

OSTEOARTHRITIS IN DOGS

Osteoarthritis is inflammation of the bones and joints. There are very few older dogs that do not suffer from degenerative joint disease, which becomes inflamed. Dogs are now living longer, healthier lives, and are often very active even in their later years. This means wear and tear on all joints and progressive pain and discomfort. As they get older they find it more difficult to stand up, become slower on walks, and they may limp. Some animals will 'warm out of it' in warmer weather, but others remain lame. Often owners mistake osteoarthritis for general old age changes and do not realise the pain their animal is in.

In a small number of cases younger dogs can acquire osteoarthritis. This may be due to injury or a congenital problem.

What can you do?

There is no cure for osteoarthritis. Stability of the joint is important, so if there is surgery available to stabilise an injured or abnormal joint, we will recommend this. Sometimes even with repair, osteoarthritis occurs anyway. For osteoarthritis associated with wear and tear on an elderly joint, there is no surgery available.

Below are some options for keeping your pets pain-free.

Nutriceuticals

These are components of food that have a pharmaceutical effect. That is, they are additives to the animal's diet that may aid in reducing inflammation in the joints. Glucosamine, chondroitin sulphate and green lipped mussel powder are all products that are available for human and animal use. As of yet there is no solid evidence that they benefit arthritic patients. However we recommend GLYDE powder or chews as this is the only product that contains high levels of all three supplements.

Omega 3 essential fatty acids (e.g. Fish oil) have a proven effect on inflammation in the joint and are also known to prevent progression of arthritis. The dose is 50–100mg/kg/day i.e. a small dog could have a 500mg capsule once a day, whilst a large dog could have a 1000mg capsule (or two).

Pharmaceuticals

Pentosan Polysulphate ("Zydax") is an injectable drug that helps reduce pain and inflammation locally in the joints. A course of injections involves one, once a week for four weeks. If this is successful, the injections can be continued indefinitely monthly to three monthly. This is an extremely safe drug to use with very minimal side effects.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) are also available and are used to reduce inflammation and pain systemically. Many older dogs end up on these drugs indefinitely as it becomes the only way to provide adequate pain relief. However, because of their systemic side effects such as kidney damage and gut ulceration, they should be avoided until absolutely necessary. Kidney function and general health should be checked regularly if these drugs are in use and the lowest dose possible given. Daily or monthly tableting is available.

Opioid-like pain relief can also be provided in the form of a synthetic analogue called 'Tramadol.' This does not have anti-inflammatory effects but rather provides general pain relief. It is often used in conjunction with the above medications or when NSAIDs cannot be used due to concurrent disease.

Exercise

Exercise is crucial in making sure all joints regular carry out their full range of motion. Controlled exercise such as walks on leads or treadmills means you can make sure your dog is not working too hard. Swimming is an excellent non-weight bearing activity for arthritic patients.

Alternative therapies

Acupuncture and physiotherapy are now available for our pets. Your GP vet can provide you with more information.

Diet

Obesity is a common problem associated with arthritic dogs and only leads to further stresses on the joints. Keeping your dog slim and monitoring its diet will ease the pressure on joints and thus the associated pain. There are many commercial prescription diets available for arthritis such as Science Diet J/d which contain high levels of omega 3 fatty acids and other supplements. Alternatively a weight loss diet may be used with added supplements.

Written by P Honson 2017