

# Recovering from Neck Injuries



As a Chiropractor working in a Veterinary world, the top three reasons people bring their pets to see me are: **neck/back pain, hind end weakness/wobbliness, and limping/lameness** issues. One of the more common problems that I treat on my daily rounds to Veterinary clinics is “Cervical (Neck) Vertebral Instability.” In essence, the joints

in the lower neck become injured (sprained) and the spine unstable, which then sags down and puts ongoing pressure on the back of an increasingly inflamed spinal cord. Minimally, dogs can exhibit neck pain, spasms, or neck muscle rigidity, and reduced ranges of neck motion. In its most severe clinical expression I see gross neurologic involvement that ranges from minimal loss of control and coordination in the legs to frank paralysis, where a dog is unable to even get up off the floor. This condition consistently stymies most Vets and even the specialists diagnostically and that’s the reason you eventually found your way to me.

If you’ve received this handout your companion is suffering from this condition and it is imperative for you to understand what you can do to help and not hinder the healing process. In truth the usual Chiropractic style of treatments will not correct this problem and can actually make things worse. Fortunately many years ago I discovered serendipitously how this condition can be gently corrected. Unfortunately, this condition is so very susceptible to re-injury, at least early on in the treatment, that knowing what causes or exacerbates this condition is vital to your pet’s stable and complete recovery.

Interestingly, for the most part the obvious causative injury or physical insult is rarely the primary reason your dog ends up in this state. It’s a case of “an accident waiting to happen.” Owners bring their injured companions to me reporting that their dog ran head first into something, or another larger dog “blind-sided” their pet at the dog park, or their dog lunged at another dog or squirrel and came up violently short at the end of their lead. I have had many cases where these symptoms arose immediately following teeth cleaning or surgical procedures requiring anesthesia. I have even had cases where these symptoms arose after coming back from the groomers. However, few pet owners realize their part in making their companions increasingly susceptible to this very injury over time.

The plain fact is that greater than 60% of these cases, in my now 35 years working with animals, had long prior histories involving strenuous and regular “tug-of-war” games with their owners or canine cohorts prior to the provocative incident and the sudden onset of severe symptoms. Dogs will

frequently jerk violently and repeatedly on the tug as they endeavor to free the other end from their owner’s grasp. Owners will often contribute to the injurious activity by adding their own variations, like yanking the tug from side to side, up and down, or perhaps even holding their canine companion up off the ground to impress friends and neighbors. As great a time as your dog appears to be having during these playful bouts, you would never suspect that with each episode you are further damaging and weakening the soft tissue supporting elements and compromising the structural integrity of your pet’s lower cervical spine. So for everyone’s sake eliminate “tug-of-war” games entirely!

## Things to Avoid while Healing:

- Avoid any acute bending of you pet’s neck especially in extension (looking straight up). So, no sitting in the kitchen at your feet looking up, waiting for UFO’s, unidentified falling food objects. No extending the head back to push Pills down.
- No toys or chew bones where they hold one end with their paws and pull at the other end with their teeth. So, things like pulling the polyester stuffing out of fuzzy toys searching for the squeaker or pulling at rawhide chew bones is not allowed.
- Avoid holding your pet’s head or neck while they strain to pull away or move their head against your restraint. This could include restraint to trim nails, clean ears, or pill them.
- No trips to the groomers until their neck is more stable.
- No roughhousing or play fighting with other pets.
- Don’t go to dog parks. Impacts and injuries are common.
- Don’t let them go through doggy doors. Hitting the doggy door with their nose and pushing through multiple times per day takes its toll on this condition.
- No fence fighting, squirrel or cat chasing.
- Avoid neck collars altogether, use a harness. This especially if they are the type to pull you around the block by their neck or lunge at other animals.
- No playing fetch, No ball pushing (soccer ball etc) .
- No digging or burying motions with their muzzles.
- No burrowing under covers or blankets. Pushing their way under blankets with their head puts undue strain on the neck.
- Never leave a heavy choke chain on your dog on a continuous basis. This puts undue downward stress on the spine.
- No hard patting or firm petting on top of their head.
- No crating pets in crates where they have to hold head lower than natural while standing or they can’t turn around easily.
- Avoid procedures requiring anesthesia if possible. If you can’t, please ask your Vet to have someone support your pet’s head and neck while unconscious. This is especially important when moving them while unconscious to prevent their head and neck from flopping and hanging down like “al dente” spaghetti as they are lifted and carried.
- Don’t let them lay flat on their chest with their head flat on the floor or flat dog bed. Get a bed with a bolster (like a donut bed) so that they hang their head on or over it to relieve the neck strain and stress.
- No Vet exams where they “crank” the neck to the extremes.