

THE USE OF EARLY OFA PRELIMINARY EVALUATIONS TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF HIP DYSPLASIA

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Nearly everyone who has seriously bred, trained, or competed with a breed at risk for hip dysplasia is aware of how devastating the news can be that a special dog is affected. The impact may be measured in a number of ways, including dashed hopes and dreams, lost monetary investment in the dog, time lost in a breeding or competition program, wasted effort spent training and preparing the dog, the emotional toll on the family, and of course, concern for the dog. Generally all of these factors contribute to a sense of loss, distress, and heartbreak that is all too familiar to those involved with dogs as a hobby, sport, or profession.

While conscientious breeders and owners attempt to lower the incidence of hip dysplasia through careful breeding and management decisions, current tools are imperfect, and the possibility of HD looms as a significant concern in young dogs of many breeds. However, in addition to breeding selection, there is another important way to reduce the overall impact of this disease that is often overlooked.

Early preliminary radiographs, done as young as four months of age, have a proven high degree of accuracy when submitted to OFA for evaluation¹. A study of over 2300 dogs showed that dogs rated "Excellent" on preliminary evaluations received normal evaluations as adults 100% of the time, while dogs rated "Good" on preliminary evaluations received normal evaluations as adults 97.9% of the time. Dogs rated "Fair" on preliminary evaluations were somewhat more likely to become abnormal as adults, but even "Fairs" remained normal as adults 76.9% of the time.

Statistics are similarly impressive for dogs evaluated by OFA as dysplastic on preliminary radiographs, with 97.4% of dogs receiving a preliminary rating of "Moderate" subsequently evaluated as having hip dysplasia as adults; and 84.4% of those receiving a preliminary rating of "Mild" subsequently evaluated as having HD as adults.

This data has tremendously valuable implications for breeders, owners, and trainers, because it demonstrates the reliability of a tool to help guide decisions about the future of young dogs prior to the investment of precious resources. While the diagnosis of hip dysplasia is disappointing at any age, it is certainly easier to recover from plans that must be altered when the dog is four-to-six months of age, rather than when the dog is two years of age. Similarly, owners can feel more confident in developing a dog's full potential when a preliminary radiograph has an OFA evaluation of "Good" or "Excellent." Owners of dogs receiving a "Fair" "Borderline" or "Mild" rating may wish to submit a second preliminary radiograph four-to-six months after the first, because results tend to become more reliable as a dog ages.

There is no substitute for a conscientious breeding program, but hopes and dreams for an up and coming youngster may be more appropriately nurtured when an early preliminary radiograph is used to help guide plans and decisions. And a great deal of distress and heartbreak can be reduced if an owner learns when a dog is very young that he/she may not be a good candidate to meet certain goals.

¹ Corley EA, Keller GC, Lattimer JC, Ellersieck MR. **Reliability of early radiographic evaluations for canine hip dysplasia obtained from the standard ventrodorsal radiographic projection.** J Am Vet Med Assoc. 1997 Nov 1;211(9):1142-6.

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