

Robinson Veterinary Services

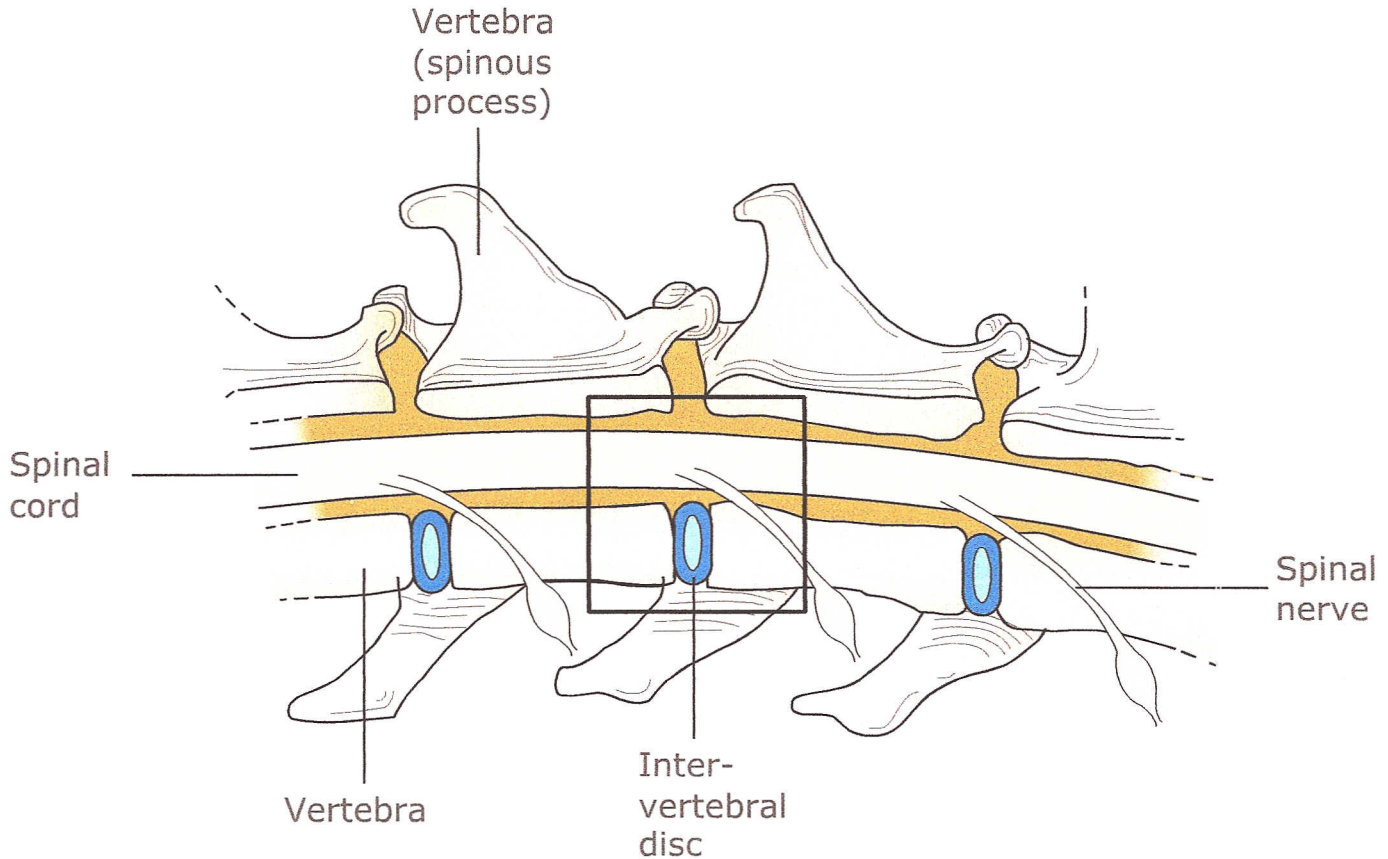
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Spine Anatomy: Segment of vertebral column showing effect of ruptured disc.



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The bony spine protects the spinal cord and nerves. The bony spine is made up of many vertebrae with intervertebral discs between each vertebral bone. This allows the spinal cord to be well protected while still allowing a good range of motion in the backbone. A normal intervertebral disc acts like a flexible cushion between the bones. A degenerated disc is weak and if pressure is placed on it, it will rupture or prolapse instead of flexing (see Diagram "Intervertebral Disc Anatomy"). The central core of the disc usually goes upward and "pinches" or presses against the spinal cord or nerves. Pressure on the spinal nerves causes severe pain, while pressure on the spinal cord causes pain and/or paralysis. Disc ruptures occur in either the neck or in the middle to lower back. The disc may "pop" suddenly, in which case it usually causes rapid paralysis. If the disc prolapses over several days to weeks, the dog will be reluctant to move and will usually show signs of pain. Further information about Intervertebral Disc Disease and its treatment can be found in our Client Education Handout Series.