

July 2010 Newsletter

PennHip – What is it?

PennHip is a service provided by Intermountain Pet Hospital through the University of Pennsylvania to evaluate canine hips (hence “Penn” “hip”). The purpose is to identify dogs that pass on the genes for Hip Dysplasia and removing them from the breeding pool. It also identifies dogs early so that preventative measures can be taken to reduce the incidence of arthritis that develops secondary to Hip Dysplasia. Hip Dysplasia is a congenital developmental disorder of the hips.

The PennHip method evaluates hip joints by what is called the “distraction index”, or DI for short. It is a measurement of “laxity” or “looseness” of the hip joint. This “laxity” describes how far the head of the femur can be separated from the acetabular rim of the pelvis. The greater the laxity, the higher the DI, and the greater the risk for future osteoarthritis of that joint.

PennHip evaluation involves light sedation of your dog. Radiographs are taken with specialized equipment by a veterinarian certified in the PennHip technique. The radiographs are then sent to the University of Pennsylvania for measurement and quantitative evaluation.

PennHip evaluation is reliable for dogs as young as 4 months of age, which allows you as an owner to start arthritis management early in life if needed. It allows dog breeders to know if they have a dog with healthy enough hips for producing the next generation of puppies. This is especially important in larger breeds of dogs which historically have been at greater risk of arthritis due to Hip Dysplasia. It is also not affected significantly by “heat” (estrus) cycles, but can be affected by some of the hormones produced late in canine pregnancy that cause muscle and joint relaxation. Thus, Pennhip is not recommended for pregnant bitches, but can be on any other dog greater than 4 months of age.

At Intermountain Pet Hospital, the PennHip radiograph (X-ray) procedure can be scheduled Mon-Fri. as a “drop-off” appointment for sedation and radiographs. Your dog can typically go home shortly afterward since the sedative is reversible and is often eliminated within 1 hour.