

Syringohydromyelia

Also known as Syringomyelia, chiari-like malformation, caudal occipital malformation

What is Syringohydromyelia?

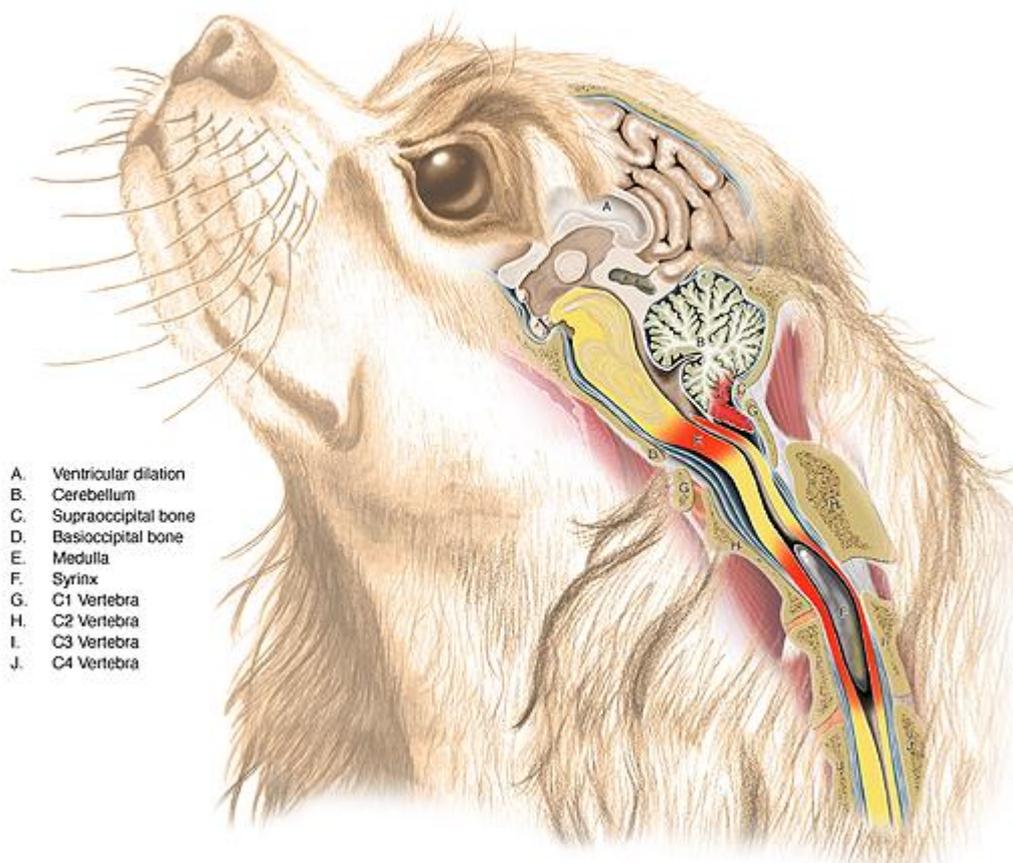
Syringohydromyelia is a condition commonly seen in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, but it can affect other breeds of dog too. It affects the spinal cord in the neck and is caused by the abnormal shape of the skull in seen in Cavaliers. If we break down the word 'Syringohydromyelia' it actually tells you exactly what the condition is....

'Syringo' or syrinx – meaning a cavity inside the spinal cord

'hydro' – meaning full of fluid

'myelia' – meaning any sort of problem with nerve tissue or spinal cord

The shape of the back of the skull in Cavaliers puts too much pressure on the back of the brain and it tends to be squashed out of the hole at the base of the skull where the spinal cord joins the brain. The pressure build up leads to an abnormal flow of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF: the normal fluid the surrounds the brain and spinal cord) from the brain to the spinal cord.



What are the symptoms of Syringohydromyelia?

Most dogs with syringohydromyelia experience neck pain, but this can manifest in a variety of different ways.

- Twisting head/neck to the side
- Overly sensitive if touched on the neck
- Scratching neck/shoulder/ears
- 'Air scratching' to the side of the neck/shoulders
- Stiff or lame on front legs
- Yelping for no apparent reason

Some dogs seem more affected when excited, or at particular times of the day. Some dogs are very minimally affected and may not even show any symptoms, whilst other dogs are at the other end of the spectrum and can be very severely affected. Dogs tend to start to show symptoms between 6 months and 2 years of age, but it can affect dogs of any age.

How is Syringohydromyelia diagnosed?

Often the breed of dog and symptoms are so characteristic of this condition, we'd have a good idea the dog is affected just by examining them. However, the only way to confirm a diagnosis is by MRI scan, there are other diseases that can have similar sorts of symptoms. MRI is a specialist procedure and would require referral to a specialist neurologists.

Can Syringohydromyelia be treated?

It can be treated either with medication or surgery, there is no one single treatment that's right for all dogs. In humans with the equivalent disease (called Chiari malformation in humans) the treatment is surgery to enlarge the hole at the base of the skull, relieving pressure. For dogs this is advanced surgery performed by specialist neurologist. Performing surgery early can potentially prevent or slow a syrinx forming. Most dogs are managed with medication rather than surgery. We commonly give Gabapentin, a medication that relieves pain of a neurological origin. Sometimes we prescribe medication to try to reduce the amount of CSF produced to relieve some of the pressure on the spinal cord. Some dogs are fine just with pain relief such as Metacam (a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory).

What's the prognosis for Syringohydromyelia?

The prognosis varies a lot between different dogs, but this is a progressive disease and tends to get slightly worse as time goes on. However the progression tends to be very slow, so many dogs appear relatively stable for their whole lives.

If you have any other queries regarding Syringohydromyelia please just contact us and we will do our best to help you **01527 831 616**