

Ask the physiotherapist

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Hip joint problems...

Hip joint dysplasia... can the dog be hunted, can it be trained, can it live with the condition as a member of the family?

Every dog owner is afraid of having his or her dog diagnosed with hip joint dysplasia, regardless of whether the dog is old or young.

What many people have heard and from what we know of this condition dogs will manifest various symptoms and suffer various disorders depending on how bad it is affected and to what extent the disorder has developed.

Hip joint dysplasia is a hip joint condition that is characterised by instability. There are three degrees of the condition: mild, moderate and serious. The diagnosis is confirmed by x-rays that can determine its degree of seriousness, i.e. whether the extent of the dog's hip joint dysplasia condition is mild, moderate or serious.

The mechanism that develops the instability or play in the hip joint is often genetically determined and in addition the condition is often affected by environmental factors and external influences. Factors that play a role here include a dog's size, breed, how quickly it grows as a puppy, the type of food it is given, as well as the type of activity, training and strain it is subjected to, as well as the duration of the activity, training and the degree of intensity of the training.

Hip joint dysplasia can be seen clinically in puppies, young dogs or older dogs. The symptoms that appear are often related to ADL functions due to the pain caused by activity in a hip that is unstable or has "play". One will be able to see that a dog is experiencing pain during normal activities such as walking, jogging and running.

Limps will often manifest in relation to the three types of gait and secondary symptoms may appear and manifest as inflammatory conditions in and around the joint due to the primary instability-play in the hip joint which is the causative factor of the secondary reactions in the joint and tissue around the hip joint.

Synovitis often develops in the joint due to abnormal strain on the weight bearing structures (hip joint = hip socket + hip joint ball + binding structures). The dog may and will experience pain when resting.

X-ray examination is a standard examination procedure and is often performed in co-operation with veterinarians and kennel clubs. These x-rays are usually taken after dogs have reached their first birthday when one will be able to read and determine the degree of dysplasia. The are rules and procedures governing the return of dogs that have developed (genetically inherited and developed) hip joint dysplasia and getting a refund.

The musculature in the area around the hip joint, i.e. the muscles that form part of the hip joint and the muscles that form part of its control mechanism, movers and stabilisers, will often

develop poorly in puppies and atrophy in young dogs and older dogs because of the pain and the reduced level of muscle activity. Functionally speaking, this will also result in poor soft tissue support in and around the joint.

If the dog has developed or has a genetically inherited mild degree of dysplasia, the musculature will be able to normalise itself quality wise and as far as strength and stamina are concerned in young dogs and adult dogs. Much will depend on the level of activity and the degree of activity, training – how one uses the dog and the strains it is subjected to.

I mentioned earlier in this article that there are three main categories of hip joint dysplasia, the diagnosis of which is confirmed by x-ray. There follows a brief description of the three different categories:

Mild:

Shows minimal damage to the cranial acetabular rim with little subluxation of the femoral head (40-50% of the femoral head is covered) as well as minimal secondary abnormalities.

Moderate:

Shows clear subluxation (20-40% of the femoral head is covered) in the bottom acetabular (socket) and varying degrees of periarticular new bone formation.

Serious:

Great deal of subluxation and/or luxated joint with flat, deformed femoral head (ball of hip joint).

Illustrations

X-ray of category 1 dysplasia, mild:

Ventrodorsal x-ray.

Femoral head is slightly subluxated and there has been some flattening of the cranial rims of the hip socket.

Photo:

X-ray of category 3 dysplasia, serious:

Serious hip joint dysplasia.

Right femoral head is extremely subluxated and the left is luxated.

Photo:

What should one do treatment wise when a dog, the family's four-legged friend, is diagnosed with this condition?

Conservative treatment of hip joint dysplasia

Veterinarian

Physiotherapy

Alternative medicine

Surgical treatment of hip joint dysplasia
Veterinarian (post-op)
Physiotherapy (post-op)
Alternative medicine (post-op)

Conservative treatment of hip joint dysplasia

Reference sources say that of gundogs diagnosed with hip joint dysplasia where the limp manifests during the puppy stage, approx. 75% of limping dogs will be normal again by the age of 12-15 months of age with the aid of conservative treatment (Johnston 1992, Barr et al, 1987). This only refers to the mild category of genetically inherited hip joint dysplasia. A vet will check a dog's weight, growth, and level of activity, and anti-inflammatory medicines can be prescribed if necessary. Physiotherapeutical measures aimed at alleviating pain, alleviating stress and tissue stimulation and tissue regeneration can be introduced.

Advice regarding suitable levels of activity as well as help with stabilisation training exercises for the musculature around the hip joint is also useful. Training in a pool where the joint is under no strain from weight is common abroad in those countries where physiotherapy is a well-accepted form of treating animals. Dietary supplements such as antioxidants and glucosamin may be introduced in conditions that affect joints, musculature and some other tissue around the joint.

