



# IVDD Emergency Action Card

PETSLIKEMINE  
INTERVERTEBRAL DISC DISEASE

The red flags that mean go now, and exactly what to do

YOUR VET _____	VET PHONE _____	OUT-OF-HOURS / EMERGENCY _____	REFERRAL / NEUROLOGY _____
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When a disc goes, minutes can matter. Fill in the phone numbers now, while everything is calm, and keep this somewhere you will find it fast. If you are mid-crisis, make the call first and read the rest while you get ready to go.

## RING NOW IF YOU SEE ANY OF THESE

- Sudden inability to walk, or back legs that have given way
- Dragging or knuckling the back paws, walking on the tops of them
- Crying out or screaming in pain
- Suddenly unable to wee
- Wobbliness that is getting worse in front of you
- A rigid, hunched back, or the head held low and stiff with a painful neck

## WHY SPEED MATTERS

A herniated disc presses on the spinal cord, and the longer that pressure lasts, the more the nerves can be hurt. For a dog still walking or only wobbly this is urgent but not a race by the hour. For a paralysed dog that has lost deep pain, time genuinely changes the odds, which is why "wait and see" can be the wrong instinct. There is no magic deadline, so do not despair over the clock, but do not wait either: get your dog seen urgently.

## WHAT TO DO IN THE NEXT FEW MINUTES

- 1 Confine your dog now.** No stairs, no jumping, no getting on or off the sofa. A small, safe space stops more disc material pushing against the cord.
- 2 Support the spine when you lift.** Keep the back level, two hands under the body, or a towel under the belly as a sling. Do not let the spine bend, twist or sag.
- 3 Phone ahead.** Say clearly, "I think this is a spinal emergency." Ask whether to come straight in or go to a referral or neurology centre, which may have the MRI and surgeon a severely affected dog needs.
- 4 Note the time the signs started.** Write down when you first noticed it and how it has changed since. That timeline genuinely helps your vet judge the urgency.

## THE RULE THAT NEVER BENDS: NO HUMAN PAINKILLERS

*Never give ibuprofen, paracetamol or any human painkiller. Even one tablet can ulcerate the stomach, damage the kidneys or harm the liver of a dog, and small breeds are especially vulnerable. Give nothing by mouth and let the vet provide pain relief that is safe.*

Written and reviewed by Dr Alastair Greenway MRCVS and Claire Greenway BVM&S MRCVS. This sheet explains and records. It does not diagnose or prescribe. Always follow your own vet's instructions.

**How to use.** Fill in the phone numbers before you ever need them. If you see any red flag, ring straight away and say you think it is a spinal emergency.

**PIN THIS UP BEFORE YOU EVER NEED IT**



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Deep pain, the milder signs, and the neck variant

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## THE DEEP-PAIN TEST, AND WHY YOUR VET DOES THE ONE THAT COUNTS

You may read about checking for deep pain. It is a conscious response to a firm pinch of a toe: the dog turns its head, cries out, or looks round at you, showing the feeling has reached the brain. It is not the reflex where the leg simply pulls back on its own, which can happen through the spinal cord alone and give false reassurance even when deep pain has been lost.

### THE RULE FOR HOME

*If your dog cannot walk and you cannot clearly tell whether deep pain is there, assume the worst and go now. Do not spend time at home pinching toes and second-guessing. Let the vet make the assessment that matters.*

## NOT AN EMERGENCY, BUT SEE A VET SOON

These milder signs mean book a prompt appointment and start strict rest, rather than rush to the emergency service. But watch closely, because IVDD can progress.

- A mild reluctance to jump up or use the stairs
- The occasional yelp
- A stable, mild stiffness that is not getting worse
- Pain alone, without weakness (still a real sign: rest it, do not push through)

### WHEN MILD TIPS INTO EMERGENCY

*If mild signs start getting worse, especially if your dog becomes wobbly, weak or unable to walk, it has tipped into the emergency category. Act on the red flags overleaf.*

## THE NECK VARIANT

IVDD can affect the neck as well as the back, and it looks a little different. Neck disease is usually dominated by pain, often severe, with the head held low and stiff and a strong reluctance to lift or turn it, sometimes with wobbliness in all four legs rather than just the back ones. It is urgent too: treat severe neck pain, or wobbliness in all four limbs, as something that needs prompt veterinary attention.

### YOUR NEXT STEP

Still unsure how worried to be? The triage and grade checker at [petslikemine.co.uk/tools/ivdd-check](https://petslikemine.co.uk/tools/ivdd-check) walks you through your dog's signs and gives a clear read on the urgency and what to do next.

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**How to use.** Trust your instinct. If something feels badly wrong with your dog, it is a vet trip, and you will never regret acting quickly on this one.

**WHEN IN DOUBT, TREAT IT AS AN EMERGENCY**