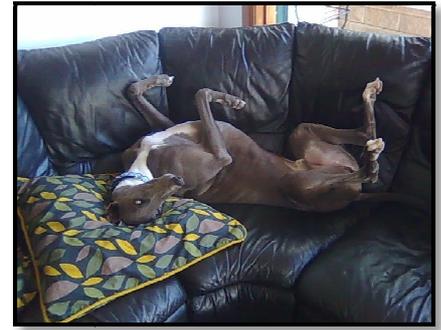


# Oh My Aching Back!

By Dr Janette O'Keefe BScBVMS

Greyhounds from middle to old age can have pain along their lower back, loss of muscle tone to the hind legs, and weakness or loss of neurologic function to the hind legs. The owners' may describe this as an unwillingness to go up or down stairs, get up on the couch, or jump into the car. In the more serious but less common signs, wobbly hind legs, occasional stumbles and falls, particularly with the rear end going down, or scuffing and toe dragging of the hind feet are other expression of spondylitis.



As a breed greyhounds' tend to not suffer from arthritic conditions of the hips which other large breed dogs are prone, but they do appear to have a higher than average incidence of spondylosis deformans, or arthritis of the spine. Though in the main the retired greyhound can and does live without any of the worse aspects of clinical symptoms – often discomfort free. Unfortunately the subtle nature of back discomfort can be mistaken for reluctance or the absence of what is considered normal behaviour of the domestic dog.

In this condition, bony spurs called osteophytes form around the ends of vertebral segments, as if trying to bridge the disc space. This occurs particularly in the lumbar vertebrae (the lower back, behind the ribs). This is due primarily to two factors.

1. The segments of the spine associated with the ribs are supported by a connective tissue band that runs from the top of the rib on one side of the body to the top of the same rib on the other side with bony changes as a response to the forces on this tissue experienced during running.
2. The lower back of Greyhounds is subject to flexion and extension during racing, as the back arches and flexes to extend the length of the stride.

Therefore the retired greyhound owner should consider having the greyhound evaluated for back and spinal soreness if there are any concerns that some of the symptoms or change in behaviour occur. Just like arthritis in humans as we age there are no cures but the greyhound's discomfort can be managed. Firstly this needs to be evaluated and this can be determined:

1. Initially by a simple test of gently applying some pressure with the tip of finger and thumb either side of the spine – starting from base of the neck moving systematically towards the pelvis. This will give an indication of some discomfort as the greyhound moves away as a result of the pressure. This is not an indicative test but one that can be used as a guide if there is some concern.
2. Definitively you will need to have the greyhound assessed by a veterinarian in order to establish firstly that there is a condition and secondly a treatment/pain management plan to minimise discomfort.

The treatments for pain management can be varied and should be done in conjunction with your veterinarian. Also it should be noted that veterinarians will offer treatment ranging from conventional pain management to various forms of complementary options. In my experience an integrated approach achieves the best result while minimising the level of conventional medications. These options I have found that have the best response are:

1. Acupuncture – this is more commonly being adopted by mainstream veterinarians.
2. Massage – the gentler forms of Tua Nua, Bowen and CST (spinal pulsing).
3. Manipulation and chiropractic – commonly used effectively on racing greyhounds.
4. Physiotherapy – becoming more common as a treatment approach with veterinary physiotherapists in larger practices.
5. Nutritional supportive therapy – the use of supplements such as Glucosamine HCL (1000-1500mg daily), Omega 3 oils (fish oil 1000 daily) and magnesium oil.
6. Other therapies such as *Laser point, magnets and magnetic field therapy* and lesser known *gold beads*.



As with all advice ask questions, keep an open mind and realise that it should always be taken on a case by case basis. There is no generic approach or treatment that best deals with every greyhound but it is vital that the greyhound be evaluated by a veterinarian to rule out the more serious form of spondylitis. The majority of cases will fortunately be only mild and can be managed by minimal treatment or if any. The important fact is to know if there is any physical reason the greyhound may be reluctant to jump in the car and if so the early you start managing the condition the better the long-term outcome for both the greyhound and their family.