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## Osteochondrosis Dissecans

### **What is OCD?**

The ends of bones that form joints are covered with cartilage. Osteochondrosis dissecans (OCD) results when the cartilage in joints thickens and no longer receives adequate nutrition. As a result, the cartilage dies and begins to develop small cracks. This process inflames the joint and causes a flap of cartilage to dislodge. The result is lameness and joint degeneration (arthritis). OCD is seen most frequently in dogs that weigh more than 50 pounds and are less than one year old. It can occur in most joints of the body, but is seen most commonly in the shoulder joints. The cause of OCD is not precisely known, but genetics, rapid growth (especially large breed dogs), and overfeeding may all be risk factors.

### **Diagnosis**

Palpation (examination by touching) of the affected joint by your veterinarian may reveal pain, swelling, and popping or grating noises (crepitus). X-rays are needed to confirm the diagnosis. Because OCD frequently occurs in both front legs, x-rays of both legs are often taken. Sedatives or anesthesia are often needed in order to relax your pet sufficiently to obtain quality x-rays.

### **Treatment**

Medical therapy consists of enforced rest, anti-inflammatory drugs, and pain medications. This therapy may be warranted if the piece of cartilage in the joint is very small. The risk of arthritis increases with medical therapy alone.

Surgery is warranted if the condition worsens or if the flap of cartilage is large. The least invasive and traumatic method of surgery available today is via arthroscopy. With arthroscopy, a tiny camera is inserted into the joint and the cartilage flap is removed without making large incisions into the joint. Arthroscopy is a referral procedure so if this procedure is unavailable, the joint can be opened and the cartilage flap removed via a larger incision.

The risk of arthritis in OCD joints is high; therefore, regardless of your decision on whether to go to surgery or not, it is strongly recommended to start your dog on Glucosamine/Chondroitin supplementation and/or begin Adequan injections. Ask your veterinarian for further information on these drugs.

### **Home Care**

Home care consists of giving all the prescribed medications and restricting your pet's activity to walks on a leash until the lameness resolves. If your pet has had surgery, the leg operated on may be bandaged to prevent swelling and to enforce rest. You should make sure that the bandage remains clean and dry and that your pet's toes do not swell because of a tight bandage. Compare the toes on the bandaged leg with those on the other leg. If swellings occurs or if the bandage is soiled or wet, call your veterinarian. You should also call your veterinarian if your pet stops eating. If you can see your pet's incision, check it daily for swelling and drainage. If either occurs, contact your veterinarian. You may need to return to the hospital for suture removal and bandage changes.