

Living with Arthritis

The signs of arthritis in our pets often creep up so slowly we may find it hard to spot them at first. We often contribute it to our pet "just getting older". Maybe your dog takes longer to get going in the morning, or your cat just doesn't jump onto higher places like she used to.

Diagnosing Arthritis

The first step is to correctly diagnose your pet's condition. Finding out where the arthritis is located and how severe the problem is becomes the first step toward an appropriate treatment plan. This requires at least a physical examination and X-rays by your veterinarian.

Osteoarthritis, also called degenerative joint disease, can affect any joint in the body-it is most common in weight bearing joints such as the shoulders, hips, elbows, knees and ankles. Arthritis can also affect their back/spine creating discomfort.

Common Symptoms

Animals can't readily communicate their pain to us in our language. We have to interpret their behavior and their response to pain.

Animals with arthritis might avoid the activities that they used to enjoy such as jumping on furniture or into the car, may have a harder time moving around or getting comfortable. They might have trouble getting up from a lying position or they may limp on one or more legs. They may walk or run with an altered gait, often resisting movements that require full extension or flexion

of their legs.

Other symptoms may be more vague, such as being upset when touched or they become depressed. They may have less of an appetite or just seem grumpy.

Who is Affected?

Middle-age to geriatric, large breed dogs are most commonly affected with osteoarthritis. It is most easily seen in large breed dogs because of the weight their frame carries, but cats and smaller dogs are often affected as well. In fact, almost all elderly dogs and cats suffer from degenerative joint disease to some degree.

What happens?

Over time, the cartilage that cushions joints wears down and the bones start rubbing against each other. As the condition progresses, the friction can wear down and damage the bones themselves.

Treating Osteoarthritis

Although there is no cure for osteoarthritis, it can be well managed with appropriate medical treatment, environmental changes, diet and exercise.

Treatment for Arthritis

Options for treatment can depend on the severity of the arthritis and which joint(s) are involved.

Changing the environment can help an animal deal with their physical challenges easier.

- 1 Keep litter boxes, food and water dishes at a comfortable height and easily accessible on a non-slip surface.
- 2 Supply a padded surface to cushion your pet's joints while he sits or sleeps. Place the bedding in a warm, draft-free location.

- 3 Make slippery surfaces like wood or linoleum floors safer with non-skid runners.
- 4 Ramps can help animals make it up and down stairs or off the porch or car.

Exercise can go a long way toward making your pet more comfortable. Light activity can strengthen muscles, keep ligaments and tendons flexible, prevent obesity and helps blood circulate to stiff joints. Do not overdo with strenuous exercise or you can cause more damage to their joints.

Diet: Obesity makes arthritis hard to manage. It increases the stress on their joints and makes it harder for them to move.

Medical Treatments such as NSAID's (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) include Aspirin, Etogesic or Deramaxx. They can reduce pain and inflammation in your pet's joints, allowing them to be more comfortable.

Adequan is a PSGAG that helps to increase joint fluid and repair cartilage in damaged joints. This method can be very effective for managing arthritis.

Complementary therapies such as acupuncture and animal chiropractic can help reduce your pet's pain and help the body heal.

Nutritional supplements such as Glucosamine, MSM, Chondroitin sulfate etc. can help your pet's joints. There are many products available and the right one will vary with each individual pet's condition.

Surgery is an option for some cases of arthritis. The joint may be replaced or reconstructed to give more stability or to remove chipped or damaged bone.

Please consult with a veterinarian for the best option(s) for you pet's condition.