

Vestibular Disease

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SUMMARY:

- 1) If your pet has idiopathic vestibular disease it should resolve on its own within three weeks, with initial improvement seen within the first three days. If signs are not resolving in this time frame or are getting worse, contact your veterinarian to discuss further testing.
- 2) Vestibular disease may cause nausea. If your pet is vomiting, or refuses to eat or drink, your veterinarian may recommend anti-nausea medication.
- 3) Some pets will need help getting up/down or walking. Do not let them near obstacles like staircases unsupervised.

EXPLANATION:

The vestibular system is the part of your body that controls balance. When you are having a problem in your vestibular system you become dizzy. This dizziness can lead to a head tilt, rapid eye movements, problems standing up and nausea.

The vestibular system is located in two places in your pet's body: the inner ear and brain. A problem in either place can lead to similar symptoms, especially early on.

SYMPTOMS OF VESTIBULAR DISEASE:

- Head tilt
- Circling
- Leaning, falling or rolling
- Abnormal eye position called strabismus
- Ticking movements of the eyes called nystagmus

CONDITIONS THAT CAUSE VESTIBULAR DISEASE:

1. Idiopathic Vestibular Disease: This is common in older dogs, and is seen occasionally in any age of cat. Signs from this condition come on suddenly, and will go away without treatment over the course of 2 to 3 weeks. If your pet is not getting better, or is continuing to get worse after the first day, they may not have Idiopathic Vestibular Disease and will need further diagnostics and care.
2. Ear Infections: Deep ear infections are a very common cause of these symptoms. Your veterinarian will perform an ear exam. Often this can be performed awake, but in some animals, particularly those with chronic ear problems, it can be hard to get a thorough exam without sedation. Some pets may require advanced imaging such as a CT scan or MRI to diagnose this condition.

Treatment of ear infections involves medication to treat the infection, which can be oral or placed in the ear directly or both. It can take one to two months to properly treat a deep infection medically. Unfortunately, some animals cannot be cured medically, and surgical procedures may be necessary.

Additionally many animals have another condition, like a food allergy or chronic upper respiratory condition, which caused the ear infection. This condition may also require treatment.



3. Other Ear Problems: Other ear conditions, like ear tumors, toxins placed in the ear or trauma to the base of the ear can lead to these symptoms. Diagnosing these condition can require ear exams and advanced imaging (CT or MRI).
4. Strokes: A stroke is a sudden loss of blood flow to part of the brain. This can cause dramatic symptoms that come on very suddenly, however pets will often get better with time and support. Many pet's who have a stroke have an underlying condition, such as high blood pressure or protein loss elsewhere in the body. Pet's with an underlying condition need treatment for this condition, like blood pressure medicine, to have the best long term result. Your veterinarian may recommend testing of blood, urine and blood pressure to look for these conditions. Full diagnosis of a stroke may require other testing, like a MRI.
5. Other Brain Problems: Other brain problems like brain tumors, infections and autoimmune disease can also cause these symptoms. These are generally more serious, and will require bigger diagnostic test, like an MRI or spinal tap, to diagnose. Some of these conditions are very treatable, while others may be more difficult to treat.

PRACTICAL CARE TIPS

1. Make sure to keep your pet off the furniture and away from stairs until they are more steady. You don't want them to fall and hurt themselves. If your pet is very affected, then they may need to be closed in a small bathroom or crate for their own protection.
2. Often pets with vestibular symptoms will feel better if they can be propped up. Old towels and pillows can be very helpful.
3. If your pet cannot walk, it maybe helpful to use a harness or sling to help them. Your veterinarian may have something available, or you can purchase an adjustable whole body harness on the internet such as the ones available at www.helpemup.com.

