Von Perthes Disease

Clinical Description
This disease is also known as Legg-Calvé-Perthes or LCP. It affects the hip joint which should be a close fitting, smooth, ball and socket joint with the ball (the femoral head) and the socket (acetabulum) being part of the pelvis. Anything which interferes with the smooth rotation of the femoral head in the acetabulum will cause pain and lameness. One of the reasons that hip replacements are so common in humans is that this joint wears out and is also subject to a number of specific defects. In Von Perthes disease the blood supply to the femoral head becomes restricted causing the decay and disintegration of the bone. It usually affects one hip only and, in Affenpinschers, is seen in far more males than females.

Symptoms
The onset of this disease is age related and lameness can occur at any stage between 3 and 13 months with the peak incidence between five and eight months. The dog will start by favouring one hindleg and, as the femoral head becomes more distorted, will finally carry the affected limb. This progression may take six to eight weeks and is accompanied by muscle wastage and sometimes an apparent shortening of the affected leg.

Diagnosis
This must be by x-rays and usually requires them to be taken from more than one position. Ideally a second opinion from an orthopaedic specialist should be sought as diagnosis of degenerative diseases of the hip joint can be confusing.

Treatment
Left to itself the lameness remains static for one or two months and then there is a gradual improvement as the femoral head remodels itself until the dog is using the limb normally. Conservative treatment throughout this period includes pain-killers and restriction of exercise. This kind of treatment has been successful with a number of Affenpinschers but is not usually recommended by veterinary surgeons who prefer surgery where the femoral head is removed entirely and a build up of muscle compensates for the absence of a hip joint.

Home Management
Always follow veterinary instructions to the letter. After surgery the dog will need to be crated and only exercise briefly on a lead. If you are following a conservative regime some owners have found helpful additions to the daily diet of one Evening Primrose capsule (500mg) plus 250mg vitamin C. Swimming is considered the ideal exercise for dogs with orthopaedic problems.

Breeding
It is believed that Von Perthes is an inherited condition but the exact mode of inheritance is not clear. The Affenpinscher Club is trying to organise some pedigree research on this issue. Please do not breed from any animal with this condition and it would be nice if we could take the next step and not repeat the mating that produced the affected dog.

Further Reading
Monkey Business Nos. 7, 8 and 31.
Steve Dean in Dog World 24.9.93

The Affenpinscher Club is interested in hearing of any dogs who have had this condition diagnosed.