Wobbler Syndrome: Cervical Vertebral Instability & Spondylomyelopathy  
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Wobbler syndrome is caused by a malformation of the vertebrae within the neck. The spinal canal is the tunnel within the vertebrae in which the spinal cord lies. In affected dogs, this opening is smaller than normal, causing pressure on the spinal cord. This prevents neural impulses from passing through the spinal cord. Additionally, as the animal matures, the space within the vertebrae continues to shrink in relation to the size of the spinal cord. Instability between the individual neck vertebrae is generally noted in addition to the narrowing of the spinal canal. While any breed can be affected, over 80 percent of all cases reported are in Great Danes and Doberman Pinschers. Genetics definitely play a role.

What are the symptoms?

Usually symptoms appear before four years of age, and on average, earlier in Great Danes than in Dobermans. An unwillingness to bend the neck is usually the first sign, followed by weakness and lack of coordination in the rear limbs, progressing to weakness in the front limbs as well.

What are the risks?

This condition is always serious and can progress to complete paralysis. A veterinary examination should be performed at once in animals of these breeds showing the above signs.

What is the management?

Anti-inflammatory medications can provide relief, but they do not correct the abnormal spinal canal within the vertebrae. Surgery can be performed to stabilize the vertebrae and/or to remove a portion of the vertebrae, thus allowing more room for the spinal cord. A full recovery is not always achieved.