



ARTHRITIS

Many animals are affected by arthritis, either early in life due to developmental diseases or later in life as part of the aging process. There's a lot of information and options in treating arthritis. Discuss any treatments with your veterinarian to help form the appropriate program for your pet.

Home Treatments

Exercise

Regular physical activity can often help to increase range of motion and prevent obesity. However, exercise needs to be appropriate to your pet and often not as vigorous as you might think. Leash walking is preferred over games of fetch or tug of war where the pet has sudden, quick changes in direction with lots of force placed on their joints. Shorter, more frequent walks are also more appropriate than a single 5 kilometre walk. A general rule is that 20 minutes is often about all we can ask the average arthritic dog to walk without feeling it the next day. Swimming is also an excellent activity. It burns a lot of calories while allowing animals to really extend their range of motion. It also puts virtually no strain on most joints! Hydrotherapy is beneficial as well, so swimming is a good way to combine hydrotherapy with exercise.

Weight Control

Arthritis is a disease caused by abnormal stresses on joints. Those stresses are increased when the animal's weight is excess. Studies have shown that arthritic animals with appropriate body weight had a gait (walking posture) similar to those that were overweight but on particular pain medications. Thus, we'd prefer that arthritic animals be on the thinner side, rather than the heavy side. Your veterinarian or veterinary nurse can show you how to do a Body Condition Score (BCS) on your pet to determine if they are at, above, or below their ideal weight. They can also make suggestions on diet and feeding practices to reach your goal.

Bedding

A soft, yet supportive, sleeping surface is just as important to an arthritic dog as it is to a human with a bad back. A relatively firm foam mattress is often best. These can be covered in vinyl in case of fleas or incontinence accidents. Hessian bag slings and bean bags provide a lot of support, but don't have much cushion. Consider placing a folded-up quilt on top of such beds. Your pet may not choose to sleep on their new bed, but with time they may become more interested. Also make sure that the bed is warm during the cooler winter evenings.

Pets And Their People

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Rest When Necessary

Sometimes pets just do too much and become painful. They can actually strain already arthritic joint capsules and ligaments, which add insult to injury. During this time, rest (and often NSAIDs, see below) are often needed. Don't be afraid to restrict your pet's activity if they become acutely lame. If the problem doesn't resolve in a few days, it's best to have your pet examined by your veterinarian.

Veterinary Treatments

Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

These medications work chemically on the inflammatory pathways inside the joint to slow down the process of damage, and also relieve pain. Although similar, in theory, to human NSAIDs, it is important to NEVER give your pet a human drug without discussing it with your veterinarian. Some human medications can cause fatal drug reactions in animals. Pets require specialised medications that must be prescribed by your veterinarian. Each dose of these medications usually last about 24 hours, so can be given daily for chronic pain, or on an as-needed basis for infrequent strains after a bit too much exercise.

Glucosamine and Chondroitin Sulfate

These chemicals are similar to those used in humans with arthritis. They are given daily either as food supplements or are directly incorporated in the food. Cartilage is eroded from the surfaces of joints during arthritic change. That leaves bone rubbing against bone—ouch! Imagine a car without shock absorbers. Glucosamine and chondroitin are basically chemical precursors to cartilage. We can never

rebuild the beautiful cartilage we are born with, but this fibrous cartilage we regenerate is certainly a lot better than nothing. Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate also help reduce degradation of existing cartilage.

Pentosan (Zydax) Injections

During arthritic change, joints often dry up and become very creaky causing pain. Pentosan is the precursor to joint fluid, and it also reduces the degradation of existing cartilage. We give injections under the skin, not in the joint affected and is a nice treatment for animals with multiple arthritic joints. The injections are given 4 times, one week apart. Depending on severity of disease, we often get six months of relief for moderately or seasonally affected pets. Owners are sometimes hesitant about such regular injections, dogs rarely even know they were just stuck with a needle and begin to enjoy their regular visits.

Free Radical Scavengers (ex: Omega 3 fatty acids)

Anti-oxidants that help mop up chemical compounds called free radicals are anti-inflammatory. They can be supplemented on an existing diet, but there are diets on the market with them already built-in. Omega-3s and similar agents are also great for skin and increase shine and softness in haircoats. Cardiologists also recommend free radical scavengers for heart disease, too! These compounds are often marine oils and are certainly a new phase in nutritional medicine.

Advanced Integrated Pain Management

As in humans, we realise that chronic pain, particularly in elderly animals with other medical issues, requires a coordinated approach with additional

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classes of medication and manual therapies. Massage, muscular trigger point releases, acupuncture, and physio/rehab can all be used in veterinary patients, too. Similarly, medications from human chronic pain clinics are being integrated into the care of our veterinary patients. Our staff has advanced training in these fields and look forward to providing a comprehensive, quality care plan for your pet.

Again, please contact your veterinary clinic for a customised arthritis plan. We can help you with appropriate foods and feeding, as well as exercise. We can also recommend the most appropriate medical approach to pain relief and joint health. These recommendations are tailored to your pet's needs, your lifestyle, and financial concerns you may have. We can work with you to ease your pet's pain and improve their quality of life.

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