

Neuropathy - What You Need To Know

By Sharon Duncan

A dog prone to IVDD is a dog that could suffer from neuropathy. Neuropathy is a nerve problem you need to be aware of as it can precede, accompany, or follow a disc episode. It can develop after surgery for a disc episode too.

Neuropathy is pain which presents when damage has occurred to the nervous system. The damage may be caused by many things but when IVDD is involved, it is caused by damage to the nerves due to trauma to the spinal cord from the ruptured intervertebral disc. This pain can come in the form of tingling, a pins-and-needles sensation, and even be a burning, searing electrical-like sensation which is extremely painful. Even paralyzed dogs can feel the pain of neuropathy. Many times, the pain can be so severe that the dog will self-mutilate themselves in an attempt to relieve the pain.

Initial signs of neuropathy can be excessive licking of a paw, leg, genital area, rear end, and the tail. Excessive licking can escalate to chewing and gnawing on the painful area and then self-mutilation which can be fatal.

If you even suspect your dog is starting to suffer from neuropathy, immediately put an e-collar (rolled up hand towel secured with duct tape will work) around the dog's neck and contact your vet. Gabapentin (Neurontin brand name) provides effective relief for many dogs; but, even as effective as gabapentin can be, it doesn't always provide relief and other options must be considered.

Here are two stories which detail some of the more severe effects of neuropathy. But they are both survivors. Meet Buster and Zoe!

Buster by Bonnie Petz



Buster is nine years old and his back problems started about two years ago. One day last year during April while he was having a disc episode, we came home from work to find that he had eaten about two inches of his tail completely off. Blood was everywhere. We took him to the vet who bandaged his tail and put an e-collar on Buster. He was able to reach what was left and eat more of his tail. There was about two inches left of his tail and the vet did an x-ray. As a result, the vet said he had a herniated disc and the only way to relieve the pain was to amputate the rest of the tail. Surgery was very expensive, but

we agreed to have it done. Unfortunately, Buster continues to have issues with his back.

ZOE by Heather Raskey

My name is Zoe and I'm a puppy mill, IVDD, and neuropathy survivor. I was paralyzed. Last year, one of my legs started giving me weird and painful tingles. After I started slowly chewing on my toes, my mommy took me to the vet. We were told it was probably a form of neuropathy and we tried acupuncture,



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treatments, physical therapy, gabapentin, and multiple pain medications. But, I was determined to chew most of my leg because it was the only way I knew how to fix it. It didn't hurt me physically to chew because I'm paralyzed; but the danger of infection was too great, so it was decided to amputate my leg. Mommy was told it is a rare disorder for dogs to chew off their own limbs, but to make sure to keep an eye on me in the future because the neuropathy and nerve regeneration can spread to the remaining limb.

I was happy and pain free until about a year later when my mommy was petting me and I started twitching my remaining leg. It was the first time I could feel my mom pet me in my whole life! It was a wonderful and happy moment for all of us! My superficial nerves had slowly regenerated, but the neuropathy also returned. A couple of weeks later, my mommy's fear turned into reality when she woke up to find I had chewed most of my foot off. Mommy rushed me to the vet, and they decided that the major nerve in my leg had miraculously regenerated. This would be great news but because of my severe chewing disorder, it was best to amputate my leg along with my tail as a precaution.

My neuropathy has been under control, and I have been living without my back legs and tail for 7 months. I am happy, healthy, and even fuller of life and love thanks to my vet specialists, friends, family, and fans! I'm now known as Zoe the Mer-Dog because who needs their back legs when I have a set of fins!. I am a fighter and an advocate for other dogs like me. I feel I am blessed to have a family to support me through hard times and medical bills; and because of that, I have learned a wealth of information about IVDD, neuropathy, and paralysis that I want to use to help inspire and teach others so they can live a wonderful life just as I have been able to!