

Arthritis – What can I do to help my pet

Arthritis means inflammation of a joint, and is commonly encountered in the dog and cat. Arthritis can affect one or more joints. Any joint can be affected, but the hip, knee, elbow and shoulder joints are most commonly affected.

With arthritis, the cartilage degenerates; the fluid is less lubricating, and with time, new depositions of bone develop around the joint. These changes lead to joint pain, stiffness, swelling and a limitation in the movement of the bones, ultimately leading to a decline in quality of life.

The most common signs seen vary but may include one or more of the following:

- reluctance to jump, walk, climb stairs, or play
- limping
- lagging behind on walks
- difficulty rising from a rest position
- stiffness after rest that improves with gentle movement
- licking of affected joints
- a personality change



What can you do to help?

Arthritis is not a curable condition, but the pain, discomfort and movement difficulties can be effectively controlled and managed.

Weight control - the joints of an overweight animal must bear greater loads, adding to the pain and immobility of arthritis. Weight loss can result in significant pain relief. It doesn't make sense to make a 30 kg joint support a 40 kg body!



Exercise regulation - exercise should be in moderation. Gentle, regular walks help maintain joint mobility and maintain muscle tone and strength. Overexercise may put excessive strain on joints. Periods of rest are advisable during acute episodes of pain.

Environmental changes

Make sure your pet has a warm bed away from draughts. The bed should be padded. Also, try to reduce the number of stairs, or jumping heights your pet must cope with.



Medical therapy

There are many different medications available.

- **Non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs** (NSAID's), such as *Metacam, Rimadyl, Previcox*. These drugs provide excellent pain relief and reduce inflammation. They can be used in the acute cases, or in longer term chronic cases. The doses of these drugs can often be reduced over time to achieve the minimally effective dose. Baseline blood tests should be evaluated and monitored for animals on long term therapy.

NSAID's may occasionally cause stomach upsets, and should be discontinued if any vomiting, diarrhoea or loss of appetite occurs. They are best given with food, and may interact with other drugs. Do NOT give human pain-killers to your dog or cat without veterinary advice, as they can be very dangerous. Do not give NSAIDS if your dog is on cortisone medication.

- **Cartrophen** is a cartilage modifying drug, which can decrease the rate of cartilage breakdown, increase the viscosity of joint fluid and has anti-inflammatory activity. Cartrophen is usually given as a course of four injections given 5-7 days apart, and can be repeated as necessary.
- **J/D Diet Hills**- proven mobility support, *J/D diet* is an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids. It also has controlled calorie content with added L carnitine to help maintain a healthy weight.
- **Glucosamine and chondroitin sulphate, as nutritional supplements** eg. *Sasha's Blend, Joint Guard* and *Glyde*. These are key nutrients that act as the building blocks of cartilage, as well as blocking the enzymes that break down cartilage.
- **Fish oils** – provide omega-3 fatty acids that help reduce inflammation. Fish oils are also useful in dogs with allergies, kidney disease, heart disease and cancer.
- **Pain relief medicines** may also be used in selected cases to make your pet more comfortable.



Surgical therapy

Surgery may have an important role in the prevention or management of arthritic disease. Examples include:

- Repair of an unstable cruciate ligament
- Early intervention for dogs with hip dysplasia
- Correction of luxating patellas

