

Osteochondritis Dissecans (OCD)

What is it?

Osteochondritis Dissecans (OCD) is a disease of cartilage that can affect various joints in the dog. Cartilage is found between two bones and acts as a cushion and protects the underlying bone. With OCD, the cartilage is damaged or grows abnormally, which results in pain. The cartilage can loosen and become a flap or an entire piece of cartilage can break off in the joint and become known as “joint mice”.



What causes OCD?

OCD is a disease of large or giant breed dogs. It is more prevalent in males than females and often presents between 4-10 of age. The cause of OCD is considered to be multifactorial. OCD lesions can result from trauma, genetics, rapid growth, hormone imbalances, and nutrition.

Signs & Symptoms

OCD can affect the following joints: shoulder (most common), elbow, knee, or hock. It can present with signs such as a mild limp to non-weight bearing on a limb. It is worse after exercise and improves after periods of rest. Both limbs can be affected at the same time.

Testing & Treatment

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on patient history, physical exam, and radiographs. Lesions of OCD can present in an affected shoulder when the limb is flexed and extended resulting in crying out in pain or reluctance to move. Radiographs should be taken of the affected joints and normal joints. Affected joints reveal a change of the bone underneath the damaged cartilage. If no abnormality is found, radiographs should be taken again in 2-3 weeks.

How is it treated?

There are two ways to treat OCD and they are: conservative medical treatment or surgical removal of the lesion. Conservative treatment involves strict rest for 4-8 weeks, short leash walks and Rimadyl. Surgery is indicated for severe symptoms in cases where radiographs revealed large lesions, and conservative treatments fail. With surgery, the affected joint is opened and the defect (cartilage flap or joint mouse) is removed.

Prevention:

Prevention consists of selected breeding of animals that do not have a history of OCD. Young large and giant breed dogs should avoid strenuous activity. A well-balanced diet that promotes even, sustained growth is recommended.

This information is not meant to be a substitute for veterinary care.

Always follow the instructions provided by your veterinarian.

*Newfoundland Dog Health Fact Sheet produced by the NCA Health & Longevity Committee
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