Vestibular Disease

Overview

The vestibular system is primarily responsible for alerting the brain if the body is standing, sitting, lying down, falling, spinning in circles, and keeps the body balanced. The vestibular system is comprised of nerves that start in the brain and continue to the inner ear. The sensors in the inner ear are responsible for informing the brain about any movement. Vestibular disease affects the ability of the brain to recognize abnormal body positions and correct these abnormalities.

Disorders of the vestibular system are divided into central vestibular disease and peripheral vestibular disease. Central vestibular disease occurs due to an abnormality within the brain. Peripheral vestibular disease occurs due to an abnormality within the nerves of the inner ear. Most cases of vestibular disease are peripheral and no known cause is determined. These are referred to as idiopathic.

Vestibular disease typically affects older dogs with an average age of 12 to 13 years.

Diagnosis and Treatment Notes:

- Vestibular disease is generally diagnosed by physical examination with a thorough ear exam and neurologic exam. Blood work is often recommended. Skull X-rays, MRI or CT scan of the brain may be beneficial.

- Treatment depends on the severity of the disease, they underlying cause, your individual pet, and your veterinarian. Many dogs with peripheral vestibular disease recover without medication. Dogs with nausea and dizziness may benefit from motion sickness medication such as meclizine. Dogs with a central lesion require treatment for the specific disease. Discuss treatment details when your pet is diagnosed with this condition.

ADAMS MORGAN Animal Hospital

What to Watch for*:

- Falling
- Incoordination
- Head tilt
- Circling
- Rolling
- Eyes continually drifting side to side or up and down
- Stumbling or drunken walking

**Please notify us if you notice any of the above signs or if you have any questions!*