

Arthritis

What is arthritis?

Arthritis/Osteoarthritis/Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD) is a complex condition involving inflammation and degeneration of one or more joints. 80% of dogs over the age of 8 years old have arthritis in one or more joints. It isn't just a disease found in older dogs, as dogs of less than 1 year old can also have arthritis. An arthritic joint can cause immense pain, especially in the morning and during cold weather, so keep your eyes open for the signs.

There is no single cause of OA. There are many factors involved, including:

- Body conformation (how a dog is built)
- Body condition/weight (being overweight)
- Abnormal joint development (e.g. canine hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia)
- Activity history
- Injury history (e.g. past fracture, muscle injury, joint infection and so forth)
- Orthopaedic surgery
- Nutritional history (e.g. previous malnutrition/poor nutrition)

Clinical signs:

- Becomes less active
- Difficulty getting up and down
- Walking stiffly or limps in one or more legs
- Reluctance to go up and/or down stairs or to jump up or down (onto/off furniture or into/out of a vehicle)
- Stiff, swollen, or sore joints
- Reluctance to be touched on some parts of the body
- Unexpected aggression towards other dogs or towards humans

Diagnosis

Arthritis is diagnosed through a combination of a physical examination, and additional diagnostics including x-rays or other imaging technology. *While arthritis cannot be diagnosed with blood tests, bloodwork may be needed to rule out other causes of the dog's clinical signs, as a pre-anesthetic screen to check organ function, especially if x-rays need to be taken under sedation or evaluate the dog for adverse effects of medications used to treat arthritis.*

If your dog doesn't receive regular exams, the arthritis may already be advanced when you notice it.

Normal knee

Arthritic knee



Treatment options

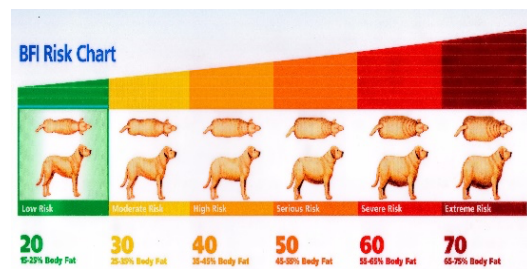
Unfortunately, there is no "magic quick fix" for treating arthritis. In fact, once arthritis is established, we are not so much **treating** it as **managing** it because arthritis is not a disease that can be cured.

Arthritis is a very complex disease process, so managing it is a fairly complex process and we get the best results from combining multiple modalities.

Treatment

1. Weight control

By far the most critical aspect of OA management. Fat produces inflammatory mediators that perpetuate the inflammation process and increased body weight puts additional force on the joints, causing pronounced OA changes and can ultimately be painful with limited mobility. In an ideal body weight, you should be able to: 1) feel your dog's ribs but not see them; 2) see an hour-glass figure when viewed from above; 3) see a tucked up belly when viewed from the side.



2. Pain medications

Analgesics are used to lessen the pain. Carprofen (Rimadyl), Deramaxx or Meloxicam are NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), prescription drugs designed specifically for arthritis in dogs. Generally, these medications are used on a daily dosage; specific therapies are individually tailored to each dog's needs.

Other over-the-counter pain medications (e.g., Panadol, Advil, etc.) should NOT be used without consultation with your vet, as they may be toxic to your pet and can lead to an upset stomach and/or bleeding problems. For dogs who cannot tolerate NSAIDs or for which NSAIDs alone do not provide enough pain relief, other analgesics (e.g., Tramadol, gabapentin etc) may be used.

Some patients may need injections directly into the joint. These newer treatments range from steroid to stem cell injections.

Additional treatments may include Chondroprotectives (Pentosan polyphosphate/Cartrophen) injections have anti-inflammatory and cartilage protective properties.

3. Nutraceuticals/Supplements

When a nutritional supplement has medicinal effects, it is called a "nutraceutical."

Supplements, such as omega fatty acids, glucosamine, chondroitin sulfates, and methylsulfonylmethane (MSM), have become popular adjunct treatments for arthritis pain in pets. There are many of these products on the market, many labelled for use with joint disease. Be sure to ask your veterinarian about the scientific data that supports nutraceuticals.

4. Nutrition

Normalizing body condition/weight is critical, so your veterinarian will prescribe a specific food to accomplish this goal. There is now a nutrient profile that can support the joints while helping to normalize body weight and condition such as Hills J/d or Hills Metabolic and Mobility.



5. Exercise / Physical medicine

Dogs are often terrible at self-control and will become too excited and run/swim for hours and regret the decision the next day, it is thus important to formulate an exercise plan and stick to it to prevent injury and pain.

High-impact activities such as running or jumping should be limited as they can cause more inflammation and pain. These activities should be replaced with more controlled activity like leash walks or hydrotherapy. Low impact consistent exercise is good to help build the muscles around the joints and will eventually promote joint stability (if discussed with your vet).

Physical rehabilitation is a new field and can include therapeutic LASER, therapeutic exercise, joint mobilization, medical acupuncture and hydrotherapy using an underwater treadmill

6. Soft bedding

Helps ease the strain on sore joints and raises them off the cold ground

Summary

Communication is key to long-term treatment success. Every patient is different and we can tailor specific treatment plans to help your pet. For more information or any queries please contact one of our veterinarians

