2026 UPDATE ON CHINOOK HIP DYSPLASIA

Disclosure. *This report by Dr. Marina Guvakova examines public data from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) database, which may not tell the full story for Chinook dogs. The trends and numbers may miss some Chinooks, especially those that were never tested or reported to OFA. Use this information as a general guide and always check with your vet for the most complete and up-to-date advice about your dog.*

******

What is hip dysplasia in Chinooks?

Chinooks are usually healthy dogs that live about 12 to 15 years. However, they can have some health problems. One is hip dysplasia, a genetic condition affecting how the hip joints fit as the dog grows. If the joints don't line up properly, the cartilage can wear unevenly, leading to pain, reduced mobility, and arthritis as the dog ages.

What are the general symptoms?

- **Mobility issues:** The dog may have trouble getting up, hesitate on stairs, or skip steps. You might also notice a "bunny-hopping" run.
- **Pain or stiffness:** The dog may look uncomfortable, limp, or sit with a back leg in an odd position.
- **Behavioral changes:** The dog might be less active than usual or suddenly lose interest in jumping, running, or playing.

What is the specific manifestation in Chinooks?

- **Asymptomatic resilience:** Breeders and vets have noticed that many Chinooks with hip dysplasia remain active and seem comfortable, often showing few signs of the condition even as they get older.
- **Late-onset degeneration:** Unlike some large breeds that get severe hip problems as puppies, most Chinooks with hip dysplasia do not develop arthritis or lameness until they are older**.**

Prevention and management.

Although genetics play a role, things like fast growth or being overweight can make hip dysplasia worse. Here are some ways to help manage it:

- **Diet and weight control:** Give puppies food made for large breeds to help them grow slowly and steadily. Keeping adult dogs lean helps take stress off their joints.
- **Controlled exercise:** While your puppy is growing, avoid too much rough or high-impact play. When they are grown, focus on gentle, low-impact activities.
- **Veterinary care:** Your vet will check for hip dysplasia using a physical exam and X-rays. Take your Chinook to the vet if you notice stiffness, limping, trouble getting up, unwillingness to jump or climb stairs, or changes in activity. Discuss screening with your vet when your dog is 24 months old, the age at which hip X-rays are recommended for diagnosing or certifying hip issues. Mild cases can often be treated with joint

supplements, anti-inflammatory medication, physical therapy, and weight management. In serious cases, surgery like total hip replacement might be needed.

How is hip dysplasia diagnosed in Chinooks?

Many genes and factors, like diet and exercise, affect hip dysplasia in dogs. **Since no single gene causes it, a regular genetic test can't diagnose it.** Instead, vets use two main methods to assess hips. The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) uses X-rays to assign a hip score based on joint shape and signs of arthritis. PennHIP uses a special X-ray to measure how loose or tight the hip joints are. OFA focuses on overall joint health and is mostly used for breed certification. PennHIP can predict future arthritis risk by measuring joint looseness. If you're considering testing, ask your vet which method suits your dog's age and health and how results might affect care or breeding decisions.

- **Key Differences**

Feature	OFA HIP Evaluation	PennHIP Evaluation
Method	Subjective scoring by 3 radiologists.	Objective mathematical measurements.
Minimum Age	24 months for final certification.	16 weeks for final certification.
Anesthesia	Sedation is recommended but optional.	Deep sedation or anesthesia is required.
X-Ray Positions	1 view: Hip-extended view.	3 views: Extended, compressed, and distracted.
Metrics	7 grades (Excellent to Severe).	Distraction Index (DI) from 0.0 to 1.0.
Public Registry	Online searchable OFA database	Results can be submitted to OFA
Best for	Meeting general screening	Identifying hip dysplasia risk very early in a dog's life

What is the OFA summary on HIP DYSPLASIA in Chinook?

The OFA evaluation is divided into 7 phenotypic categories, grouped into three main categories: Passing (Normal), Borderline, and Failing (Dysplastic).

1. Passing / Normal Grades

Dogs with these grades are considered within normal limits and **receive an official OFA registration number** for breeding registries.

- **Excellent:** Superior conformation. The ball fits deeply and tightly into a well-formed socket with minimal joint space.
- **Good:** Well-formed, congruent hip joints. The ball fits well in the socket and provides good coverage, though slightly less than "Excellent".

