we will discuss the peripheral form, which, with treatment, generally carries a good prognosis and is much more common than central vestibular disease, which attacks the central nervous system and brain.

Dogs with peripheral vestibular disease have a breakdown in communication between the inner ear and the brain, causing dizziness. Though this disease can be debilitating for your furry friend, it is not life-threatening. Peripheral vestibular disease generally affects senior and geriatric dogs over 8 years of age. Its most common cause is inflammation of the nerves that connect the ear to the brain, most often caused by chronic or recurrent [ear infections](#). In some situations, vestibular disease can result from a lesion or infection in the brain, a stroke, or a head injury. In some older dogs, vestibular disease occurs suddenly, with no known underlying cause.

Symptoms

The most common symptom of vestibular disease is loss of balance. No, your pooch hasn't been hitting the bottle...but it may look as though she has! If the disease only affects one ear, your dog may walk with a tilt or in circles.

Other symptoms might include:

- Inability to stand
- Falling
- Repetitive eye movement (nystagmus)
- Stumbling
- Incoordination (ataxia)

Diagnose/Treatment

Once consulted, your veterinarian will perform a thorough physical exam, looking carefully at your pet's ears, and may recommend diagnostic tests to look for concurrent conditions and to rule out other disorders that mimic vestibular disease.

These tests could include:

- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function, as well as sugar levels
- A complete blood count (CBC) to rule out blood-related conditions
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your pet isn't dehydrated or suffering from an electrolyte imbalance
- Urine tests to screen for urinary tract infection and other disease, and to evaluate the ability of the kidneys to concentrate urine
- A thyroid test to determine if the thyroid gland is producing too little thyroid hormone
- A cortisol test to rule out Addison's disease
- Antibody/Antigen tests to rule out parasitic infections
- Ultrasound examination of the abdomen to rule out tumors

Treatment will depend on the discovery of any concurrent conditions or underlying causes, such as an ear infection. If no cause is detected, your veterinarian will suggest supportive care that you can provide for your dizzy pooch as she recovers. The good news: most cases resolve quickly, with dogs recovering within a few weeks.

Prevention

Keeping your pooch [free of infection and clean](#) will help to prevent vestibular disease caused by an inflammation of the nerves. Routine health care and physicals including diagnostic tests can identify—sooner rather than later—any underlying conditions that could possibly cause vestibular disease. Call your veterinarian immediately if your dog seems dizzy or “drunk”—vestibular disease can happen quickly and can be scary, for both you and your pet!

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.