

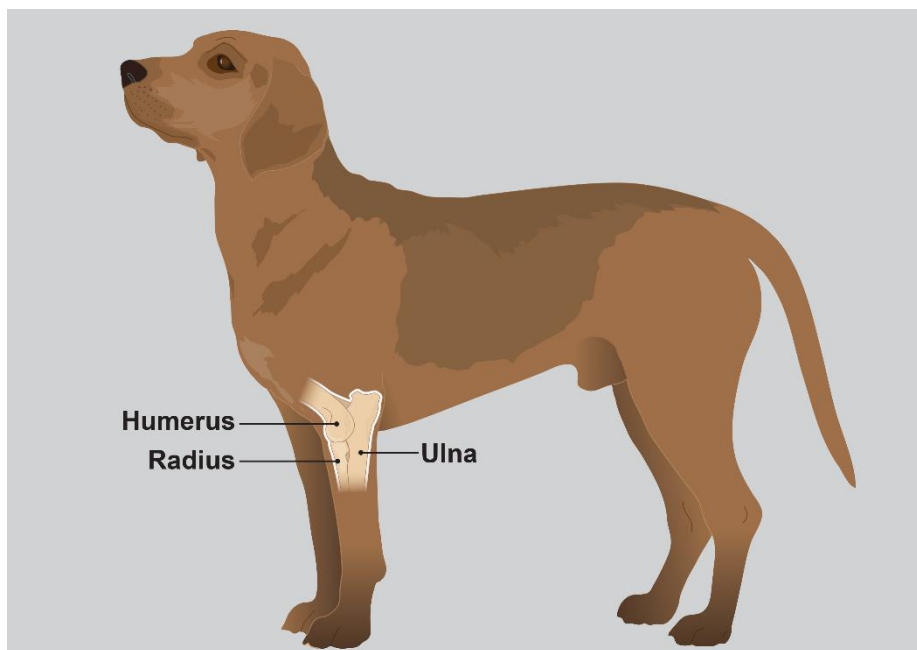
# Elbow dysplasia in dogs

## Overview

Elbow dysplasia is a condition that causes swelling, pain and eventually arthritis in the elbows. It's often passed down from a dog's parents.

Symptoms usually start when a dog is young (5 – 18 months old). Elbow dysplasia can often be managed with exercise control, weight control, physiotherapy and anti-inflammatory pain relief. Some, more severely affected dogs will also need surgery.

Elbow dysplasia most commonly affects medium and large breed dogs. Breeds prone to elbow dysplasia should be screened for the condition before having a litter of puppies - this reduces the number of puppies born with this painful condition. Care needs to be taken to make sure puppies at risk of elbow dysplasia get the right food and exercise when they are growing.



*The elbow is made of three bones: radius, ulna and humerus.*

## What is elbow dysplasia?

Elbow dysplasia happens when the elbow joints develop abnormally while a dog is growing. There are three areas inside the elbow joint that can be affected. Some dogs have just one problem area, while others suffer with a combination of changes. In some cases the bones inside the joint don't fit together snugly making the joint unstable.

Pain, swelling and lameness develops because the bones inside the joint rub against each other and because small pieces of bone or cartilage sometimes detach inside the joint. The result of this is eventually arthritis.

If your dog develops elbow dysplasia their symptoms are likely to be worse if they are overweight.

## Symptoms of elbow dysplasia

- Limping and stiffness
  - usually worse after exercise
  - can be difficult to spot if your dog is painful in both elbows
- Less enthusiasm to go for walks or play
- Front paws pointing outwards
- Elbows sit at a strange angle
- Swollen, puffy elbows (in severe cases)

Most dogs start showing symptoms between 5 - 18 months old. Dogs with a mild form of the condition may not show signs until they are much older and have developed arthritis in their elbows

## Treatment options

If your vet thinks that your dog has elbow dysplasia, they will probably want to take x-rays to check the bones in the elbow. They might also want to refer your dog to a bone specialist for scans or joint inspection (arthroscopy) and surgery.

If your dog is diagnosed with elbow dysplasia there are a few different treatment options. Your vet will help you decide which treatment is best for your dog depending on how severe their condition is.

### Weight control

- Keep your dog slim to ensure no extra strain is put on their joints.

### Pain relief

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or other pain relief will be prescribed by your vet if necessary.

### Controlled exercise

- Regular, short lead walks are ideal. Ensuring your dog doesn't over exercise is important.
- Avoid jumping, skidding, chasing, racing around and walking or running for very long periods.

### Rest

- Periods of rest may be necessary when elbow dysplasia is causing pain and discomfort.

### Surgery

- If your dog has severe elbow dysplasia or isn't responding to rest and pain relief your vet may suggest surgery.
- There are a few different surgical options – your vet will advise you which operation your dog needs.
- Surgery usually means that your dog will need to be referred to a specialist veterinary hospital.

## Ongoing care

The symptoms of elbow dysplasia usually continue throughout a dog's life and they will often need ongoing care and treatment. Your vet will be able to advise which of these options may be beneficial for your dog:

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

## When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if your dog is showing any of the signs above or you are worried about the risk of elbow 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 buying or breeding a dog speak to your vet about screening for elbow dysplasia and other inherited diseases.

## Which breeds are at risk of elbow dysplasia?

Elbow dysplasia is much more common in medium to large breed pedigree dogs including:

- Labradors
- Golden Retrievers
- Rottweilers
- German Shepherd Dogs
- Bernese Mountain Dogs
- Newfoundlands
- Bassett Hounds

If you own one of these 'at-risk' breeds make sure you take advice from your vet to ensure your dog is exercised and fed appropriately when growing. This may help to lower the risk of developing elbow dysplasia later in life.

## Outlook

Elbow dysplasia is a painful condition that often needs lifelong management.

Some dogs respond very well to daily management (weight control, exercise control and pain relief). Specialist surgery may be recommended for some young dogs that don't respond well to management. If your dog improves it's possible for them to live a long happy life.

Unfortunately, nearly every dog with elbow dysplasia will develop arthritis in their elbows as they get older which will need treatment from your vet.

## Prevention

**The only way to prevent elbow dysplasia long term is to avoid breeding from dogs already suffering with the condition:**

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

**If you own a puppy already at risk of elbow dysplasia:**

- Speak to your vet about how much to exercise your puppy when they are young. It's important to keep them fit, but too much or the wrong type of exercise can make elbow dysplasia more likely.
- Ensure your puppy is fed an appropriate food - it's important to ensure they are fed the correct 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.

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