

ANIMAL MATTERS: Tips & Treatments



Michigan Veterinary
Specialistssm

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SURGERY:

Elbow Dysplasia

Definition

Elbow dysplasia is a generic term meaning abnormal development of the elbow that ultimately results in degenerative joint disease of the joint. Conditions associated with elbow dysplasia include the fragmented medial coronoid process (FCP), ununited anconeal process (UAP), osteochondritis dissecans (OCD), and elbow incongruity. These conditions most commonly affect immature large and giant breed dogs.

Signs and symptoms

Most dogs present with a history of acute or chronic, intermittent forelimb lameness which may be most noticeable when first rising from rest, however heavy exercise can worsen the lameness. Gait abnormalities may include a stiff-shortened stride and circumduction of the elbow when walking or trotting. When sitting or standing, affected dogs frequently externally rotate the forelimbs in order to take pressure off the medial compartment of the elbow joint.

Diagnostic tests

Physical examination findings commonly include effusion, thickening, medial joint pain, crepitus, and decreased range of motion of the elbow joint. Weight-bearing (standing position) will make joint effusion more obvious. Radiographic evaluation of the elbows should include neutral lateral, flexed lateral and a craniocaudal views. A lateral radiograph showing a lucent line at the caudal aspect of the anconeal process is diagnostic for UAP; keep in mind that 60% of patients that have an UAP also have a FCP. A diagnosis of FCP or OCD of the medial humeral condyle may not be obvious on plain radiographs and only subtle changes such as subchondral sclerosis along the ulnar notch and faint production of new bone (osteophytosis) on the dorsal anconeal process may be present. In some cases, blunting or a fissure line through coronoid process may be seen with FCP and a saucer defect in the medial humeral condyle may be seen with OCD. Elbow incongruity may be obvious on radiographs in some cases, yet other cases have no visible radiographic signs. Although CT scan is a very good diagnostic tool, arthroscopy has largely replaced the need for this modality in the diagnosis (and treatment) of elbow conditions.

Treatment

Early surgical intervention prior to significant degenerative joint disease is ideal. We recommend arthroscopic removal of OCD flaps and fragmented coronoid processes. Due to the size of an UAP, a mini-lateral arthrotomy is performed in conjunction with arthroscopy. Long-term medical therapy consisting of nutraceuticals (Adequan, glucosamine, chondroitin sulfate, MSM), nonsteroidals, NMNDA blockers (amitidine or gabapentin), narcotics (Tramadol and codeine), weight management and rehabilitation therapy are

recommended. Adjustments of drug doses are based on clinical responses to therapy.

Prognosis

Approximately 75% of the patients that receive arthroscopic surgery for removal of an OCD flap or FCP are improved after surgery, but DJD is expected to progress with time. Excision of a UAP carries a favorable prognosis, but long-term medical therapy also will be needed. Dogs that have advanced DJD may not do as well, however arthroscopic evaluation should still be considered.

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Michigan Veterinary Specialists has board-certified surgeons at the Auburn Hills and Southfield locations. A member of the surgery team is on-call 24/7 to provide consultations to MVS emergency doctors and to perform the emergency services for patients seen by the MVS emergency service. Our surgeons are available for questions and consultations on surgical conditions during the weekdays.

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