

Limping: Causes of Lameness in Dogs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

You see that your dog is limping. What could be the cause of this lameness? There are actually many causes of lameness, and your veterinarian will need to examine your dog to discover why he is limping or not using the leg properly.



What are some of the causes of limping in dogs?

- Muscle sprain or strain
- Contusion/bruise
- Tendonitis: inflammation of a tendon
- Myositis: inflammation of the muscle
- Nerve injury
 - To a nerve in the affected limb, e.g., [radial nerve paralysis](#)
 - Spinal cord problem, e.g., [intervertebral disc disease](#)
- Joint disease
 - Dysplasia: [hip](#) or [elbow](#) are the most common
 - [Arthritis/degenerative joint disease](#)
 - [Osteochondritis dissecans \(OCD\)](#)
 - [Luxated patella](#) (knee)
 - [Legg-Perthes Disease](#)
 - [Ruptured cruciate ligament](#) in the knee
 - Luxated joint: the joint is out of its socket, most commonly the hip
 - Infections, e.g., [Lyme disease](#)
- Bone disease
 - Cancer, e.g., [osteosarcoma](#)
 - [Panosteitis](#): inflammation of the long bones in young dogs
 - [Fracture](#)
 - [Hypertrophic osteodystrophy](#): painful bone condition seen in young dogs
- Injury to the foot
 - Broken nail
 - Laceration
 - [Frostbite](#) or burn
 - Diseases of the pad, e.g., lupus
 - Foreign body: piece of metal, plant material, etc.
- Snakebite or other animal bite

How is the cause of the limping diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will do a complete physical exam on your dog to help determine the exact location of the problem. The age and breed of your dog, history of any trauma, onset of the problem (acute or chronic), severity of the lameness, and whether multiple legs are involved are all indicators as to the possible source of the problem.

Special testing may be required in some circumstances. Most commonly this may include one or more of the following:

- Radiographs (x-rays)
- Biopsies
- Blood testing for infectious or immune-related diseases
- Collection and examination of joint fluid

How will the lameness be treated?

Treatment will depend on what the specific diagnosis may be. It may include anything from simple rest to complex surgery. The prognosis (predicted outcome) will be dependent on multiple factors including the cause of the limping, the severity of the condition, and the time lag between the first symptoms and the time of diagnosis and treatment.

