



Stella the Rottweiler, owned by Lisa



“Stella’s six years old, and was diagnosed with slight hip dysplasia at ten months. She showed slight lameness on a foreleg on and off over a couple of months, but I put this down to muscle strain as it only showed briefly.

“During Christmas Eve 2011 she became very lame on her left foreleg, and, as she was still quite lame two days later, I arranged a visit to the vet. An X-ray revealed that Stella has osteoarthritis in both her elbows, although her lameness had vanished.

“As the lameness resolved so quickly, the vet thought that this could have been due to a strain, so it was pure coincidence that the osteoarthritis was found.

“Stella tends not to show signs of pain, and it’s worrying to think that the osteo had been developing without any obvious symptom, and was only discovered by pure luck. Thankfully, there’s still time to take action to maintain the joints as much as possible, without having to resort to surgery.”

“The vet’s advice was to stay off anti-inflammatories and painkilling drugs due to her young age and lack of lameness, and suggested putting her on a supplement such as Omega 6 instead.”



Max, a six-year-old Westie, owned by Jean



“About 18 months ago Max was showing signs of arthritis in his right hind leg, which the vet thought was due to his putting out his hip by jumping up and down the stairs.

“The vet suggested I took Max along to the arthritis clinic so that the nurse could check him regularly, and I could chat about any worries I had.

“Max was very happy to go there – he got lots of attention. I used to take him once a month and now it’s every two months.

“When his patella (knee cap) was



popping in and out of its groove, Lucy, the nurse, said she thought it would need investigating and sorted out the further checks. (Thankfully Max didn’t need an operation and it popped back in.)

“People laugh when I say we’re off to the arthritis clinic, but it helps so much. Max is such a lovely, affectionate chap, and I want him to get all the help he needs.

“He’s my guardian angel.”



Breeds affected by inflammatory arthritis

Auto-immune conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus, generally affect small and toy dogs of both sexes usually between the ages of two and six years.

Other breeds which can be prone to inflammatory arthritis include West Highland Terriers, Bernese Mountain Dogs, Cocker Spaniels, Boxers, and Beagles. Cross-breeds, such as Labs-Pitbulls, can get it, too.

Doing what comes naturally

When form matches function, arthritis is less likely to occur. Greyhounds, for example, are designed for racing, and rarely get arthritis – or only in old age, if so. However, Border Collies, following their natural herding instincts, can still develop arthritis in hips or elbows, for various reasons.

And Springer Spaniels, a breed developed as a dog-for-all-seasons and every purpose, can suffer from arthritis, perhaps because of too much pressure on joints before they're properly formed.



When Tigger grows up he could earn his keep catching criminals.

Injuries

Although any dog can sustain an injury when involved in even the most basic activities, certain breeds – including Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Mastiffs, Boxers, Poodles, and Rottweilers – are prone to cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) tears in their

knees, often resulting in degenerative joint disease further down the road. The reasons for this injury are many and varied, and genes play a part.

Limited gene pool

Pure-breeds are thought to be more predisposed to arthritis because of in-breeding. While the human population is 'out-bred,' dogs have a much more restricted gene pool. In general, in-breeding is considered bad for genetic diversity, which can result in dogs who are less fit and more susceptible to inherited diseases.

The Metropolitan Police Service Dog Support Unit runs a breeding programme which has had considerable success in screening out inherited (and potentially arthritic) health problems among the breeds it uses for various duties, including German or Belgian Shepherds and Spaniels.

Estimated breeding values

As part of their ongoing genetic research programme, scientists at the Animal Health Trust, a Suffolk-based veterinary charity, have been developing genetic health tests called Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) to assist in selection against joint problems such as hip dysplasia. The use of these EBVs could result in a 20 per cent decrease in HD cases.

EBVs are available for breeds such as Labradors, German Shepherds, Rottweilers, Border Collies, English Setters, Tibetan Terriers, and Rhodesian Ridgebacks via the 'Mate Select' service on the Kennel Club's website.

Hip problems in smaller breeds

Although hip problems are more common in larger pure-breds, and rare in toy or miniature dogs, smaller pedigrees can also be susceptible, as Bobby's case history (overleaf) reveals.

.....
but lives life to the full!

Where form matches function – a greyhound doing what she was designed to do. (Courtesy Retired Greyhound Trust)



although acupressure (using fingertips only) can be practised on a dog by anyone qualified to do so.

BOWEN TECHNIQUE

This is a 'light-touch' soft tissue therapy named after its innovator, Tom Bowen, and adapted around ten years ago for use on dogs.

The therapist gently moves their fingers over muscle, ligaments and tendons on various parts of a dog's body to promote healing and pain relief.

CHIROPRACTIC

Chiropractors believe that regular adjustment of the joints in the spine and other parts of the body can help keep joints more mobile, reduce pain, and slow further damage.

HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy is based on the principle of 'like cures like.'

Where conventional medicine aims to suppress symptoms – for example, by using anti-inflammatories to reduce inflammation – homeopathy provokes the body into healing itself.

Homeopathic remedies like Rhus Tox can help dogs with problems such as stiffness that eases on movement.

MASSAGE

During massage the whole of your dog's body is treated in order to reduce soreness, tension, over-compensation, and old muscular injuries.

By manipulating muscles and restoring their function, massage is a natural way of managing your dog's health, prolonging quality of life and promoting well-being. It can help dogs with hip dysplasia in particular.

OSTEOPATHY

The principles of osteopathy are based on the belief that structure governs function, so normal health and mobility



Millie's getting help with the soft tissue problem in her neck, caused by over-enthusiastic play. (Courtesy Tony Nevin, UKSOAP)

will be determined by the structure of a specific joint.

Osteopathy uses gentle manual techniques and soft tissue massage to improve flexibility and range of movement. The treatment will often