



Canine Neck Pain

When dealing with a dog with neck pain there are many factors to consider. The dogs' neck is an integral part of your dogs' ability to move. It's easy to think that because your dog is not standing on its neck that it doesn't have a role in movement. This is not the case, the dog uses the neck in every step, it has muscle attachments that aid in locomotion, it has core attachments that aid in balance and stability, and it has leverage that is used throughout the top line. The neck is where the majority of the lateral mobility is within the dogs' spine and where the bend and flexion is often initiated. The neck also plays a huge role in overall balance of the dog.

Your dogs' neck posture needs to be evaluated to ensure balance within your dog. We often see the neck compensating for back and hip pain or weakness. This compensation is often, but not limited to, a mirror image of what the dog has going on in the hind end. The body can also use the neck as a lever as it assumes this postural shape to help rock the weight forward off the weak leg or compensate for back or hip pain. Straightness then becomes our focus to ensure that the weakness in the hind end doesn't continue to affect the front end. This creates a lot of soreness in the musculature of the neck.

Neck problems needs to be dealt with carefully and holistically, it is easy for handlers to think a stiff neck needs to be pulled into submission, but we have to remember that the neck is often a mirror of an already weak back can be strained.

Tips for working with neck pain:

- Have your dogs teeth checked.
- Check collar, harness, and anything else that is placed on or around the neck.
- Application of heat (can be used before and after work). Use 12-18 min of heat.
- Therapy products that increase circulation.
- Light to moderate massage using your hand or if the dog allows it a massage mitt to increase circulation and stimulate nerves.
- Use the neck rock technique to warm the tissue and mobilize the joints before work.

Exercises:

Ensure your dog has an adequate warm up and cool down. Muscles need that circulation from warm up to function at their best. Encourage the neck to move during this time and work through full range of motion.

Inhand work:

- Poles
- Cavaletti
- Turn on forehand
- Labyrinth
- Hill work, up hills, down hills, and transverse (across) hills
- Backing: both straight line and circles
- Zig Zag laterals

- Figure 8 or small diameter serpentine
- Flexion work; True flexion, Counter flexion, Serpentine, Spirals, Figure 8's
- Lateral work; leg yield, Shoulder in and out, shoulder yield, half pass, side pass.
- Transitions; both up and down as well as within the gate. Transitions in a straight line and on a circle.
- Backing; in a straight line and on a circle

Range of motion exercises:

Performed before and after work, as well as safe for the dog that has been taken out of work altogether.

- Neck/Rib rock
- Neck Rib Push Push
- Poll nod
- Wither rock
- Sternal wither rock

Stretches:

- Cookie Stretches
- Clock Stretch
- Neck/Rib Rock
- Wither Rock
- Wither Sternal Rock
- Poll Nod
- Foreleg Sternal Lift
- Neck Rib Push Push

Do you need to get on the fast track to getting your dogs' fitness InHand?

I know how busy life can be, and I know we all want to do the best we can for our dog. If you don't have the time to do the complete program listed above with your dog, it's better to do a little work rather than skip it all. Choose one exercise a day from the exercises, range of motion and stretch list above. Even if you rotate through the above list of work on a daily basis, you will be making a positive change and helping your animal. Choose to do something every day, no matter how small will be a step forward in your dogs' wellness program. When we work our dog in the peak and valley type of program with a ton of work for a few days and then nothing for a time, we may actually be doing more harm than good.

Steady work towards your dogs' postural goals will bring the results you want, and the more time you can devote the quicker you will get there, however slow and steady will win the race as well.

****NOTE: Therapy is not a replacement for Veterinary Care.****

