

BASIC INFORMATION

Description

The sacroiliac (SI) joint is the connection between the pelvis and the sacrum of the lower spine. SI joints are present on both sides of the pelvis, and they have very limited motion. Luxation means that the joint is dislocated and the pelvis is no longer connected to the sacrum on the affected side. Many SI luxations are accompanied by fractures of the pelvis, often through the floor of the pelvis.

Causes

Major trauma, such as being hit by a car, can result in dislocation of the SI joint. One or both joints may be dislocated, and any animal can be affected.

Clinical Signs

Significant lameness and other signs of trauma are usually present. The pelvis is often malaligned and painful when felt (palpated). If both sides are affected or additional spinal trauma has occurred, the animal may be unable to walk. Adjacent vertebral fractures may cause paralysis of the tail and loss of bladder and anal function.

Diagnostic Tests

X-rays of the pelvis are needed to confirm the diagnosis and to help identify fractures or other injuries. Nerve damage can occur in conjunction with the luxation, and nerve function must also be carefully evaluated. Laboratory tests, x-rays of the abdomen and chest, an electrocardiogram (to identify abnormal heart rhythms), and an ultrasound of the abdomen may be recommended to identify and assess other injuries.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

Medical therapy is usually indicated if only one side is dislocated, there is minimal malalignment of the pelvis, and the remainder of the pelvis is intact (with no other fractures or dislocations). SI luxations treated medically heal by the formation of scar tissue, which can take a long time. Medical therapy consists of cage confinement, vigilant nursing care, physical rehabilitation exercises, and pain-relief medications for at least 3 weeks. The animal is then allowed restricted, controlled activity for another 4 weeks, until healing is complete. Full return to function may take as long as 3 months.

Surgical stabilization of the SI luxation may be done with a screw or other techniques. Surgery may be required if both SI joints are dislocated, the joint separation is wide, the pelvis is fractured and the pelvic canal is narrowed, or other pelvic injuries are present. Surgical intervention usually results in quicker healing and a faster return to normal activity.

Follow-up Care

Periodic follow-up visits are usually scheduled to monitor the animal's progress. If surgery is performed, x-rays are taken every 4-6 weeks to assess healing. Other tests may be repeated to monitor other injuries associated with the SI luxation.

Prognosis

Prognosis for return to normal function is generally excellent for luxations that are not complicated by spinal trauma or nerve damage. Prognosis can be guarded if the SI joint luxation is accompanied by neurologic abnormalities, severe trauma to the abdominal organs, or multiple fractures of the pelvis.