

A Stitch in Time Saves Nine

By Rodger Barr, DVM

Revised Spring 2015

Preventive medicine is the order of the day when dealing with greyhound medicine and surgery. From the time greyhounds are puppies, the emphasis is on prevention. Regular worming programs, which can be as often as every two to three weeks, are aimed at preventing intestinal parasites. Vaccination programs, starting as early as three weeks of age, are aimed at preventing viral infections. Until they reach three to four months of age, these are the major issues young developing greyhounds face.

At three to four months, what had been harmless play can now develop into wounds, lacerations, and major injury, and even, in rare cases, death. The puppies have always been competitive, but now their teeth and strength are capable of doing significant damage. Some kennels begin to separate litters at this point, and the animals may begin to wear muzzles, not because they are mean, but because they are highly competitive. The only ways greyhound pups have to interact with each other are with their legs and their mouths. As young greyhounds begin to exceed their bodies' resiliency levels, they can break bones by sheer speed alone. At this age, some fractures can be repaired and a racing career still salvaged—but not all.

Toe injuries are totally dependent on the type of surface used in the runs. Clay surfaces can provide enough resistance to break or dislocate toes. Sand surfaces generally discourage that kind of injury, but sand, because of its low resistance to movement, can predispose dogs to major hock fractures later in life. Such fractures occur due to reduced bone density (bone hardness), which is directly related to the amount of impact a bone experiences over the course of time.

Life is pretty happy-go-lucky for young greyhounds. Play is the order of the day, and the major activity is challenging dogs in adjacent runs to a race to the end of the fence line and back. (A word of advice: Whatever you do, keep your tail and ears on your own side of the fence!)

Training is a pretty innocuous time. There may be an occasional fractured quarter bone (metatarsal or metacarpal), but for the most part, major injuries are not common. These dogs truly love what they do. They have no jockeys on their backs encouraging them on, so their competitiveness is what fuels them.

As your pets age, modification of their activities is a critical part of preventing age-related injuries. Just as you or I make changes in our activities due to the aging process, so must we adjust our dogs' activities. Leash restrictions outdoors will

prevent a great deal of pain and suffering, from back problems to toe injuries and on and on. It's not as much fun as watching them stretch out and fly around the yard, but the potentially devastating injuries are reduced to almost zero. It is the best advice I will ever give!