

Causes of Arthritis, Hip Dysplasia and Other Joint Diseases

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Many dogs develop some form of joint disease during their lives. It can be mild, even unnoticeable to the pet owner, or it can be debilitating, severely affecting the pet's quality of life, or even causing complete lameness. The majority of cases fall somewhere in between.

While some dogs may develop joint disease in the first half of their lives, signs usually do not appear until the latter half of life, which varies depending on your pet's breed. Dogs are more susceptible to arthritis than cats, and the larger dog breeds are more vulnerable than smaller breeds.

The most common signs of dog joint disease include stiffness, limping, or favoring a limb - particularly after sleep or resting, inability to rise, reluctance to jump or even climb stairs, and noticeable pain.

Causes of Dog Arthritis and Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD)

There are many diseases that affect the joints of dogs. So many, in fact, that there are 10 major classifications. Joint diseases occur as a result of:

1. **Ligament, tendon, or muscle disease**, e.g., ruptured anterior cruciate ligament
2. **Fractures involving the joint**
3. **Developmental disorders**, e.g., hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, osteochondritis dissecans, Legg-Perthes disease
4. **Congenital disorders**, e.g., Wobbler's syndrome (cervical)

What is a joint?

The area or junction where two bones meet on an animal's body is referred to as a joint. The areas of the bones that come into contact with each other are covered with an incredibly smooth surface of cartilage. This allows the bones to move back and forth against each other without pain or discomfort. The area is enclosed in a joint capsule that contains joint fluid

spondylomyelopathy), luxated patella

5. **Dietary and hormonal disease**, e.g., hyperparathyroidism, obesity

6. **Metabolic disorders**, e.g., von Willebrand's disease (hemophilia) in dogs

7. **Degenerative joint disease** (osteoarthritis)

8. **Inflammatory joint disease**, e.g., Lyme disease, rheumatoid arthritis

9. **Degenerative spinal joint disease**, e.g., intervertebral disc disease, cauda equina syndrome

10. **Cancer**

that further lubricates the action of the bones as they move back and forth. If the joint becomes inflamed, injured, diseased, or is the result of abnormal aging processes, the surfaces within the joint and the surrounding bone may become deformed. The smooth interaction between the opposing bones is lost and this usually leads to a painful condition we refer to as arthritis.

Management and Medical Treatment of Dog Arthritis

Medical treatment of hip dysplasia and osteoarthritis (degenerative joint disease) has greatly improved in the last several years thanks to the introduction and approval of several new dog joint supplements and drugs. Because hip dysplasia (and other types of dysplasias) are primarily inherited conditions, there are no products on the market that *prevent* their development.

Diagnosis of hip dysplasia in dogs that are showing clinical signs of arthritis and pain is usually made through the combination of a physical exam and radiographs (x-rays). If a dog is showing outward signs of arthritis, there are usually easily recognized changes in the joint that can be seen on radiographs. In addition, the veterinarian may even be able to feel looseness in the joint or may be able to elicit pain through extension and flexion. Through proper diet, exercise, supplements, anti-inflammatories, and pain relief, you may be able to slow down the progression of degenerative joint disease, but the looseness in the joint or bony changes will not change significantly.

Medical management is indicated for both young dogs with clinical signs and for older dogs with chronic osteoarthritis. Because of the high cost involved with many surgeries, medical management is many times the only realistic option for many pet owners. However, medical management is multifaceted. Discuss your options with your veterinarian.