

## Ease Your Dog's Hip Dysplasia Naturally

**Try these holistic methods to prevent or reduce the effects of hip dysplasia.**

*Lisa Hanks*

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Once hip dysplasia sets in, a dog's condition usually only deteriorates. The inherited disease affects the hip joints, particularly in large or fast-growing breeds, such as the Bulldog, the Bloodhound, the Boxer, the Rottweiler, the St. Bernard and the Welsh Corgi. It's actually a form of osteoarthritis, causing loss of cartilage, inflammation, bone damage and joint spurs.

The most severe form usually surfaces during rapid growth from 4 to 9 months of age. Symptoms include limping, stiffness, pain, a wobbly gait and difficulty getting up, climbing stairs or sleeping. A milder form, which is more difficult to diagnose, appears slowly as a chronic problem later in the dog's life. Symptoms include mild, intermittent pain; stiffness; and limited hip motion. If your dog shows these symptoms, take it to your veterinarian immediately to have its hips X-rayed and professionally evaluated.

Holistic veterinarians advocate gentle, nonsurgical methods to prevent or reduce the effects of hip dysplasia. Follow these steps to treat hip dysplasia naturally:

**Prevention.** If you are concerned your puppy or dog might develop hip dysplasia, have a professional organization evaluate its hips. The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals and International Canine Genetics does most of the testing and can be reached at 2300 E. Nifong Blvd., Columbia, MO 65201-3856; (573) 442-0418; ofa@offa.org.

**Before buying a puppy,** be sure the sire and dam have been certified free of hip dysplasia. But certified-free parents are not guaranteed to have dysplasia-free pups. Some veterinarians postulate that if more than 25 percent of the pup's ancestors developed hip dysplasia, it is more likely to develop the disease.

**Diet.** New evidence shows hip dysplasia can be delayed or prevented by restricting the growth rate of susceptible puppies. Dogs predisposed to hip dysplasia may benefit from a conservative diet until 2 years of age. One study showed that feeding a 24 percent smaller ration to puppies, beginning at 8 weeks of age resulted in a 46 percent lower occurrence of hip dysplasia. Check with your veterinarian for an appropriate diet.

Holistic veterinarians highly recommend homemade dog food, raw or cooked, made with organic, whole meats, grains and veggies. A natural homemade diet may also keep your dog at its optimum weight. Obesity stresses the joints and can lead to other health complications.

Holistic vets recommend supplementing the diet of dysplastic dogs with antioxidant-rich foods, such as carrots, or vitamins A, C and E to help rid the body of damaging toxins and aid in joint repair.