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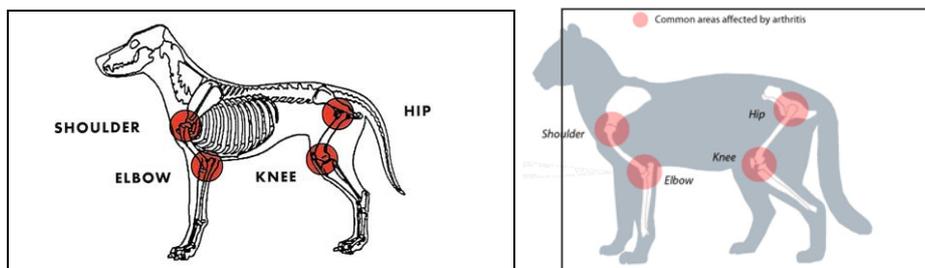


ARTHRITIS AND YOUR PETS

Arthritis is a gradual degenerative joint disease where the body's joints become worn out, stiff and painful. It is a common condition seen particularly in aged cats and dogs, but may affect pets of all ages and breeds. It often goes unnoticed at first as symptoms can develop slowly over time. Joints in the body depend on a layer of cartilage acting as a cushion and providing a smooth surface for bones to move freely over each other. Fluid in the joints helps this process and acts as a lubricant. With arthritis there is deterioration in the cartilage and the fluid so that the movement of the bones is less smooth and causes pain.

Why does arthritis develop?

Arthritis can develop for a number of different reasons. Wear and tear associated with older age is the most common reason for arthritis. Breed, weight, injuries, and other disorders can all contribute. Large breed dogs can be more susceptible to joint problems. Pets who are working, athletic or overweight may have more stress on their joints. Trauma from an accident involving a joint can cause it to deteriorate. Conditions like hip dysplasia can lead to joint health deteriorating. Pets with disorders that affect collagen or cartilage are also at higher risk (such as cushing's disease, diabetes, hypothyroidism, and prolonged steroid treatment).



Common positions for arthritis include the hips, shoulders, knees, and elbows

Signs you may see in your pet

- Stiffness after getting up from rest, especially in the morning
- Reluctance to go on walks, run and play
- Reluctance to jump in the car, onto your lap, go up stairs etc.
- Limping
- Personality change – irritable/aggressive
- Reluctance to be patted on limbs, back, hips
- Vocalising/yelping in pain
- Swelling of joints
- Licking excessively/chewing at joints
- Cats may have difficulty grooming

How can you find out if your pet has arthritis?

Examination of your pet's musculoskeletal system by a vet can help determine if they have developed arthritis. X-rays are often required to help confirm a diagnosis of arthritis. X-rays may show narrowing of joint spaces, extra bone deposited around the joint, and even degeneration of joint cartilage.

What can be done to help my pet?

Although arthritis is unable to be cured medically, there are many things that can be done to make your pet's life more comfortable. Medical treatment usually relies upon a combination of methods including pain relief and products that provide nutrition and support to the joints.

Pain relief:

- **NSAIDs – (Non Steroidal Anti-inflammatories)** are medications that relieve pain and inflammation. There is a range of medications available, and many of the newer medications enable safe long-term use with minimal side effects. However blood tests are still recommended prior to starting and then once every 2-6 months to monitor liver and kidney function.
- **Pentosan** polysulfate is a medication which helps actively repair and maintain joints. It encourages new cartilage formation and increases and improves the joint fluid. The result is a joint that is better lubricated and smoother running. Pentosan is given as a course of injections over 4 weeks and effects often last up to 1 year. Course can be repeated more frequently if necessary (every 4-12 months). 80% of pets respond quickly to one treatment course. However it can take up to 6 weeks for effect so in some cases your pet may require NSAIDs also for a short period.

Joint support:

- **Glucosamine and chondroitin** – natural anti-inflammatories and joint protective compounds which can be found in a powder form to sprinkle on your pet's food or a tasty chewable treat. These powders may be similar to some human supplements but it is important to use one that is formulated for pets as there are some differences. The brand we currently stock is **joint guard**. They can be safely used with NSAIDs and pentosan.
- **Fish oil** – full of omega acids helpful for good joint function and packaged in a liquid form for easy dosing to a range of weights and sizes. We currently use **PAW Fish Oil** which is specially formulated and flavoured for pets.

In addition to medications there are things you can do at home to help your pet's arthritis.

- (1) Ensure they have a warm well padded bed, away from draughts and preferably elevated from the cold floor
- (2) Ensure your pet does not become overweight
- (3) Feed older pets foods which are designed for senior pets, some of these foods have glucosamine and omega acids added for good joint health.

Providing them with gentle regular exercise to keep the joints moving and the muscles toned is also very important. Physiotherapy is commonly used for humans with joint issues so why not our pets! Here are some simple exercises you can do with your pet at home to help improve their joint mobility:

- **Range of motion (ROM) exercises and stretching** – talk to your vet about how you can move your pet's joints and stretch muscles to enhance joint movement. This should be done at least once a day with 20 repetitions of movement and holding stretches for 15-30 seconds. You should start small and gradually strive to increase joint and muscle range of motion. Swimming or walking in sand/water/tall grass can also be a great way to help improve your pet's movement.
- **Heat therapy** – the use of hot packs such as a wheat bag or warm bath for 20 minutes. Used to reduce muscle tightness, pain and spasms. It also increases the range of motion of the joint. You can use it as a warm up to exercise or before doing some muscle stretches or ROM exercises.
* To test the heat of a hot pack put it on the back of your neck, if comfortable then it is fine for your pet.

With a combination of treatments, and some changes to your pet's lifestyle at home, we can often successfully manage arthritis and provide a good quality of life for your special friends.