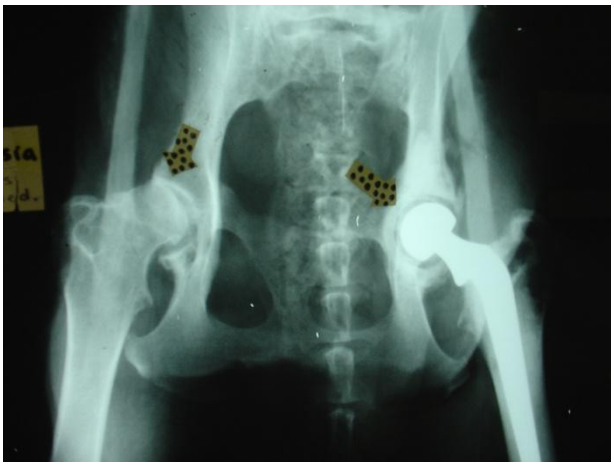
What's Wrong with Jax?

by Allison Kozak

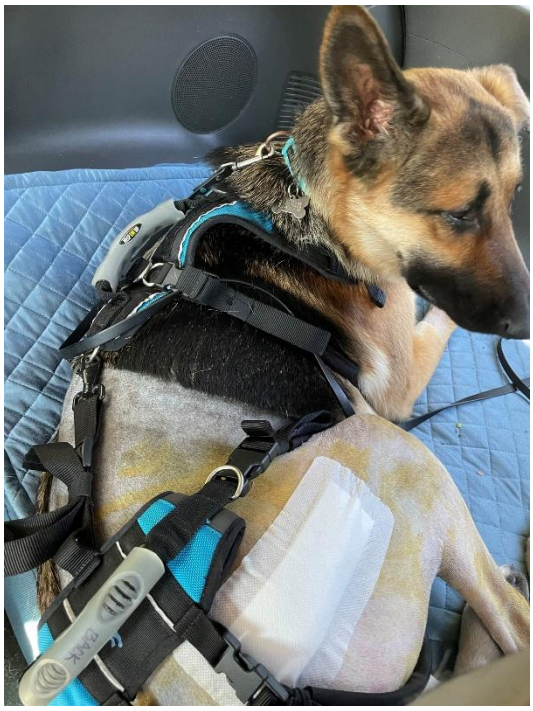
Something was wrong. Jax, a healthy, playful 9-month-old puppy would run around with other dogs for a bit then lie down. If another dog came over to wrestle, Jax would happily indulge, but he'd stay on the ground. After 5 to 10 minutes of rest, he'd be back on his feet… for a while. Then he'd lie down again.

Why was he lying down? He didn't appear to be tuckered out. Could he be in pain for some reason? He didn't wince or show any tenderness anywhere. He did have a weird way of running, though, where he kind of "bunny-hopped" with his rear legs rather than alternating his stride.



Dysplasia in right hip socket (left in image) and artificial hip in left hip socket (right)

That "hop" was a big clue. Jax's vet took some x-rays and they clearly showed hip dysplasia, a common, often inherited, orthopedic condition where the hip ball-and-socket joint does not develop properly, leading to looseness, cartilage wear, pain, and arthritis. It primarily affects large breeds like GSDs.

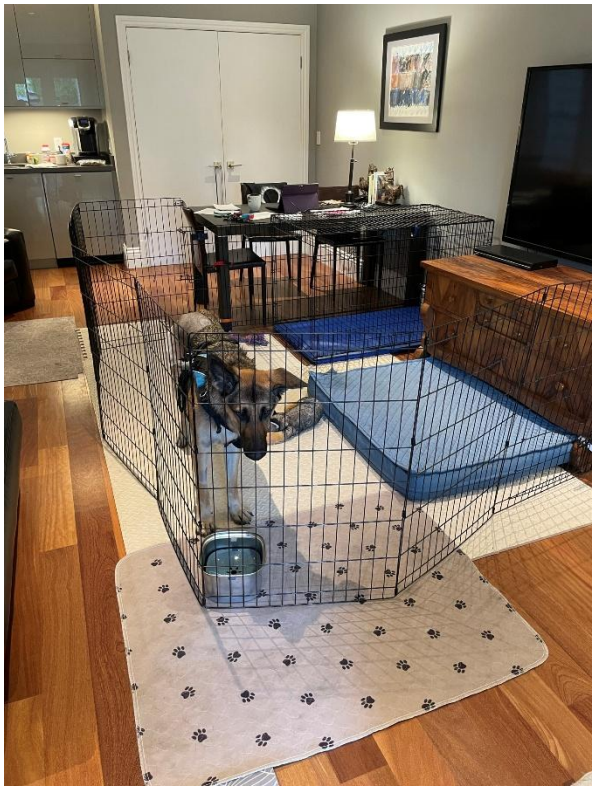


Jax coming home after surgery

Jax wasn't showing any pain, but he was sure feeling it. An orthopedic evaluation showed that Jax already had limited range of motion due to the significant amount of arthritis in both his hip joints. Jax's parents were given the options; first was to decrease his activity and manage his pain with medication & supplements. This was a common choice for dogs that didn't start suffering until late in adulthood. Second was to replace one or both hips, in a procedure similar to that for humans. (In fact, hip replacement surgery was refined in dogs before being made available to humans.)

Given that Jax (by this time just over a year old) had a long life ahead of him, his parents opted for hip replacement, starting first with the worst hip and hoping he could manage with one good hip. They headed to UC Davis, where the orthopedic department has the latest equipment and does hundreds of hip replacements a year.

In the procedure, the top of the femur is removed, including the ball joint, and a new ball joint is attached. A cup is inserted into the socket that perfectly fits the new ball joint. In Jax's case, the incision was about 6" long and he stayed at Davis for 2 days for observation before he was sent home.



Jax in his recovery pen

Now came the hard part – keeping him quiet for months. Jax felt great – all the pain was eliminated! But to let the replacement parts heal into the bone and to let all the disturbed muscle recover, he needed to be wholly inactive. For over a month, he lived exclusively in an 8'x6' pen, going outside only to potty, and always on leash and in a Help-'Em-Up Harness (loaned by GSRNC). Sedatives helped keep him from going stir crazy.

Gradually, walking was introduced, starting with 5 minutes a day for the first week, and adding 5 minutes a week each week after that. After building up to unlimited leash walks, he was allowed limited off-leash play.

Two and a half months later, he was healed enough to play as rough as he wanted. And did he ever! But after a year it was clear that the second hip was going to continue to be a problem and Jax's parents elected to have that replaced as well.

After all that transpired, Jax is still the happy playful boy he's always been. But now he has brand-new, pain-free titanium hips that'll last a lifetime!