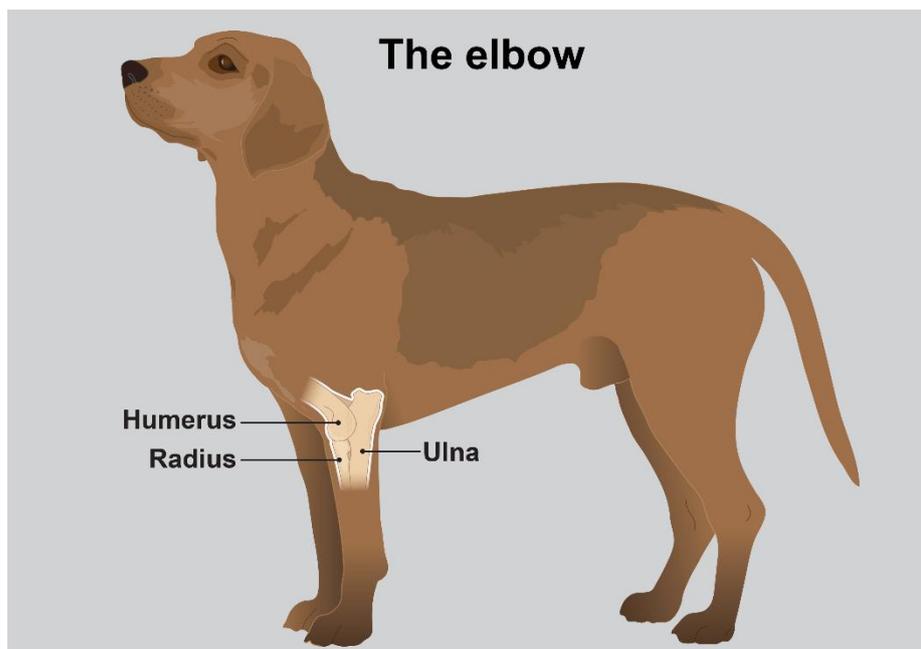


Elbow dysplasia in dogs

Overview

- Elbow dysplasia is a condition that causes swelling, pain and eventually arthritis.
- Symptoms often begin between 5 - 18 months old.
- Elbow dysplasia is often hereditary, and most commonly affects medium - large breeds.
- Symptoms of elbow dysplasia can often be managed with exercise control, weight control, physiotherapy and pain relief. Some dogs also benefit from surgery.
- We should only breed from healthy dogs to prevent this painful condition.
- Breeds prone to elbow dysplasia should be fed and exercised correctly when they are growing.



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

What is elbow dysplasia?

Elbow dysplasia is a painful condition that causes one or both elbows to develop abnormally while a puppy is growing. There are three main areas inside the elbow joint that can be affected; some dogs have just one problem area, while others suffer with a combination.

Elbow dysplasia causes pain, swelling, instability and often leads to arthritis.

Symptoms of elbow dysplasia

- Limping or stiffness (usually worse after exercise and difficult to spot if both elbows are affected)
- Less enthusiasm to go for walks or play
- Front paws pointing outwards and/or elbows held at a strange angle
- Swollen, puffy elbows (in severe cases)

Most dogs start showing symptoms between 5 - 18 months old. However, dogs with mild elbow dysplasia may not show signs until later in life, once they have developed arthritis in their elbows.

Treatment

If your dog has elbow dysplasia, there are a few different treatment options.

Pain relief

Your vet may prescribe anti-inflammatories and other pain relief for your dog.

Weight control

Weight control is vitally important for a dog with elbow dysplasia. Symptoms will be worse if your dog is overweight – keep your dog slim to ensure no extra strain is put on their joints.

Controlled exercise

You will need to make sure your dog stays fit by doing the right type of exercise. Regular, short lead walks are ideal. Prevent your dog from jumping, skidding, chasing, racing around and walking or running for very long periods.

Rest

Rest may be necessary if your dog's elbow dysplasia is causing them pain and discomfort.

Surgery

If your dog has severe elbow dysplasia, your vet may suggest surgery. It's likely your dog will be referred to a specialist veterinary hospital for this.

Ongoing care

The symptoms of elbow dysplasia often continue throughout a dog's life, meaning they need ongoing care and treatment. Your dog may benefit from some of the additional treatments below:

- **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.

Outlook

Elbow dysplasia is a painful condition that needs lifelong treatment.

Some dogs respond very well to daily management (weight control, exercise control and pain relief), but some do not, and require surgery. If your dog improves with treatment, it's possible for them to live a long happy life.

Most dogs with elbow dysplasia develop arthritis in their elbows later in life. Speak to your vet if you think your dog might be developing arthritis.

Prevention and screening

The only way to prevent elbow dysplasia is to stop breeding from dogs with the condition. Screening programmes are available to check that a dog has healthy elbows before mating. If you choose to buy a pedigree dog, ask the breeder about elbow scores. Speak to your vet before choosing a new dog or breeding from your dog.

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 a home.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if your dog is showing any of the signs of elbow dysplasia. You may also want to speak to your vet for advice if you own a breed at 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.

Breeds at risk of elbow dysplasia

Elbow dysplasia is most common in medium to large breed dogs, including: Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Rottweilers, German Shepherd Dogs, Bernese Mountain Dogs, Newfoundlands and Bassett Hounds. If your dog is at-risk of elbow dysplasia, speak to your vet for advice on proper feeding and exercise while they are growing.

Own a breed at risk of elbow dysplasia?

If you own a breed that is at high risk of elbow dysplasia, you will need to make sure you feed and exercise them correctly, especially while they are growing.

- **Exercise.** Speak to your vet about how to exercise your puppy when they are young. It's important to keep them fit, but too much of the wrong exercise can make elbow dysplasia more likely.
- **Feeding.** It's important to make sure your puppy is fed an appropriate food for their size, breed and age. They are more likely to have problems later in life if they don't have the correct nutrition as a puppy.

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