



## **Hip dysplasia**

Hip dysplasia is a canine genetic condition whereby the ball and socket hip joint does not develop into the correct shape. The ball becomes flattened, and the socket becomes too shallow meaning that there is not a snug fit between the two bones. This happens because the ligaments and joint capsule that normally stabilise the joint become lax in the first few weeks/months of life. Hip dysplasia is usually bilateral meaning that both hind limbs are affected

### **Symptoms of hip dysplasia**

The condition most frequently affects large breed dogs such as German Shepherds and Labradors, although smaller breeds and even cats can be affected. Signs include:

- Stiffness (especially after rest)
- Reluctance to exercise
- Unusual gait
- Problems climbing stairs, getting up or lying down
- Sore around hips when stroked/groomed
- Limping

These symptoms can often start around 6-12 months of age. Some dogs do not show any signs of pain at home but will resent their hips being manipulated by a vet.

### **Why is hip dysplasia a problem?**

Hip dysplasia can result in pain. At first this is due to strain injuries to the soft tissues that are trying to support the hip. As the hip joint moves inappropriately it will cause excessive wear of the cartilage and eventually wear through to bone. This results in a great deal of pain and is known as osteo-arthritis. Research suggests that all dogs with hip dysplasia will develop some degree of osteo-arthritis over time which can be severe.

### **How is hip dysplasia diagnosed?**

You may have gone to the vet for something you have noticed, or the vet may pick up on an abnormal gait or range of motion at a routine health check. Clinical history from you as an owner is important as well as the clinical examination in the consultation. If your vet has a suspicion of hip dysplasia, we would recommend further investigation via x-rays.

Whilst under sedation/general anaesthetic for the x-rays, your vet may also perform an evaluation of the hips to assess laxity known as an 'Ortolani' test.

Your pet may be referred to a specialist for further assessment such as CT or MRI if appropriate

### **How is hip dysplasia treated?**

The treatment depends on the severity of the hip dysplasia with most animals treated in a non-surgical (conservative) manner.

Hip dysplasia identified incidentally such as during routine screening for breeding can be treated non-surgically. Treatment for dog's showing signs of dysplasia will depend on the severity of hip pain.

Non-surgical management consists of the following:

- Weight management
- Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy
- Exercise control
- Medications (eg painkillers)

Unfortunately, most improvements from management changes alone will not be consistent in the long



term, with most dogs requiring medication as time passes.

Surgical treatments are considered for severe cases. These include:

- Total hip replacement (THR) – the whole diseased hip joint is removed and replaced with a metal/plastic implant. These can be highly successful but also come with high risk of complication and catastrophic failure.
- Femoral head and neck excision – This is carried out when total hip replacement cannot be performed and is in general more suitable for smaller breeds of dog. The ball part of the hip joint is completely removed, and the joint is then supported by the soft tissues alone. This removes the pain of bone rubbing on bone. Joint function is reduced, and intensive physiotherapy is needed to build up strength of the soft tissues to support the joint, but lots of dogs will have a good outcome with this surgery.
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If you have any concerns about hip dysplasia in your pet, call the surgery to make an appointment with the vet on: 01626 835002