

HIPS

HIP DYSPLASIA AND MANAGEMENT

What is hip dysplasia?

Hip dysplasia is a common issue in dogs where the hip joint is lax or “loose”. This laxity is a result of multiple factors including family history, exercise levels, growth rates and breed.

Hip dysplasia can be painful in severe cases which can trigger us to investigate it in puppies. Many puppies with hip dysplasia however will not show signs of discomfort until they are older. This is because hip dysplasia over time leads to damage to the hip joint and results in progressive arthritis.

What can we do about hip dysplasia?

In an ideal world - we would love to have animals born without any risk of hip dysplasia. With the rise of breeders performing hip scoring x-rays; this has led to improvements overall across Australia. Even with improvements in breeding and genetics, there will be animals that are at risk due to other factors

The next best thing we can do is determine as soon as possible if our own individual pet has hip dysplasia and what their risk is of developing future hip issues. This can be done as young as 16 weeks of age in a safe, non-painful x-ray procedure known as PennHip X-rays.

In animals with hip dysplasia we are able to employ strategies to minimise arthritis progress using preventative supplements, exercise management programs and dietary control. In some patients a procedure known as juvenile pubic symphysiodesis (JPS) can aid in reducing future arthritis.



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What can we do about hip arthritis?

In many patients with hip dysplasia, it is unfortunately not identified until it has led to quite advanced hip arthritis. This is because many dogs with early disease will be only a little bit stiff and generally not have too much pain in the joint. Arthritis can also develop in animals that have suffered from injuries or trauma that affect the hip joint. In these cases our goal is to manage the pain of arthritis.

Arthritis management involves managing patient weight to reduce impact on the joints, exercise in moderation and reducing progression of joint damage with specific medications and supplements. The best plan for each patient is different and so it is important to discuss the specifics of this with your veterinarian.

What happens when medications don't seem to help?

Some patients will develop severe arthritis to the point that pain relief doesn't seem to help. This can be either due to the severity of pain or due to the significant fibrous changes in the joint that start to significantly inhibit movement.

In certain cases - it may be necessary to perform what is known as a "salvage" surgical procedure to stop this ongoing pain from arthritis. The two main procedures for this purpose are a total hip replacement or a femoral head ostectomy. These procedures are best performed before the patient has had too much muscle loss from inactivity to ensure the best outcome.