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HIP DYSPLASIA

What is it? Hip dysplasia is a condition in which the hip joint is incongruent—the ball of the femur and the socket of the pelvis do not fit well together. This results in increased movement (laxity) in this joint and subsequent wear and tear on the cartilage causing arthritis. It is an inherited condition and is also influenced by other environmental factors like diet, exercise, and weight.

What animals are affected? Any animal can be affected, but we see it most commonly in larger breed dogs. Dogs that are predisposed to hip dysplasia include Golden retrievers, Labradors, German Shepherds, and Rottweilers.

What are the signs? Dogs with hip dysplasia typically show signs at two different stages of life. In the young dog (4mo to 1yr) the increased movement in the joint causes inflammation and swelling and they may show soreness or a reluctance to play. They often have a very characteristic “bunny hopping” gait. Older dogs show stiffness, soreness, and decreased activity related to the arthritis that develops over time.

How is it diagnosed? Hip dysplasia is diagnosed by palpating or feeling the hip joints for increased movement (Ortolani sign) and by taking radiographs (x-rays). There are two main radiographic techniques that are used: PennHip radiographs (3 different views that help demonstrate the degree of laxity present) and OFA radiographs (dogs are given a score based on the degree of subluxation and arthritis seen).

How is it treated? Hip dysplasia can be treated medically or surgically. Medical management includes weight control, low impact exercises, anti-inflammatory and pain medications, and joint supplements (glucosamine chondroitin sulfate). Surgical management can be done at an early age to try to improve the congruity of the joint and minimize the progression of arthritis or later in life to minimize the discomfort and improve function. Your veterinarian and the surgeon will help determine which procedure is best suited to your dog.

What is the prognosis? Dogs with hip dysplasia that is recognized and managed either medically or surgically can have normal life-spans. In some patients, the arthritis can truly become debilitating but most can be managed and are able to maintain a good quality of life.

Can it be prevented? Hip dysplasia is very difficult to prevent or eliminate because there are so many contributing factors. Conscientious breeding of dogs with good hips, and neutering or spaying those with dysplastic hips will help. Appropriate diet and exercise can also minimize the impact hip dysplasia has on your pet.

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