

Arthritis in Dogs

Our veterinary surgeons have diagnosed that your dog is suffering from arthritis. Arthritis is the term given to an inflammation of the joints, and there are several different forms of the disease.

By far the commonest form is degenerative osteoarthritis, a chronic condition characterized by the breakdown of the soft cartilage that lines the joint. As cartilage cushions the ends of the bones, its loss causes them to rub directly against each other, resulting in swelling, pain and loss of movement of the joint. This then sparks off changes in the bones themselves, causing bony spurs and thickening to develop.

Degenerative osteoarthritis can result from a variety of causes such as hereditary deformations of the bones or physical injury, but very often it is simply due to long term wear and tear in older animals. In dogs it most commonly affects the elbow and/or the hip joints.

Other rarer causes of arthritis include septic arthritis, due to infection that settles in one or more joints either due to a penetrating wound or by circulating in the bloodstream from another site in the body, and auto-immune disease such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Diagnosing Arthritis

Arthritis is diagnosed using a combination of a careful clinical examination and radiography (x-rays). Your dog's age, breed and weight will also be taken into account as we know that osteoarthritis affects older animals and those of certain breeds more readily than others. We also need to know about any changes in your dog's habits such as ability to get in and out of the car, where they sleep and what type of bed they have, and any old injuries they may have sustained.

Managing Arthritis

Arthritis is a painful and debilitating condition that needs addressing. Unfortunately there is no cure, but there are lots of ways to reduce the pain and suffering associated with it, and also slow down the progression of the disease.

- ❖ Weight control: If your dog is overweight then weight reduction is the most effective way to help reduce stress on the joints.
- ❖ Medication: There are several very effective pain killer and anti inflammatory medications that can really help reduce the pain in the joints, we will advise you on which is most appropriate for your dog. In most cases these are suitable for long term use and can make a huge difference to your dog's quality of life.
- ❖ Diet: There is now excellent data to support the benefits of specially formulated arthritis diets. These diets have been proven to have an anti inflammatory effect within joints, and

also can slow down the progression of the disease. In some cases it allows the dose of medication to be reduced. Supplements containing glucosamine and chondroitin sulphate can also be used to help provide the building blocks for healthy joints.

- ❖ Environmental adaptation: The use of ramps and steps around the house and car can really help your dog continue to carry on with their normal activities. If you have lots of wooden or tiled floors then putting some rugs or carpet down will help your dog feel confident and maintain good grip whilst moving about the house.
- ❖ Hydrotherapy: Any sort of swimming is of great benefit, be it in the local pond or at a special hydrotherapy pool. Do ask us if you need to know where your closest locations are for this.
- ❖ Complementary treatment: As arthritis is a long term problem, many owners are keen to try complementary treatments for their pets. Only licensed veterinary products that are known to be safe in dogs should be used, and after a vet has given the all-clear to do so. Acupuncture can help in some cases (in our experience particularly for arthritis in the spine), and we do work with a specialist veterinary acupuncturist, please ask for details.
- ❖ Surgery: In the most advanced and severe cases of arthritis there are some surgical options to manage the condition, but these are best discussed on a case by case basis.

In summary, arthritis is a common and painful condition in dogs, but with early diagnosis there are lots of options available to manage the condition and really improve both your dog's quality of life and longevity.

Please feel free to contact the surgery should you have any further questions about your dog's condition. We are always happy to discuss and advise on all the treatment options available.