

Caring for your Pet with Osteoarthritis

Contact Information

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What is Arthritis?

Osteoarthritis, more commonly known as arthritis, is a progressively worsening inflammation of the joint caused by the deterioration of cartilage. In a healthy joint, cartilage acts as a cushion to allow the joint to move smoothly through its full range of motion. Degenerative joint disease causes wearing of the cartilage and new bone to form so joints no longer move smoothly. This leads to pain and stiffness.

How is Osteoarthritis diagnosed?

Osteoarthritis may be suspected from the signs your pet is showing at home such as: intermittent lameness, reduced willingness to exercise and stiffness when getting up. There may also be a history of previous injury to a joint, which makes your pet very likely to suffer with arthritis at some point in their life. There are many ways to diagnose arthritis including:

- Palpation/manipulation – a physical hands-on assessment of the affected joint. It can be felt when they are thickened/inflamed and pressure on the joint will often lead to flinching due to pain. We will also assess the degree to which the joint can bend.
- Imaging – in the early stages of the disease x-rays may show increased volumes of joint fluid. Roughening and irregularities are present on the bone surfaces. Arthroscopy may occasionally be used to look inside the joint using a special camera but only in cases where a flap of diseased cartilage or a bone fragment are causing additional pain and lameness. CT can also be used to show an arthritic problem in more detail than an x-ray.

FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENT

Please let us know if you are unable to attend the above appointment and we will arrange an alternative day/time.

PATIENT DETAILS

Name of patient:

How is Osteoarthritis treated?

Arthritis is a degenerative joint disease which can never be cured. Once arthritis has been diagnosed then there are three main considerations for treatment:

1. Pain relief – osteoarthritis is a painful condition, as a result of the inflammation which irregular cartilage and new bone causes in the surrounding tissues. This is manifested as behavioural changes – dogs becoming withdrawn and seeming “old”. Pain relief, primarily through the use of anti-inflammatory medication, is necessary to control both the pain in the joints and that sensed by the brain and spinal cord. As arthritis progresses, additional anti inflammatory + pain medication can be useful so many pets end up taking more than one treatment to stay happy.
2. Weight control – obese dogs are more likely to develop arthritis and arthritic dogs are more likely to become obese (through inactivity). Excess weight worsens arthritis, so slimming down a fat dog will both improve the dog's comfort and reduce ongoing joint damage.
3. Exercise control – exercise is good for joints, so controlled lead walking is generally good. Exercise little and often is best as this helps maintain muscle tone and joint flexibility. Sudden stop-start off-lead exercise, an example being ball chasing, can worsen pain from arthritis. You may find your pet takes a little longer to get up in the morning the day following strenuous exercise, so short frequent walks are best.

Hydrotherapy and physiotherapy are excellent methods of promoting muscle condition. Joint supplements are available also, but they should always be used in conjunction with the appropriate treatment as there is little scientific evidence that they help. Regular veterinary assessment of arthritic patients is important so that your vet can choose the right treatment for your pet. If your pet is on lifelong medication, we will need to clinically assess their health every 6 months to abide by prescribing laws in order to continue providing you with your pets medication.