



## HIP DYSPLASIA

Has Rover been limping around your house lately? Is he having trouble making it up the stairs? Does he seem sluggish and reluctant to stand up? If so, your pet may be suffering from hip dysplasia, which affects the connection between the ball and socket of the hip joint.

Even if your pet is free of these symptoms, he may still develop the disease. This issue of Pet Planet will help you identify signs of hip dysplasia and teach you how to care for your ailing friend.

### What is hip dysplasia?

In basic terms, hip dysplasia means "badly formed hip." In unaffected animals, the ball at the end of the leg bone fits smoothly into a pocket in the hip, just as pieces of a puzzle fit together. In affected dogs, the "pieces" don't come together as well. The ball may roll around loosely in the socket, making for a rather uncomfortable fit. This looseness is what may cause your pet to limp or seem pained during certain activities.

### Who gets it?

The joint disease is common in large dogs; about 50 percent of some larger breeds are affected. Less commonly, the disease also can occur in medium-sized breeds and even in small breeds. It primarily strikes purebreds, but it can develop in mixed breeds, particularly when both parents are prone to the disease. Dogs with a higher incidence of hip dysplasia are German shepherds, Labrador retrievers, rottweillers, Great Danes, golden retrievers, Doberman pinschers, mastiffs, and St. Bernards. Greyhounds and borzois have a lower incidence. Cats may develop dysplasia, but they rarely have severe symptoms because they weigh less and put less strain on their joints.

### How can you screen for hip dysplasia?

Because dysplasia is passed down from dogs to their puppies, breeding symptom-free dogs is important. You should look back three or four generations to check for carriers in the bloodline. The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (<http://www.offa.org/>), a nonprofit organization that consults with breeders and purebred dog owners, will review dogs' hip X rays and provide OFA certification for dogs that have normal hips. If you have questions about OFA certification, your veterinarian can give you more information.

Breeding two animals with excellent hips still won't guarantee that all of the puppies will be free of hip dysplasia, but you'll have a better chance of getting a dysplasia-free pup than if you breed two animals with fair or poor hips.

### When do signs show up?

Dogs of all ages are subject to the symptoms of hip dysplasia, but in most cases, they don't begin to show up until the middle or later years. If you want to check your pet for hip dysplasia at a younger age, schedule an X ray and physical with your veterinarian. If you are able to nip the problem in the bud at an early stage, you will prevent your dog from

experiencing even greater problems down the road.

Dogs that show physical symptoms may walk or run with an altered gait, often resisting movements that require full extension or flexion of their hind legs. Many times, they run with a "bunny hopping" gait because their legs are stiff and painful after exercise or first thing in the morning. Dysplasia also may cause arthritis, which affects movement in affected dogs. Some pets will warm up nicely after they've been moving for a while. Other dogs' gait will worsen with exercise, and they may resist extended activity.

As dysplasia progresses, dogs may lose muscle tone and even need help getting up. Many owners attribute the changes to normal aging, but once their pets are treated for dysplasia, owners may be shocked to see more normal, pain-free movement.

### **What can be done to prevent hip dysplasia?**

Because hip dysplasia has a genetic basis, you can't determine whether your puppy will get dysplasia by how you raise him, but you may influence when he begins to develop symptoms. If your pup has genes for hip dysplasia, it's a good idea to prevent overly rapid growth while Rover is an adolescent because the additional weight puts strain on the hip, further loosening the ball-and-socket fit. If your young furry friend is at the high end of the weight scale or is a large breed, you should begin feeding him an adult dog food or a puppy food specifically developed for bigger dogs.

Dysplasia also may be aggravated by rough play, jumping, climbing stairs, sliding on slick floors, calcium supplementation (which can increase the rate of bone formation), or forced running for any distance, especially on hard surfaces. You can keep your canine buddy's joints healthy by avoiding these situations as much as possible.

### **How do you treat a pet with hip dysplasia?**

Dogs with hip dysplasia may be treated surgically or nonsurgically, depending on your veterinarian's recommendations and the severity of the problem. Nonsurgical treatment to improve mobility and reduce pain includes the use of drugs like aspirin, phenylbutazone, NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories), and steroids. These drugs should be administered only under the supervision of your veterinarian. Your veterinarian also might ask you to restrict your pet's exercise. An ideal exercise for dysplastic dogs is swimming, which doesn't stress their aching joints.

Surgery can correct current problems and/or keep the condition from progressing. Several surgical procedures are common; your veterinarian will recommend one depending on your dog's age and the state of his joints.

Triple Pelvic Osteotomy (TPO) often is used for dogs younger than 10 months that show signs of dysplasia on X rays but that haven't yet developed symptoms. Surgeons will break the pelvic bone and realign the ball and socket correctly. As the bones heal, they will begin to fit together normally.

Total hip replacement is another option. This procedure involves removing the bad hip and replacing it with a prosthesis. In order to qualify for this procedure, your dog must be full-grown and weigh at least 35 pounds. Your veterinarian also may recommend other surgical options.

If you suspect your dog may have hip dysplasia, arrange for an X ray and physical exam. If your pet is diagnosed with the disease, she (or he) should be spayed (or neutered) so the disease isn't passed on. You should also notify your dog's breeder so that he can take steps to improve his breeding program. With help from you and your veterinarian, your dog can live a long and happy life with hip dysplasia.



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