

Degenerative Joint Disease

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DJD can be caused by aging changes in a joint or by a mechanical instability. Mechanical instabilities are most often the result of joint abnormalities (such as hip or elbow dysplasia), trauma, or wear from a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament, luxating patella, or osteochondritis dissecans (OCD). Most often, the clinical signs of DJD appear in middle-aged and geriatric patients. They can include stiffness, reluctance to go on walks, and trouble with stairs. As the condition progresses, these symptoms become more severe, sometimes to the extent that the animal will not use the affected limb. Symptoms of DJD are exacerbated by cold, damp weather.

DJD is diagnosed through physical examination and radiographs (x-rays). Early DJD may only show a decreased joint space, as cartilage is not radio-opaque. Mid-stage or severe DJD can be seen in the formation of osteophytes and changes in the bone under the cartilage.

Treatment of DJD is limited to medicinal and physical therapy to reduce the amount of pain in the surrounding ligaments and joint capsule. After routine bloodwork is performed, the patient may be placed on an NSAID (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory), and in the case of obese dogs, on a prescription weight-loss diet. Corticosteroids may be used in severe cases that do not respond to NSAIDs. The ideal physical therapy for dogs is swimming or the

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use of an underwater treadmill. Other physical therapy includes short walks and passive flexion and extension of the affected joint.

Other treatments include the use of supplements, such as glucosamine and chondroitin, acupuncture, and the electrical pulse therapy.



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