- **Fair:** Minor joint irregularities. The hip joint space is slightly wider, the ball may slip slightly out of the socket, or the socket is marginally shallow.

2. Inconclusive Grade

- **Borderline:** There is no clear consensus among radiologists on whether to classify the hip as normal or dysplastic. There is usually joint incongruency, but no definitive arthritic changes are present to diagnose dysplasia. Re-evaluation in 6 months is usually recommended.

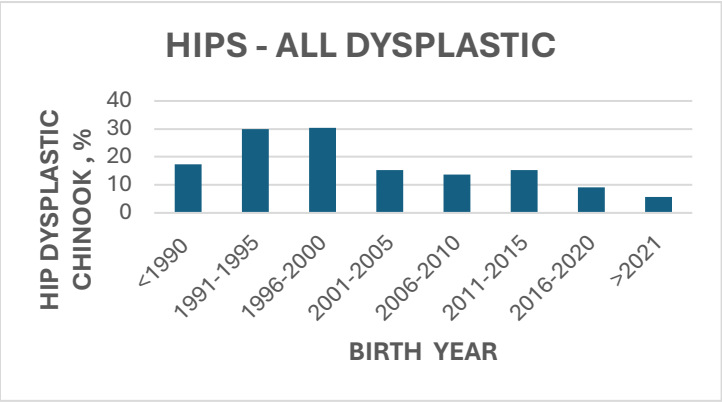
3. Failing / Dysplastic Grades

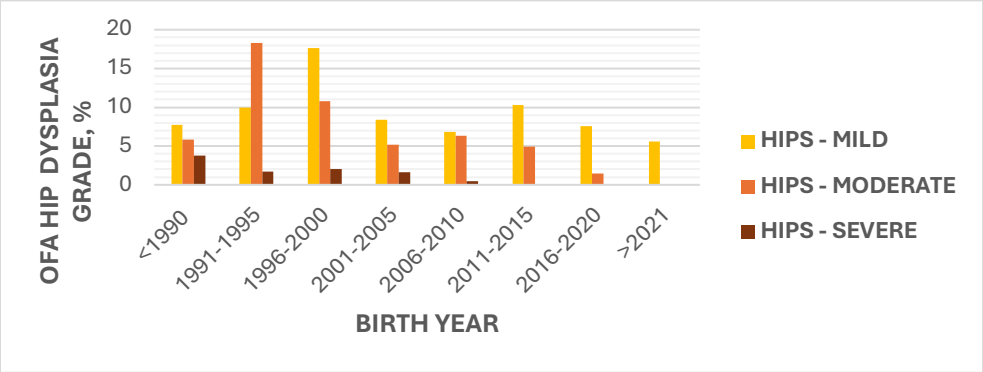
Dogs with these grades show radiographic evidence of hip dysplasia and **will not receive an OFA breed registry number**.

- **Mild:** Significant subluxation is present. The ball is partially out of a shallow socket, increasing joint space.
- **Moderate:** The ball is barely seated in a flat, shallow socket. Flattening of the femoral head and early arthritic changes are typically visible.
- **Severe:** Marked dysplasia is evident. The ball is nearly or completely dislocated from a flattened socket, with significant degenerative joint disease and extensive arthritic changes.

What is the hip dysplasia trend by Chinook birth year?

