

Lump on Dog's Leg Likely a Lipoma

Golden and Labrador Retrievers are susceptible to harmless fatty tumors.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 9-month-old Labrador-Golden Retriever mix has a soft, movable lump about the size of a golf ball on her right front leg at the elbow joint. Can you give me any idea of what it may be?

A. Aah, lumps and bumps on retriever mixes; sometimes, it seems this is what keeps veterinarians in business.

In evaluating a lump, it is important to answer the following questions to determine if it has the potential to be something bad: Is it growing rapidly? Is it firmly attached in place? Is it soft? Is it a regular shape? Is it painful? Does it have any discharge? Could it be a lymph node?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, the lump should be investigated further with a fine needle aspirate, a simple procedure that collects microscopic cells from the lump, stains them, and allows them to be viewed under a microscope.

Based on what you describe, the breed of your dog, and the location of the lump, it is most likely a harmless fatty tumor, called a lipoma. A very simple way for your veterinarian to confirm this is by pushing a needle into the lump, and then pushing the cells collected in the needle onto a slide with a syringe. If they appear as a clear, oily substance, your dog has a fatty tumor.

Most lipomas are left alone unless they grow to a size that makes the dog uncomfortable, in which case they are surgically removed. It is not uncommon for older Labrador-Golden-Retriever-type dogs to have numerous lipomas. Don't assume every lump is a lipoma, however, check each one out whenever you are "loving up" on your dog.