

What Is Degenerative Myelopathy in Dogs?

Degenerative Myelopathy (DM) is a slow onset, non-painful destruction of the nerve conduction portion of the spinal cord, called axons and myelin. Axons are the nerve fibers that extend from the nerve cell and myelin is the coating around the nerve fiber that allows for conduction of nerve signals. Both the thoracic (upper and middle back) and lumbar (lower back) parts of the spinal cord are affected.

As the disease progresses, a dog will develop weakness and an abnormal gait in the hind limbs. Usually, the condition is worse on one side of the spinal cord than the other, so clinical signs may be worse on one side of the body compared to the other side. With time, the disease causes paralysis of the hind limbs. The entire spinal cord can eventually become affected—causing forelimb paralysis and problems with breathing, vocalizing, and eating.

Typically, about one year after the first symptoms are seen, a dog is unable to walk on their hind limbs.

Which breeds are predisposed to Degenerative Myelopathy?

The [German Shepherd](#) is the most common breed affected by DM, but it can also be seen in other large breed dogs, such as:

- [Labrador Retrievers](#)
- [Boxers](#)
- [Bernese Mountain Dogs](#)
- [Chesapeake Bay Retrievers](#)
- [Rhodesian Ridgebacks](#)
- [Siberian Huskies](#)

Degenerative myelopathy can also be seen in some smaller breeds, such as the [Pembroke Welsh Corgi](#), [Cavalier King Charles Spaniel](#), [Pug](#), and [Miniature Poodle](#). Affected dogs are most commonly middle-aged or older.