



Health Issues:

Canine Hip Dysplasia (CHD) is an improper formation of the hip joint which consists of a "ball" and "socket" joint. The "ball" does not fit snugly into the pelvic socket and change occurs in the shape of the "ball" (femoral head). When a dog bears weight on the rear limbs, the ball rubs against the socket and damage occurs to the joint cartilage. When dogs exhibit symptoms of hip dysplasia they usually are in pain and lame on one or both rear legs.

In many cases, the rapid growth rate of the disease is directly related to young dogs that develop excess body weight at a rapid rate.

Symptoms:

- ➔ Pet is having trouble rising, walking, running or climbing stairs
- ➔ Lameness and more pronounced after exercise
- ➔ They will have well-developed shoulders due to a shift in weight from hind legs to front legs.
- ➔ A sensitivity to touch the hindquarters

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis of CHD is based on breed, history, physical exam findings, and an x-ray of the dog's pelvis

Treatment:

Swimming is an excellent form of exercise which builds up the muscle without stress to the joints. Non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs, such as aspirin and carprofen, can often help manage pain. Research has shown that Vitamin C can also reduce the inflammation in the affected joints.

Preventing and treating obesity is also highly beneficial to alleviate stress to the joints and slows the progression of degenerative joint disease. Also, keeping the dog in a warm environment with sleeping areas that are well padded can relieve joint stiffness.

Surgical Therapy:

There is a procedure that attempts to decrease pain by releasing tension on the joint capsule. The advantages of this procedure are that it greatly increases joint function, while significantly decreasing pain. The main disadvantage of the procedure is that it does nothing to stabilize the joint. Consequently, it does not prevent the development of Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD).

In younger dogs, the hip joint can be corrected by performing either pelvic or

intertrochanteric osteotomy surgeries. The various pelvic osteotomy techniques all strive to reposition the cavity at the base of the hipbone ("socket") so that it fits better over the femoral head ("ball"). Alternatively, the intertrochanteric osteotomy technique is done to reposition the femoral head ("ball") so that it fits better into the "socket". Pelvic osteotomies are very difficult and extensive surgeries, while the intertrochanteric osteotomy is more conservative.

For an adult dog with DJD, total hip replacement is the surgery of choice.

Prevention:

High calorie diet, over supplementation of calcium and over-exercise on hard services may exacerbate degeneration of the joint. Swimming is an excellent form of exercise which builds up the muscles without putting stress on the joints. There are also many holistic products that support healthy strong joints, muscles, tendons, cartilage and bones.

Gastric Torsion - or Bloat (Gastric dilatation volvulus GDV) is a condition is caused by a twisting of the stomach and thus trapping the stomach contents and gases resulting in a rapid swelling of the abdomen accompanied by pain and eventual death if untreated. It is most often found in deep chested breeds.

Symptoms:

- Continuous pacing and/or lying down in odd places
- Salivating, panting, whining
- Unable to get comfortable
- Acting agitated
- Unproductive vomiting
- Excessive drooling, usually accompanied by retched noises
- Swelling in abdominal area

Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) is a family of diseases all involving the gradual deterioration of the retina. It is diagnosed by a retinoscopic exam or by means of an electroretinogram (ERG). Symptoms are subtle, often starting with night blindness and eye dilation. As their vision deteriorates, affected dogs adapt to their handicap very well, as long as their environment remains constant.

Cataracts are are relatively common in dogs. Most are hereditary, however haziness or cloudiness in the eyes of an older dog is often not caused by cataracts. Cataracts are diagnosed by means of an ophthalmoscopic exam. If the dog is in good health, cataracts can be surgically removed with usually good results.

Retinal Dysplasia is an abnormal development of the retina which is thought to be inherited. It may also be as a result of injury or due to a viral infection, toxins or nutritional disorders. A retinoscopic examination can usually reveal retina problems.

Eye Infection

If your lab's eyes have a discharge throughout the day, they may have an infection. Eye infections are fairly common. They can crop up on their own or when something lodges in the eye. They can also occur when the surface of the eye, called the cornea, gets scratched. A telltale sign of infection is the appearance of the discharge: It will often be thick, yellow, gray, or green. It may form a crust on the eyelids as well.

Hereditary Myopathy (Muscular Dystrophy) is a condition unique to Labrador retrievers. It's a hereditary muscle disorder in which there is a deficiency of type II muscle fibers that leads to a decrease in skeletal muscle mass. While several breeds of dog have been known to have similar disorders, this condition is only seen in Labrador Retrievers. It was first described in 1976.

Additional names for HMLR include Autosomal Recessive Muscular Dystrophy (ARMD), Myotonia, Generalized Muscle Weakness, Polyneuropathy, and Hereditary Myopathy. The disease is inherited when both parents of an affected dog carry at least one copy of the disease gene.

Symptoms:

- ➔ muscle weakness
- ➔ abnormal gait and posture
- ➔ diminished tolerance to exercise

Onset of any symptoms generally take place at three to four months of age, even so, some dogs exhibit symptoms as early as six to eight weeks or as late as six to seven months.

The symptoms of abnormal gait and posture become more visible as exercise continues and the dog tires or if the dog is exposed to cold weather.

Rest improves symptoms but a relapse will take place when the activity level is increased again. Other signs of HMLR include irregularities of the joints and, with progression, wasting of the muscles in the limbs and head becomes evident.

