

Hip dysplasia in dogs

Overview

Hip dysplasia is a condition of the hip joint that causes swelling, pain, stiffness, limping, and eventually arthritis.

Dogs inherit hip dysplasia from one of their parents and it most commonly affects medium to large breed pedigree dogs. Symptoms usually start at around 5 - 6 months old and can continue for life. Hip dysplasia is managed with careful exercise, weight control and anti-inflammatory pain relief. Some severely affected dogs also need surgery.

There are schemes in place that mean dog breeders can check for hip dysplasia risk before a dog has a litter of puppies. This reduces the number of puppies born with the painful condition.

What is hip dysplasia?

The hip is a 'ball and socket' joint which normally fits together perfectly, allowing free and easy movement. Hip dysplasia causes the hip joint to grow into an abnormal shape and as a result it doesn't fit together properly. Instead of moving smoothly, the bones rub up against each other which causes swelling, pain and eventually arthritis.

Dogs with hip dysplasia usually start to show symptoms at around 5-6 months old and the condition tends to be worse in medium to large breed dogs, fast growing dogs, overweight dogs (extra weight puts more strain on joints) and dogs that are given too much exercise when they are very young.

Symptoms of hip dysplasia

- Running with both back legs moving together - 'bunny hopping'
- Limping
- Stiffness
- Difficulty getting up and lying down
- A wobbly or swaying walk
- Difficulty jumping or going up or down stairs
- Less interest in walks
- Skinny hips - a sign of small, weak muscles in the back legs and hips

Some dogs with mild hip dysplasia won't show signs until they are much older and they've developed arthritis.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if your dog is showing any of the symptoms listed above or you are worried about hip dysplasia.

You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Before you consider breeding from your dog speak to your vet about screening for hip dysplasia and other inherited diseases.

Which breeds are at risk of elbow dysplasia?

Any breed of dog can develop hip dysplasia but it is much more common in medium to large breed pedigrees including:

- Labrador

- German Shepherd
- Golden Retriever
- Rottweiler
- Bernese Mountain Dog
- Newfoundland



How will hip dysplasia affect my dog in the future?

Some dogs respond very well to treatment and their symptoms improve as they become an adult. Unfortunately, these dogs often still develop arthritis in their hips as they get older.

Some dogs don't respond well to medical treatment and hip dysplasia continues to cause pain throughout their life. In these cases, stronger pain relief or surgery may be suggested.

If your dog's pain becomes uncontrollable it may be necessary to consider making the very difficult decision to put them to sleep.

Treatment for hip dysplasia

Symptoms of hip dysplasia can be improved with:

- **Weight control**
Keep your dog's weight in check to ensure no extra strain is put on their joints.
- **Anti-inflammatory pain relief**
Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication (NSAIDs) or other pain relief will be prescribed by your vet if necessary.
- **Controlled exercise**
Unless your vet advises otherwise, regular, short lead walks are ideal. Ensuring that your dog doesn't over-exercise is important. Avoid jumping, skidding, chasing, racing around, and walking or running for very long periods of time.
- **Rest**
Periods of rest may be necessary when hip dysplasia is causing pain and discomfort.

Fortunately, dogs with mild hip dysplasia often improve a lot with the treatments above. If your dog responds well to this treatment it is likely your vet will advise you to continue caring for your dog at home without surgery.

- **Surgery**
If your dog has severe hip dysplasia that doesn't respond to rest and medication your vet may suggest surgery. There are a few different surgical options, your vet will help you select the best one for your dog. Most of the surgeries will mean that your dog will need to be referred to a specialist veterinary hospital.

Ongoing care

The symptoms of hip dysplasia may continue throughout your dog's life and they are likely to need additional ongoing care to control their pain. Your vet will be able to advise which of these options may be beneficial for your dog:

- **Physiotherapy**
Physiotherapy can help build up muscle and take pressure off your dog's hips.
- **Hydrotherapy**
Hydrotherapy is a great way to exercise your dog without putting strain on the joints.
- **Joint supplements**
Joint supplements might help to slow down the development of arthritis.
- **Acupuncture**
Acupuncture might help relieve pain caused by hip dysplasia.

Preventing hip dysplasia

The only way to prevent hip dysplasia is to avoid breeding from dogs with the condition.

- Always speak to your vet before choosing a new dog.
- Take a look at PDSA's PetWise quiz to help make sure you pick the most suitable pet for your lifestyle. If you choose to buy a pedigree breed ask the breeder about the parents' hip scores.
- There are lots of lovely, deserving dogs in rescue centres across the UK. You may be able to find the perfect pal in a 'breed specific rescue centre'. Please consider giving a rescue dog their forever home.

- Always speak to your vet before breeding from your dog.

If your puppy is at risk of hip dysplasia or already has the condition:

- Speak to your vet about how much exercise your puppy needs to ensure they receive the correct amount when they are young. It's important to keep them fit but too much or the wrong type of exercise can make hip dysplasia worse.
- Ensure they are fed appropriate food for their size, breed and age. Your dog is more likely to have problems later in life if they don't have the correct nutrition as a puppy. Contact your vet practice for more information.

Cost

Treatment for hip dysplasia can mount up to thousands of pounds over a dog's lifetime. Think about insuring your dog as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This means you will have all the support you need to care for them if they become poorly or develop a condition such as hip dysplasia.

It's also very important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your dog. There are often several treatment options so if one doesn't work for you and your pet then your vet may be able to offer another.

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