

Hip Dysplasia:

Juvenile Pubic Symphysiodesis

Firstly, congratulations on your new puppy! They will provide you with 12 to 15 years of companionship and fun. As well as general health care for your new pup (vaccinations, worming, fleas and tick prevention, feeding, etc), there are one or-two other things to think about. You have probably been given this handout because your pup is one of the breeds of dog that can develop hip dysplasia. It does not mean your dog has hip dysplasia, but it is a common problem in many breeds including the Labrador, Golden Retriever, Rottweiler, German Shepherds, and many other large and medium sized breeds. The point of this handout is to give you a little information about hip dysplasia and tell you what you can do to minimise the risk of a lifetime of problems for your dog as a result of hip dysplasia.

What is hip dysplasia?

Hip dysplasia is an inherited abnormality causing the hips of affected dogs to develop abnormally. The round head of the femur (thigh bone) does not fit properly within the cup in the pelvis. In severe cases the joint is completely dislocated. Some dogs become lame by 8 months, but most develop early arthritis and hip pain from 2 - 8 years of age. Once arthritis has developed there is no cure, although the pain can be managed in many dogs. Hip scoring of the parents of your dog may reduce the chance of your dog developing hip dysplasia if the parents had low scores, but unfortunately it is still no guarantee. We see many pups with bad hips bred from dogs with better than average hip scores.

Early screening

By testing for the signs of hip dysplasia at an early age, your vet can offer effective treatment for many dogs. This is because at up to 20 weeks of age, the hip joint is still developing and a simple procedure can change the way the joint grows to improve the fit between the head and cup of the hip.

Screening methods

There are two tests used, the Ortolani test, where the hips are moved through a range of angles while the vet carefully feels the top of the thigh bone, and x-rays. Neither test will hurt your dog, but they will need to be done with your dog asleep under anaesthesia, as muscle

tension makes feeling the hip joint nearly impossible, and good x-rays cannot be taken with your pup awake.

Treatment options

There have been a number of treatments developed, and most require surgery. One of the treatments your vet can perform is called juvenile pubic symphysiodesis (JPS for short). It involves a small cut through the skin at the front part of the pelvis down onto the bone, and then fusing of the bone at the front of the pelvis, so that as the pelvis grows, the cup part of the hip joint covers more of the ball (head) of the femur. There is not much muscle or other tissue in the way, so it is not a very painful surgery and there are very few complications. JPS is an effective procedure for mild to moderate hip dysplasia, but for more severe cases your vet will talk to you about other possible treatments and may have to send you to see a specialist surgeon.

Complications

The most common complications of JPS are some local swelling and discomfort. Serious complications are very rare and can usually be avoided by performing the surgery carefully and precisely. Your vet has had extra training in performing the procedure correctly.

Other treatments

Non-surgical treatments are usually only recommended for dogs with very mild or very severe hip dysplasia where preventative surgery would be ineffective or not required. Generally, this means keeping your dog in light body condition (thin), using anti-inflammatory pain killers and various diets and cartilage protecting agents if needed. Surgical treatments other than JPS include pelvic osteotomies (cutting the pelvis to realign the hip joint), total hip replacement (effective for severe dysplasia) and femoral head removal (cutting out the ball part of the joint) for smaller, less active dogs. These procedures can be successful (especially joint replacement) but are more expensive and not preventative treatments.

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What should you do now?

Your vet will talk to you about screening and may discuss early desexing at the same time. If you wish to have your pup screened, then you can make a time to do that, ideally between 16 and 20 weeks of age. Your pup will be given an anaesthetic, be tested for dysplasia and if they have the disease, then may be treated at the same time (with your permission of course!). Desexing at the same time is a good idea to prevent passing on the genes for hip dysplasia to future generations of dogs. Many pups do not have hip dysplasia and will not require treatment after being screened; if this is the case, it is good news.