

ORAH Info:

What causes arthritis? How can I tell if my pet has arthritis?



Arthritis (more formally osteoarthritis) is a condition resulting in painful joints. It is common in older pets, especially the larger breeds of dogs. Any joint can be affected with arthritis, but the most commonly affected joints include the hips, knees, shoulders, elbows, and vertebrae (the back).

Arthritis is often the result of an unstable joint. This can be caused by an injury or it may develop for unknown reasons. Arthritis can develop slowly or quickly. Frequently it is progressive (that is, it worsens with time). Often it begins with occasional sore days, and may be associated with weather changes or strenuous exercise. Overweight pets are most susceptible.

Signs of arthritis pain may include stiffness; reluctance to walk, climb stairs or play, limping, lagging behind on walks; difficulty rising from a resting position; personality changes, or even loss of appetite or crying aloud. Most animals don't moan or whimper until pain becomes severe. Clinical signs in most arthritic pets are often worse when they first get up and start to move (just as with people). Cats are less active than dogs and signs of their arthritis pain can be very subtle.

Other diseases must be ruled out before a diagnosis of osteoarthritis can be made. These include disc disease, torn ligaments, infections, bone tumors, and nerve damage. X-rays are often necessary to obtain the correct diagnosis and assess the extent of the problem.

TREATMENT

There is no need for your pet to suffer the pain of arthritis! There are many strategies for treating the causes and the symptoms of arthritis.

MEDICATIONS CAN HELP

Aspirin is sometimes used in dogs, but you should always check with your vet first, to obtain the correct dose and to make sure that aspirin is appropriate for your dog. If your dog is taking other medications or has other medical conditions, aspirin may not be appropriate.

Do not give aspirin to cats without first consulting your vet. NEVER give Ibuprofen, Tylenol or Naproxen to cats or dogs. Tylenol is poisonous to cats and has been shown to be ineffective for arthritis pain in dogs.

Recent advancements in arthritis drugs for pets have greatly enhanced our ability to reduce the inflammation and pain of osteoarthritis. Excellent drugs designed especially for pets include Rimadyl, Metacam, and Deramaxx. In addition, other pain medications can be used in combination with these anti-inflammatories. Nutritional supplements can also help to build healthy cartilage and reduce inflammation: glucosamine/chondroitin (Synovi or Glycoflex) and omega-3 fatty acids (3V Caps). Newer diets such as Purina Veterinary Diet JM have these supplements in them.



EXERCISE CAN HELP.

Regular, moderate exercise throughout life is very important in keeping joints working properly. Over-exertion can make the condition worse. Swimming is great exercise for arthritic pets.

PREVENT OBESITY.

This is the most important things you can do for your pet's health. Obesity contributes to pet health problems in many ways, and can make arthritis worse. For an arthritic pet, being slightly underweight is desirable. Overfeeding (either too much food or too rich a food) is the major culprit in overweight pets. Older pets may need no more than 50% of the calories of a young, growing animal. Your vet can design a weight loss program for your dog or cat.

TALK TO YOUR VET.

It is important to work closely with your veterinarian to achieve the best relief for your arthritic pet and to minimize any side effects. Your pet's individual plan may include a combination of drugs, nutritional supplements, weight loss, and exercise. Periodic comprehensive physical examinations and laboratory screenings are necessary to monitor your pet's response to any long-term medication and to modify the treatments as appropriate.

