

Legg-Calve-Perthes Disease (LCPD)

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What is Legg-Calve-Perthes Disease?

This disease is caused by an interruption to the blood supply in the hip joint, leading to degeneration of bone in the head of the femur (top part of the thigh bone). The head of the femur is a ball that fits neatly into a socket formed by the pelvic bone, thus creating the hip joint. Following the interruption to blood supply and the death of bone cells, the blood supply is restored and there is new bone growth. Unfortunately, this new growth does not usually maintain the correct ball shape that is required for it to move smoothly in the socket, and the dog will become lame and suffer pain. The disease is most often seen in small dogs.



What are the Signs or Symptoms?

This disease will affect dogs when they are very young, with symptoms presenting themselves anywhere from 3 to 13 months of age. The dog will initially show pain, stiffness and lameness which will gradually worsen over 1 to 3 months, until the pain will become quite severe, and muscle wastage in the affected leg will become obvious. It is usual for the disease to affect one leg only, although it is possible for both back legs to be affected.

How is it Diagnosed?

Pain and lameness in the hip joint of a small-breed dog, along with muscle wastage (atrophy) in the affected leg may indicate a case of Legg-Calve-Perthes disease. This can be confirmed by X-ray and perhaps a bone biopsy.

How is it Treated?

There are really only two methods of treatment for the disease - one involves conservative therapy, and the other involves surgery. If a diagnosis is made before the head of the femur has been deformed too much, then a good resolution may be reached by providing pain relieving medication whilst preventing weight-bearing by placing the affected leg in a sling and reducing exercise. In most cases however, diagnosis is not made until degeneration has proceeded so far that surgery is the only option. The procedure involves the removal of the head and neck of the femur, followed by lots of exercise in the days following surgery. The surgical option is extremely successful, returning dogs to a normal, active and pain-free life.

How can you Avoid Buying a Dog with Legg-Calve-Perthes Disease?

Legg-Calve-Perthes Disease appears to be an inherited trait, although the exact mode of transmission has not yet been identified. However, to reduce the incidence of this disease, it is recommended that affected dogs, along with their parents and siblings should not be used for breeding.