

7-Year-Old Dog is Limping

Limping could be a sign of osteoarthritis.

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Q. I have a 7-year-old Gordon Setter. I have always taken her on an hour walk every day and she has a yard to play in. I've noticed lately that after she has been lying down for a while, she will limp for a few minutes when she gets back up. Then she's back to her normal, active self. What can I do to help ease her discomfort? She never lies on the hard floor-she'll only lay on her oversized dog bed. Thank you for your help.

A. On the surface, it sounds like your Gordon Setter is getting osteoarthritis, which is not uncommon in dogs that are at least 7 years old. Osteoarthritis is a gradually worsening condition that affects the joints of primarily medium to large-breed dogs. The normal cartilage cushioning between the bones of the joints is gradually eroded due to a variety of factors, most of which are genetic.

However, before we get too attached to that diagnosis, is there any leg in particular that your dog limps on? If so, does she generally favor that leg, or is it only sore after exercise? It's possible that only one joint is affected, such as an elbow or knee. Only a thorough veterinary exam can determine this.

If your dog does have osteoarthritis, there are a few things you should do right away: Minimize exercise and activity, just provide the minimum your dog needs to stay sane. If your dog is overweight, use a calorie-restricted diet to help her lose some weight. A reasonable target for a dog of her size is about one pound a month. Provide an orthopedic dog bed. Help your dog avoid cold, damp environments. Start your dog on some nutraceutical supplements, such as chondroitin or glucosamine.

Over time, you may want to start giving your dog a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) for the pain and inflammation that goes with arthritis. Your veterinarian can prescribe one that makes the most sense for your situation. In some cases, diagnostic X-rays with possible surgical correction are required.

Remember, in arthritic dogs, minimize exercise and make sure they are not overweight.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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