

Spondylosis in Bracco Italiano

Spondylosis deformans, vertebral bridging, has been diagnosed in three bracco italianos less than three years of age in Finland.

What is spondylosis?

Spondylosis deformans is a degenerative condition of the spine: bone proliferation occurs between vertebrae, which, in later stages, may cause bridging and consequent immobilisation of the spine. In the end, the entire spine may be bridged. Mild spondylosis often goes unnoticed, but severe spondylosis may negatively affect the dog's life.

There is no unambiguous answer for what causes spondylosis. It can be caused, for example, by excessive stress on ligaments between the vertebrae, structural over-mobility of the vertebrae, injury or developmental disorder. Genetics are also considered to play a role in the development of spondylosis. Spondylosis is common in, for example, the boxer, in which the condition is considered hereditary, although the mode of inheritance is not known. In addition to the boxer, spondylosis has been found in, among others, the golden and flat-coated retriever, leonberger, doberman, giant schnauzer and Irish setter.

Symptoms

The symptoms of spondylosis deformans are diverse and vary between individuals: the dog may have a stiff gait, it may be unwilling to move or stretch or it may stumble. When palpated, it may be careful of its spine, often in the lumbar region, or it may have inexplicable muscle pains. When the spine stiffens or the dog no longer carries weight equally on all four legs, the extended trot typical to bracco italiano may disappear and the trot becomes short and stiff. The owners of dogs suffering from spondylosis often say that their dog either walks or starts walking dragging its legs as if it was stretching. If bone proliferation causes pressure on the nerves, spondylosis may cause incontinence and symptoms of paralysis. Spondylosis may prevent or hamper using the dog for hunting, but it may also have no noticeable signs. Spondylosis usually occurs in older dogs. Spondylosis cannot be cured but the symptoms can be alleviated.

Actions

According to the information received from the breed clubs and breeders of bracco italiano, spondylosis has not been diagnosed in Italy, Sweden or the Netherlands. It is, however, possible, that all cases have not been reported to the breed clubs. In the boxer, in which spondylosis is a relatively common genetic problem, it is recommended not to breed two dogs with spondylosis or at least to avoid mating two dogs with moderate changes in the spine.

Spondylosis is diagnosed on the basis of x-ray examination. However, it must be borne in mind that spondylosis is a degenerative condition, whose changes may not be noticeable in case of very young dogs and that special expertise is required from the veterinarian to diagnose the condition from x-rays. The Finnish bracco italiano owners are kindly requested to report possible x-ray results to the breeding advisor or the bracco italiano contact person of the Finnish Continental Pointing Dog Club. The owners are also requested to report regularly other health-related data on their dogs. The data will be deemed confidential and saved in the database of the Finnish Continental Pointing Dog Club for follow-up and breeding purposes.

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