

Some Human Injuries Also Common in Dogs

An orthopedic surgeon details the most common injuries dogs face.

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Just like humans, dogs are at risk of suffering broken bones, torn ligaments, arthritis and congenital diseases. Fortunately for dog and owner, these ailments can be treated, and in most cases, prevented.

Dr. James Roush, an orthopedic surgeon at the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital at Kansas State University, says cruciate ligament ruptures are common in large-breed dogs, especially dogs that are very active, or in older dogs with arthritis. The rupture occurs when dogs stand on their toes with their knee bent forward, causing the femur to bear down heavily on the cranial cruciate ligament, the only ligament opposing the femur as it pushes down. When the stress becomes too much, the ligament ruptures.

“One way that we see a very active dog tear his cruciate ligament is when he jumps up in the air, comes down and lands on one leg with a little twist and a pop,” Roush says. “That would be similar to the way a football player or a basketball player would get a cruciate rupture.”

Another common injury is a traumatic fracture. Like cruciate ruptures, trauma fractures may have other contributing factors.

“A lot of the fractures we see are related to dogs that are running loose,” he says. “They’ve been allowed loose where they can run into the road and get hit, or they are riding in the back of a pickup truck unrestrained and jump out.”

Although cruciate ruptures and traumatic fractures make up the two largest groups of injuries that Roush treats, he also warns of damages that congenital orthopedic diseases may cause. According to Roush, the nutrition of the dog as a puppy and heritability are risk factors for congenital orthopedic diseases such as osteochondritis dissecans, or OCD, which affects shoulders, elbows and spinal articulations.

“The two things that cause problems are too many calories and too much calcium, especially in large-breed dogs, where most of these diseases occur,” he said. Overweight and obese dogs are at a greater risk for orthopedic diseases.

Roush offers the following tips to help dog owners, especially those with puppies, prevent injuries to their pets: Check your dog's pedigree, and buy from established breeders. Control your dog's diet, and feed young puppies low-calorie food so that they stay at a normal weight or thinner than normal weight. Watch calcium intake, particularly in large-breed dogs. According to Roush, you should never supplement large-breed dogs with calcium. Don't let your dog run without a leash if they tend to run away. Don't let your dog ride unrestrained in the back of your vehicle.