



## What Is OCD?

Osteochondritis dissecans (OCD) is a developmental orthopedic disease that affects young horses, causing loose cartilage or bone fragments within the joint. Lesions most commonly occur in the hock, stifle, and front and hind fetlock joints, where they cause inflammation and discomfort.

OCD is most prevalent in warmbloods and Standardbreds and slightly less prevalent in Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, and Arabians.



## Clinical Signs

The primary sign of OCD is excessive joint fluid accumulation (effusion), which typically appears in young horses, particularly late weanlings and early yearlings. Affected horses don't always exhibit lameness, making early detection difficult. In some cases, OCD is only identified during routine pre-sale radiographs or pre-purchase examinations.

Signs to watch for include:

- Swelling in one or more joints
- Mild to moderate lameness (though

some horses might not show lameness)

- Stiffness or reluctance to move freely
- Difficulty in training or performing athletic activities



## Diagnosis

Veterinarians diagnose OCD through a combination of clinical examination and imaging. Radiographs are the primary diagnostic tool for revealing bone fragments or cartilage defects. In some cases, your veterinarian might recommend advanced imaging techniques like ultrasound or MRI to assess joint health further. Early detection is key to managing OCD effectively and ensuring long-term joint health.



## Treatment and Management

The treatment approach for OCD depends on the severity of the lesion and the horse's intended use.

- Surgical Intervention: Arthroscopic surgery is the most common and effective treatment for OCD. During this minimally invasive procedure, the

veterinarian removes loose cartilage or bone fragments and smooths the affected area. Horses typically recover well, with a high likelihood of returning to full athletic function.

- Conservative Management: If the OCD lesion is small and not causing clinical signs, your veterinarian might recommend a conservative approach, including rest, controlled exercise, and joint-support supplements.



## When to Call Your Vet

If you notice any signs of joint swelling, lameness, or stiffness in your young horse, contact your veterinarian for an evaluation. Early detection and treatment of OCD can significantly improve your horse's long-term joint health and athletic potential. If your horse is diagnosed with OCD, your veterinarian will help determine the best course of action based on the location and severity of the lesion.