

CADENCE-Toy Poodles & Ruptured Discs

The month of December propelled me into a world of information about disc disease I was not intending to learn about. I had always known that long-backed dogs were prone to back problems, however, it was new to me that this was not an uncommon problem in toy Poodles. Also, I was surprised that it would occur in a young dog that as far as I know, had not been injured. Apparently, the symptoms can occur suddenly and can vary from pain to paralysis.

In the case of Cadence, I noticed he was a little less his energizer, twirling, dervish self that day, but there was nothing obviously wrong. I had to run an errand to take some cat fecals to the vet for routine analysis, so I put him in his crate thinking I would confine him and keep an eye on him. I came back less than 2 hours later to find him completely paralyzed in the rear end. I immediately called my vet, who happened to answer the phone himself. He told me to bring Cadence right in, which I did. As soon as Dr. Greg Gallegos saw him, he told me that it was a good thing that I brought him to the clinic, because this was an emergency situation. Dr. Greg examined him and said that it was imperative to start treatment immediately and that surgery might be necessary. The good news was that Cadence still had deep muscle pain. He said he was taking him back and would worry about paperwork later, but he wanted to start him on medication right away.



I left Cadence feeling dazed, but, trusting my vet. Never having experience with a problem such as this, I was wondering if my little guy could/would recover or if ultimately euthanasia might be necessary.

Cadence has always been a healthy dog and is only 3 years old (apparently, 3-7 is the common age for this problem). He came to me through a friend of a friend from the animal shelter after his litter of 4 purebred toy Poodle puppies had been abandoned on someone's porch (at least that was the lady's story). They were sick and only about 4-weeks old. The shelter employees were sure the puppies would die in the shelter, so they fostered them at their own homes until they were well, and old enough to be adopted. I got Cadence when he was about 8-weeks old. Despite his beginning, until now, he has had zero health issues.

After 5 days of hospitalization, steroids, anti-inflammatory drugs, and pain medication, the deep muscle pain response seemed to be diminishing. Dr. Greg sent me 110 miles away to the neurosurgeon who explained that if surgery was to be successful, it must be done right away. He said that for every hour that passed, the probability of a successful outcome was diminishing exponentially. The specialty vet hospital asked for a large monetary deposit which I could not come up with. I explained that Cadence was covered by Pet Health Insurance through Trupanion. The treatment was already pre-approved. The hospital would not accept this. Just as I was about to give up and leave, thinking I would do the best I could for Cadence without surgery, while fearing that euthanasia might be likely, my phone rang. It was Trupanion saying they were going to overnight a deposit to the hospital so that he could have the surgery.

The surgery staff of the specialty hospital took Cadence to the back for a myelogram to confirm the diagnosis. If appropriate, surgery would be performed while still under anesthetic. No promises were made, but the vet explained that there was reasonable hope because Cadence still had some deep muscle pain. Cadence had spinal surgery that afternoon.

The signs of disk disease vary with severity and location in the spine. A mild rupture can cause slight pain, but severe ruptures can cause irreversible paralysis. Most cases fall somewhere in between.

Signs of disk disease include:

- • **trembling, whining, or crying out with certain neck or back movements**
- • **reluctance to move or turn the head**
- • **appetite loss**
- • **an arched back or a noticeable twist to the back**
- • **reluctance to jump up or climb stairs**
- • **an unstable walk**
- • **toes knuckling under or feet dragging**
- • **inability to use the legs.**

If you notice any of these signs, take your dog to the veterinarian immediately. The levels of spinal cord damage can progress quickly from pain to an unstable gait to loss of bowel and bladder control and paralysis. Prompt treatment often prevents further damage.

The daily reports from the attending vet were discouraging at first. No movement of any kind. It was hard anticipating the call from the attending vet daily and hoping for some sign of progress. Finally, on the fourth day, Cadence tried to wag his stumpy tail and, possibly, moved his right leg? (Reported by Dr. Trudeau) Encouraging news! The next day the vet asked me to come pick Cadence up to go home. I was instructed in the fine art of expressing his bladder because he couldn't go on his own yet. I never did get the hang of it, even with the YouTube videos I stayed up most of the night watching-. Fortunately, Cadence took over and emptied his bladder on his own when he came home. I was still insecure as to whether all was going well and that he was completely emptying his bladder. I worried I wasn't doing it right and that the worst would happen. I took Cadence to see Dr. Greg to make sure his bladder was empty and for his 1 week post-surgery check. Dr. Greg gave me another bladder expression lesson, which fortunately I did not need to use.

Cadence is now beginning the third week post surgery. At this writing, he is walking with a wobble, but walking— mostly- without turning his feet under and walking on top of his feet. Last night, he actually lifted his leg to pee on a rock. I was amazed. He continues to have his "happy, love everyone" attitude. In fact, when we went to see Dr. Greg, he almost jumped out of my arms hearing his voice outside the door.

Trupanion made the surgery financially possible. I had signed up for insurance so that I would not have to make decisions about my pets based on money. I was beginning to think that none of that mattered. But, Dr. Greg generously worked with me putting Cadence's care first and Trupanion came through to make the surgery possible. Recovery is a 12-week, process of crate confinement with a gradual progression of activity outside the crate. I am happy and relieved to report that it appears that Cadence is making a very speedy comeback. Here's hoping for full recovery.

Thank you to Dr. Greg and the Lancaster Pet Clinic for their care and dedication to the welfare of their patients. Thank you to Trupanion for going the extra mile for Cadence and I.

Laura Mitobe