Elbow Dysplasia is due perhaps to improper development (different growth rates) of the three bones making up the elbow, the joint loose and in mildly affected dogs leads to pain. Dogs with this disease are lame on the affected leg(s) and they may cry when the elbow is extended.

Treatment:

- ➔ surgical correction if possible
- ➔ aspirin and other anti-inflammatory drugs

Osteochondritis Dissecans (OCD) is a defect in the smooth cartilage surface which can affect the shoulder, ankle, elbow or knee joint and almost always surfaces during the growth phase of the larger dog breeds, usually between the ages of six to nine months. It can start as an intermittent limp in one leg.

A lot of young dogs with OCD run as though nothing is wrong but when they slow down they recognize that the limb causes pain and the limp comes back. Contributing factors to OCD include obesity and physical impacts, such as jumping off high places.

In most cases a piece of cartilage has broken off and is floating around the joint. This causes pain, which varies from mild, intermittent limping to intense, constant pain. Strict rest and restriction on activity may help heal this defect.

Treatment:

Surgery to remove the defective cartilage is recommended.

Hypothyroidism (Under-Active Function) is the most typically diagnosed hormonal disease found in dogs. The term hypothyroidism means the underproduction of thyroxin, the hormone produced by the thyroid gland.

The thyroid gland is located on the trachea of the dog, just beneath the voice box. It produces and releases thyroxin into the blood stream. This hormone is very important in controlling growth and development and maintaining normal protein, carbohydrate and lipid metabolism of the dog.

Hypothyroidism commonly occurs between the ages of two to six years. The most common sign is an increase in body weight. Lethargy and some form of skin disease are also common signs of Hypothyroidism. This condition is treatable by a thyroid hormone supplement.

Ear Infections can be very common in Labrador Retrievers due to the fact they have floppy ears that trap warmth and moisture which can in turn cause irritation and eventually pain.

Causes:

- ➔ ear mites
- ➔ allergies
- ➔ yeast infection
- ➔ food allergies
- ➔ obstruction due to cancer, polyps, and excessive hair
- ➔ autoimmune diseases

Symptoms:

- ➔ excessive shaking of it's head
- ➔ dog rub it's ears with it's paws, on the carpet, on the furniture, on your leg?
- ➔ shies away from you scratching it's ears
- ➔ dirt in the ears

Prevention:

- ➔ clean your dog's ears at least once a week.
- ➔ The ear should be light pink or flesh-toned and clean and there should be no odor coming from the ear.
- ➔ Always dry your dogs ears after swimming and bathing
- ➔ If you see wax or dirt in the ear but it doesn't seem to be bothering the dog, clean it's ears.
- ➔ If your dog has allergies (one of the prime causes of ear infections) they should be treated for the allergy as soon as they start itching.
- ➔ If you see any signs of dog ear infections, get your dog to a veterinarian.

Arthritis can include osteoarthritis which is caused by the degradation of the cartilage inside a joint. The breakdown of cartilage can stop the joint from working properly and create pain or stiffness. Mild arthritis is uncomfortable for your dog but severe arthritis is very painful.

Symptoms:

- ➔ stiffness of the joints
- ➔ favouring one leg over another
- ➔ trouble in sitting or standing
- ➔ reluctance to jump
- ➔ reduced activity level.

Treatment:

- ➔ There are various products that support strong joints, muscles, tendons, cartilage and bones that may be found at your veterinarian or local pet stores.

Tricuspid Valve Dysplasia (TVD) is a congenital, heart defect that is becoming more common in Labrador Retrievers. The tricuspid valve allows blood to flow in one direction from the right atrium into the right ventricle. If a puppy inherits the gene responsible for the defect, his tricuspid valve will be deformed.

The puppy will have a dysplastic valve at birth that does not shut tightly, letting blood to escape back through it. The severity of the disease depends on how much leakage there is. A puppy with mild leakage can have a normal life span. If the leakage is severe, the disease can prove fatal.

Diabetes Mellitus affects Labrador Retrievers that have a deficiency of the hormone insulin or an insensitivity to it. A diabetic dog has insufficient insulin to stop glucose production by the liver or to efficiently store excess glucose derived from energy giving foods.

Consequently, the blood concentration of glucose rises and eventually exceeds a level beyond which the kidneys can dispose of it into the urine. This causes larger than normal volumes of urine to be produced. The excessive loss of water in urine causes increased water consumption.

Symptoms:

- ➔ Excessive thirst
- ➔ Excessive urination
- ➔ Weight loss

Other symptoms may include: cataracts, recurrent infections, increased appetite, and exercise intolerance. Ketoacidosis occurs if the production of ketones by the liver is excessive. This makes the affected dog very sick.

The normal treatment is to give your dog insulin injections. Oral hypoglycemics are not of value in the treatment of dogs with Diabetes Mellitus.

Laryngeal Paralysis (LP) occurs when one or both sides of the larynx do not open and close properly. This condition can impede the dog's ability to get oxygen. It can also lead to overheating since dogs pant to cool themselves down, however, a dog with LP cannot pant effectively. In severe cases, the dog can develop cyanosis (a blue colour to the gums) from lack of oxygen. He may collapse and it could even be fatal.

Symptoms:

- ➔ A change in the sound of the dog's bark and a rough sound in the breathing.

Article by Karen H.