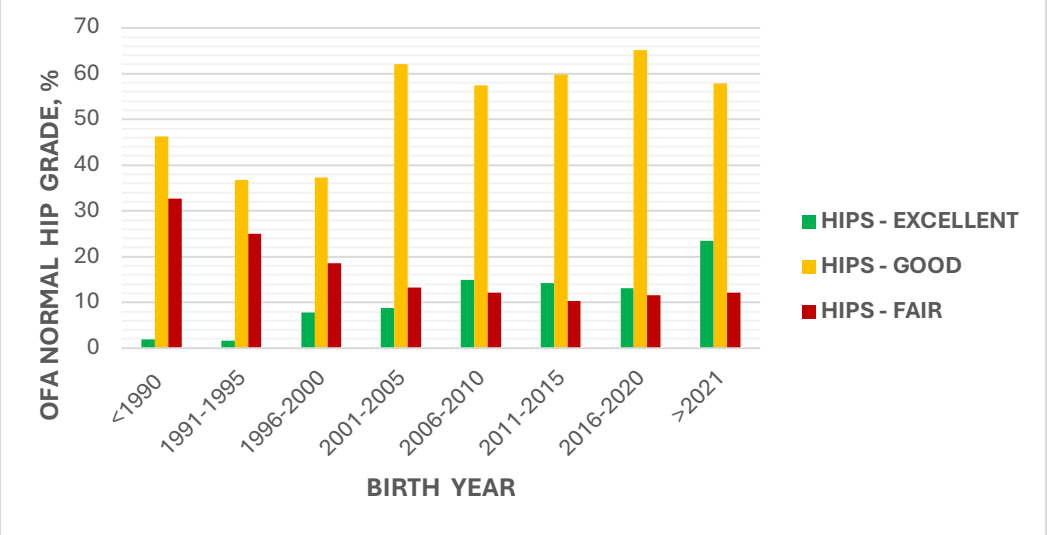
From 1,194 Chinook OFA hip test records between the late 1980s and 2025, 83% passed with normal scores, about 2% were borderline and needed retesting, and 15% were diagnosed with hip dysplasia. Hip dysplasia cases in Chinooks can be grouped by birth year. Up to 30% of reported Chinooks born before 2000 had hip dysplasia. There is a positive trend: fewer cases among dogs born after 2001, and even fewer among those born after 2021. Only about 6% of Chinooks born in 2021 or later had mild dysplasia. There are fewer moderate cases and no reports of severe hip dysplasia in these dogs. Hip dysplasia appears very rare in Chinook puppies born after 2021.





What is the normal hip grade trend by Chinook birth year?

Of the 83.1% of Chinooks with passing hip scores, 12.1% were rated excellent, 56.9% good, and 14.9% fair. Since the early 2000s, more Chinook puppies have received "good" or "excellent" scores. Today, about 80% of Chinooks are rated “excellent” or “good” by OFA. The number with a "fair" score has remained about the same for the last 25 years.



The meaning of an OFA "Fair" hip score in plain language

An OFA "Fair" hip score means the dog has a low to moderate chance of developing arthritis later in life. It is a passing score but shows the radiologist noticed small issues, such as a slightly shallow socket or a loose joint. The dog might not have arthritis at the 24-month X-ray, but the joint could wear out faster over time. Whether arthritis develops depends largely on how you

care for and manage your dog's environment. A sled dog breed like a Chinook can carry more weight and put more stress on those joints.

- **Weight management:** Keeping your Chinook at a healthy weight is the most important thing you can do. Extra weight puts more pressure on the joints and can worsen arthritis faster.
- **Activity levels:** Regular gentle exercise, such as swimming or walking, helps keep muscles around the joint strong. Avoid high-impact activities like jumping or twisting because they can worsen joint looseness.

What an OFA "Fair" hip score means for Chinook owners: A dog with fair hips can still live a normal, active, and pain-free life if you keep them lean and in good shape. If you are looking for a Chinook puppy, ask breeders for the hip scores of both parents and how they were paired. Good questions include: What are the OFA or PennHIP results for the parents? If one parent is rated "fair," was it paired with a dog with "good" or "excellent" hips? Does the breeder follow breed club recommendations for hip testing and pairings? Asking these questions can help you choose a puppy with a lower risk of developing hip dysplasia.

What an OFA "Fair" hip score means for Chinook breeders: Records show that breeders use Chinooks with all hip grades, including "fair." While OFA allows fair-rated dogs for breeding, breed clubs suggest pairing a "fair" dog only with one rated "excellent" or "good" to lower the risk of passing on looser hips.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Currently about 80% of Chinooks are rated "excellent" or "good" by OFA.
- Hip dysplasia is less common in Chinooks born after 2021.
- Most Chinooks with hip dysplasia show few symptoms until older age.
- Weight management and gentle exercise are key to prevention and care.
- Breed a "fair" dog only with one rated "excellent" or "good" to lower the risk of passing on looser hips.

References

(n.d.). Hip Dysplasia. OFA. https://ofa.org/diseases/hip-dysplasia/
(n.d.). Hip Grade Details. OFA. https://ofa.org/diseases/hip-dysplasia/hip-grade-details/
DVM, M. D. (2024). Chinook Dog Breed Health and Care. PetMD. https://www.petmd.com/dog/breeds/chinook
(2023). Basic OFA Breeding Recommendations. OFA. https://ofa.org/basic-ofa-breeding-recommendations/