When it comes to older dogs and conservative treatment important veterinary measures include weight control, diet, adjusting activity levels for the condition, and the use of anti-inflammatory medicines if necessary. The physiotherapy mentioned above may also be applicable in these cases too.

Alternative methods that can be tried include acupuncture treatment and the permanent installation of gold needles, which I know some vets use.

Surgical treatment of hip joint dysplasia

There are various surgical techniques that a vet can use to alleviate pain, stabilise and make the hip joint more mechanically-anatomically correct so that one can prevent the further development of a dysplasia condition in a dog's hip. These operations will be indicated during an early phase of diagnosed dysplasia in young dogs. The methods available include pectineal resection, corrective osteotomy or arthroplastic techniques.

The key words here are pain alleviation, increased joint congruence, and joint stability.

There will often be a need for a post-operational rehabilitation phase in which the dog and the dog owner will be helped by a vet and physiotherapist, possibly in combination with others.

I know that in the USA many vets now inject relatively large doses of glucosamin into the joint immediately after a surgical procedure. You can also add glucosamin to a dog's food later on in the post-operational phase. Going into detail about the course of post-op treatment would be too extensive for this article.

Can the dog be hunted, can it be trained, can it become a member of the family?

I believe it is possible to both train and hunt a dog diagnosed with hip joint dysplasia. It can also become a member of the family. Of course, this depends on the category of hip joint dysplasia that has been confirmed by x-rays. Mild cases will be able to withstand activity and training if one is careful and adapts it to what the dog can stand.

One must train with moderation, care and not subject it to great strain and levels of activity. One has to become very familiar with the dog, learn to read its body's reactions, and be on the look out for symptoms that the dog might display during or after activity.

A dog with serious hip joint dysplasia will not be able to function as a gundog and the impact of training on its hip joints will be too great. It can become a member of the family and enjoy a relatively good, long life if one manages to balance the condition, adapt its activities and in co-operation with both a vet and others find out exactly what this dog needs to live free of pain and symptoms for as much of the time as possible.

In my opinion it is important to diagnose and determine the degree of its hip joint dysplasia so that a dog is not subjected to impact or impact it can't withstand. It is also important to try and alleviate the symptoms caused by the condition as much as possible so that it can live a good life. I hope that this has managed to shed some light on the issue of hip joint dysplasia so that dog owners can help to make and reach the correct choices given circumstances in which a dog has been diagnosed with a condition that will effect its daily activities, training and hunting.

Good hunting – good training...

Happy hunting!

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Limping disappeared

Good experience with the dietary supplement glucosamin

My attitude to alternative medicine and various quacks has been pretty chilly. I was thoroughly taken for a fool by a witchdoctor many years ago and the experience had an impact. Luckily as one grows older your rough edges round off and you become more open minded as the years go by: now I think it is less of a big deal how people or animals are treated, the important point is whether it works.

About 5 years ago my ten-year old Gordon Setter began limping for periods of two – three weeks at a time. Then six to nine months could go by without any symptoms appearing before a new round of limping began. This continued. Hunting and sleigh trips went fine without

problems of any kind – the limping occurred for no understandably apparent reason – often during the middle of summer during quiet periods. Three years ago she was x-rayed but nothing wrong showed up on the x-rays. During the winter her limping returned and worsened, it became without a doubt permanent and got steadily worse. After three months of limping she was x-rayed again, but everything looked okay on the x-rays. The only way to find out what the precise cause was to open the dog up – which according to the vet wasn't much of an idea. Instead the pain alleviator Rimadyl was prescribed – for the rest of her life. The dog was given the medicine with no effect. I could probably have increased the dosage, but the thought of having to dope her for the rest of her life was not particularly appealing.

We ended up at Are Thoresen in Sandefjord. He is a fully qualified vet, but he also works with alternative medicine and as a homeopath – both for people and animals. He determined quite quickly that the dog has a rheumatic disorder. The dog was given simple acupuncture and then that magical white powder – glucosamin. Give him half a gram of this a day and come back in a month and the problems will have gone he said. I found it hard to believe but said, “OK, I'll try it”. After three weeks the limping disappeared and the dog is like new, supple and fine again. The powder costs NOK 200 for a 6 month supply – Thoresen procures it himself and sells it on without some expensive intermediary.

People interested in this ought to read Åse Birkhaug's article in Fuglehunden no 3 – 2002. Are Thoresen was able to tell me that the latest research shows that the effect is best when the treatment just involves pure glucosamin, i.e. without combining it with other preparations.

My story is about a single case and I can't say more about it than what is written here. But it does make you think seriously when well established vets don't even mention these possibilities – another said quite plainly that glucosamin could not have any provable effect. Åse Birkhaug's article says something quite different.

The loyalty to the medicines they have learnt in school and the pharmaceutical industry, within the vet and medical community, borders on stupidity when well proven natural medicines/dietary supplements are rejected and not mentioned. It is pretty unbelievable that they haven't heard of it. People both think for themselves and do research themselves. Previously, I was sure that these businesses were operated just for the sake of money, now I am not so sure.

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