

## NEUROLOGICAL

**Degenerative Myelitis** is a disease that occurs towards the end of the GSD life. This is a devastating condition that gradually whittles away the mobility and effectiveness of the entire hindquarter. Unfortunately it occurs usually after the age of breeding, usually 8-9 years and older, a few as early as 5-6 years. The number of physically affected older dogs that are seen would be in the order of around 5% (maximum) of older GSD's.

This is a slowly progressing degeneration of the myelin sheath around the nerves of the middle of the back, slowing down the transmission of messages which results in increasingly severe effects on the mobility and manoeuvrability of the hindquarters, with the messages getting slower and slower.

The degeneration in these dogs always only affects the hindquarters. The dogs follow a course of always step wise degeneration, plateauing out for a while before gradually getting worse again. The course of the disease generally takes 12-18 months, from the time symptoms are recognised, some dogs may last up to 2 years before the hindquarters no longer support them in any significant degree. This condition would affect around 5-8% of older German Shepherd Dogs.

The only good part of this disease is that it is not painful to the dog. The disease course runs some 12-18 months with affected dogs being euthanised due to inability to stand etc.

This disease has been found in many breeds, over 115 breeds at last count (and in mixed breeds). The DNA test has been available only over the last 4-6 years. This disease is inherited as a simple recessive condition but it is complicated by a late onset which can vary from as early 5-6 years to very late, to the point the dog may die from other conditions, without exhibiting any obvious signs. It appears that there may be additional triggering factors that then cause the disease to manifest as the dog ages. There is considerable research ongoing in this area than may hopefully clarify the situation.

As a result, DNA affected dogs DM are being called "**at risk**" rather than affected, as only 1 in 2-3 will physically become affected prior to their death.

**Epilepsy** - Exact mode of inheritance not fully understood. Age first seen - 5-6 months to 5 years; average 6 months to 3 years. These dogs need a life time of medications. Not all dogs stabilize well.

**Tail Chasing** - This has been linked with both behavioural abnormalities and with epilepsy. It is unknown if it is an inherited condition, however as these dogs are treated with the same drugs as the epileptics. Unfortunately some of these dogs may need their tails partially or fully amputated due to damage, however, it still doesn't stop the dogs tail chasing a phantom tail.

\*As a general comment, I have found both epileptics and tail chasers to be very "hyper" (or over the top) dogs.

**Gun/Noise Sensitivity** - This is considered an inherited trait in many breeds, and the dogs that are affected often get worse with age with increasingly severe reactions to thunder storms, fireworks etc.

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