

Vestibular Disease

What on Earth is the Vestibular Apparatus?

In a nutshell, the vestibular apparatus is the neurological equipment responsible for perceiving your body's orientation relative to the earth (determining if you are upside-down, standing up straight, falling etc.) and informing your eyes and extremities how they should move accordingly.

The vestibular apparatus allows us to walk and even run on uneven ground without falling, helps us know when we need to right ourselves, and allows our eyes to follow moving objects without becoming dizzy.

The Signs of Vestibular Disease

If there is trouble in the vestibular apparatus, then you may not properly perceive your orientation. To put it more simply, you won't know which way is up, whether or not you are standing up straight or slanted, and you will feel dizzy.

The following are signs of vestibular disease:

- Ataxia (lack of coordination without weakness or involuntary spasms - in other words, stumbling and staggering around)
- Nystagmus (back and forth or rotational eye movements. The movements will be slower in one direction. This is the side where the neurologic lesion is likely to be; however, nystagmus is named according to the direction of the fast component i.e. there may be left nystagmus but the lesion is probably on the right side of the vestibular apparatus.)
- Circling
- Head tilt (usually toward the side of the lesion)
- Falling to one side (usually toward the side of the lesion)
- Nausea

Causes of Vestibular Disease

Canine idiopathic vestibular disease, also called old dog vestibular disease, begin acutely and resolve acutely. Usually improvement is evident in 72 hours and the animal is normal in 7 to 14 days, possibly with an occasional head tilt persisting. We do know that they represent problems in the periphery, the nerves of the middle ear rather than in the actual brain.

Treatment of Vestibular Disease

There is no specific treatment. Keeping your dog from falling down stairs and treating nausea with Meclizine 25 mg twice daily for a large dog.