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Perhaps your young dog has occasional stiffness, pain or lameness and you are wondering if it's just 'growing pains.' After all, even though there is no evidence that growth hurts, some children do seem to experience an intermittent aching or throbbing in their legs. Maybe dogs feel the same thing. However, if someone talks about their dog having 'growing pains' they are most likely referring to a specific, medical condition called panosteitis, a recognized, orthopedic disorder that can cause significant pain and lameness in young dogs.

What is panosteitis?

Panosteitis predominantly occurs in young, growing, larger breed dogs like [Dobermans](#), [Great Danes](#), [Retrievers](#) and especially [German Shepherds](#); but it has been documented in dogs as young as two months of age, as old as five years, and as small as a Miniature [Schnauzer](#). One study showed that 20% of dogs were 18 months old at initial presentation. There are many theories about the possible reason that panosteitis occurs, ranging from infectious agents to nutritional causes to genetics (especially given the increased incidence in larger breed dogs), but none of these have been proven. The good news is that panosteitis is a self-limiting condition which means that affected dogs will 'grow out of it' without long-term ill effects. Even so, it can be a particularly painful and debilitating condition in the meantime.

Symptoms of panosteitis

If your dog develops panosteitis, you will typically observe the following:

- A very painful, shifting leg lameness lasting days to weeks with no apparent inciting cause
- Fever
- Depression
- Inappetance
- Lethargy

Between episodes your dog may be perfectly sound (not lame at all) until he or she becomes painful and lame in another leg. This episodic nature and the tendency for the lameness to come and go in different legs can be quite confusing causing owners to question whether or not to seek veterinary advice. Often times just when you convince yourself that your dog needs to be seen by your veterinarian, the lameness resolves itself and puts those plans on hold.

However, there are many other [potential causes for lameness](#) that may, in fact, require timely surgical intervention so it is important to get a diagnosis whenever you have a young dog with significant orthopedic discomfort or lameness. Remember, too, that dogs rarely actually cry when they are in pain. So if your young dog is not moving normally, willingly, and comfortably with or without overt lameness, take him to your veterinarian for an examination.

Diagnosis of panosteitis

Sometimes the diagnosis has to be presumptive based on a process of ruling out other conditions, looking at the age and breed of the dog and considering the clinical history. On physical examination, though, your veterinarian may be able to localize your dog's pain specifically to one of the long bones in the leg (as opposed to the joint discomfort seen in many other disorders). This type of pain is indicative of panosteitis.

In addition, radiographs (X-ray images) may show changes in the bone(s) that are characteristic of panosteitis. Without getting bogged down in technical jargon, a bone with panosteitis can look variably fuzzy or mottled (darker or lighter).

Treatment of panosteitis

Once you determine that your dog has panosteitis, what can you do? Even though the condition is self-limiting, you still need to make every attempt to keep your dog comfortable during episodes of inflammation, pain, and/or fever. Your veterinarian can help you to find appropriate and effective anti-inflammatory pain medications to give your dog relief and can counsel you about any other questions you might have especially if you were considering breeding your dog. Again, no one knows yet for sure how genetics contribute to this disorder, but until we do know, the possibility of passing on a predisposition to developing this painful condition

deserves serious consideration.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.