

## What Is Hip Dysplasia?

**Learn about this crippling joint disease and holistic approaches to helping your pet live a more comfortable life.**

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Hip dysplasia is a crippling, degenerative joint disease that affects the ball-and-socket joint of an animal's hip. Hip dysplasia is a problem found primarily in dogs, although many practitioners believe that the disease has been underdiagnosed in other species such as cats. The records of the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) show that 24.8 percent of Maine coon cats evaluated from 1974 through 1996 were dysplastic. Among dogs, large- to giant-sized breeds continue to be those most frequently troubled by this disease, with as many as 50 percent of some breeds suffering from hip dysplasia, according to a release from Cornell University. Some breeds with a high rate of hip dysplasia include Bernese mountain dogs, bloodhounds, boxers, rottweilers, and Saint Bernards, but smaller breeds, such as the Welsh corgi and the toy breeds, can develop the disease, too. Hip dysplasia may be underdiagnosed in small-sized dog breeds simply because their minuscule weight and light frames enable them to function without showing symptoms of the disease. The belief is that a lax and disfigured hip may not cause a tiny 10-pound dog, such as a Yorkshire terrier, as much pain as a giant-sized 150-pound dog in which even a mild case of dysplasia can be crippling.

Is My Dog Dysplastic? Typical symptoms for hip dysplasia include pain, heat, and sometimes swelling in the joint. The dog may be grouchy when touched, wanting to be left alone. The dog may also appear cow-hocked (a condition where the back elbow joints turn in), stand toe-out, and perhaps have some muscle atrophy. (When a dog is in pain, she doesn't want to move the part that hurts, so if a hip is sore, she may not want to use her rear legs. After a few weeks, these muscles become flabby.) The dog may be uncomfortable after sitting for long (or short) periods of time. Often, a dog with abnormal hips will "puppy sit" (sit on one hip), rather than sit squarely on her haunches (although some adult dogs with normal hips may also "puppy sit"). The dog may have a fever, have trouble moving, or may pace or pant with pain. An indicator that something is wrong may be as subtle as the dog suddenly shying away from you. Of course, these symptoms can be the same as those displayed for a variety of conditions and/or diseases unrelated to hip dysplasia. For example, if a dog has strained the ligaments and tendons of the hip joint while chasing a squirrel, there may be some pain or heat in the hip region. A dog with hip dysplasia-like symptoms may actually be suffering from arthritis or even Lyme disease. In other words, the symptoms of hip dysplasia are somewhat vague. A clinical diagnosis (made by feeling the hips) is not sufficient to determine whether a dog has hip dysplasia. The only way to definitively determine whether or not a dog is dysplastic is to X-ray the dog's hips.