

Elbow Dysplasia



What is elbow dysplasia?

Elbow dysplasia is a congenital defect which occurs inside the joints of the front legs in larger breed dogs such as: Chow Chows, Golden Retrievers, Irish Wolfhounds, German Shepherds, St. Bernards, Rottweilers, Shar Peis and Bernese Mountain Dogs. Although these breeds may be more prone to elbow dysplasia, all breeds are susceptible. The problem is typically present at birth, but it may go undetected until some wear and tear of the joint has occurred. This normal wear and tear is what can cause degenerative changes in the joint such as osteoarthritis and signs of lameness.

What can cause elbow dysplasia?

The term elbow dysplasia refers to several conditions that affect the elbow joint. It often affects both legs even if lameness is only visible in one. There are several known causes of elbow dysplasia:

- **Osteochondritis dissecans:** This is when a piece of cartilage becomes detached or separates from the bone in the joint causing pain and inflammation.
- **Osteochondrosis of medial humeral condyle:** When osteochondrosis occurs on the elbow end of the long bone in the front leg, above the elbow, the bone and cartilage do not develop correctly.
- **Fragmented medial coronoid process and ununited anconeal process:** The coronoid and anconeal processes are small bones which fuse together to form the ulna as the animal matures. (The ulna and the radius are the two long bones which make up the front leg between the wrist and elbow). These terms describe the conditions where those processes either break off from the ulna, or fail to fuse normally.

- **Incongruent elbow:** The bones which form the elbow joint grow at different rates and do not fit together correctly causing the cartilage to become quickly worn, leading to progressive arthritis.

How will my doctor know if my dog has elbow dysplasia?

Your observations of your pet's behavior at home will be instrumental in helping the doctor diagnose your pet. Signs of lameness can start as early as 6 to 10 months of age. Some form of front limb lameness may be seen every day, and can be most obvious when your dog first gets up or starts to walk or run. Your Banfield veterinarian will perform a thorough physical and orthopedic examination as well as X-rays, possibly while your pet is under sedation or anesthesia. In some cases your pet may need to be referred to an orthopedic specialist for further evaluation and/or surgery.

What is the treatment for elbow dysplasia?

The most common treatment is a combination of appropriate exercise, weight control and anti-inflammatory medications. Your Banfield veterinarian may perform routine blood work before prescribing such medications. Timely surgical intervention can help to slow down the inevitable progression of joint damage if it is detected early enough.

For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

Will my pet recover from elbow dysplasia?

The outcome of treatment often depends on how far the disease has progressed by the time therapy begins. If the disease is diagnosed early and treatment is started immediately before degenerative changes have developed, good clinical results (*i.e.*, your dog will not be in pain) are usually seen.

Can elbow dysplasia be prevented?

If you purchase a puppy from a breeder, try to get as much information on the parents of your new puppy as possible. Large breed puppies should always be fed diets specifically formulated for them (unless your veterinarian recommends differently). If your pet is at risk, X-ray images to screen for elbow dysplasia are recommended before your pet reaches 1 year of age.

