



## **Arthritis in Dogs and Cats**



Arthritis is a painful, progressive degenerative joint disease that affects one in five adult dogs in the United States. It also occurs in cats. Arthritis is most common in senior pets, especially in larger breed dogs and in dogs and cats that are overweight. Unfortunately, many cases of arthritis go undiagnosed because owners attribute the subtle changes in their pets to “old age” or “slowing down.”

Arthritis can also be a result of the normal aging process, injury to joints, or congenital problems such as elbow or hip dysplasia. Arthritis can affect one or more joints and lead to pain, stiffness, joint swelling, lameness, and reduced mobility. As the disease progresses, there can be additional destruction of cartilage on the bone surface and production of extra bone around the joint. If left undiagnosed and untreated, arthritis causes irreversible damage and can prevent our pets from fully participating in everyday activities such as walking, running, and swimming.

### **What Are the Signs of Arthritis Pain?**

Any animal can develop arthritis and knowing the signs of arthritis pain will

help you determine when to consult your veterinarian. Clinical signs of arthritis include:

- ✓ Decreased activity
- ✓ Reluctance to walk, run, climb stairs, jump, or play
- ✓ Stiffness
- ✓ Limping
- ✓ Difficulty rising from a resting position
- ✓ Lagging behind on walks
- ✓ Soreness when touched
- ✓ Yelping or whimpering in pain
- ✓ Acting aggressive or withdrawn

If you've observed any of these signs, it's possible that your pet is suffering from arthritis. Arthritis is one of the most common sources of chronic pain treated by veterinarians. Signs typically increase in severity as the disease progresses, so the sooner your pet is properly diagnosed and treated, the sooner he or she can overcome the pain and become an active member of your family again.

### **What Can I Do to Help Manage My Pet's Arthritis?**

While there is no cure for degenerative joint disease and arthritis in our pets (with the exception of joint replacement), the pain associated with these conditions can be managed. The following are ways to help manage the clinical signs of arthritis:

- If your pet is overweight, losing those extra pounds can relieve some of the stress on painful joints. Ask your veterinarian about a weight management program for your pet.



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- Moderate exercise can help strengthen joints and reduce the chances of further damage. Most home exercise programs encompass simple, low-impact exercise routines you can do with your pet.
- Acupuncture is also available for pets. This ancient technique centers around using small needles placed in specific points in the body to decrease pain and promote healing. Acupuncture is sometimes the only treatment an arthritic pet may need but it can also be used in conjunction with other treatment modalities.
- Chinese herbs can help to correct the underlying deficiency leading to arthritis pain and help to promote healing.
- Joint supplements and other vitamins can also play a vital role in your pet's joint health. Ask your veterinarian if these supplements are appropriate for your pet and if they may help to improve joint health and function.
- Your veterinarian can prescribe a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) or other pain medications to relieve arthritis pain and inflammation. These drugs often provide safe and effective pain relief and can have a significant effect on your pet's quality of life.

**With recent advances in veterinary medicine and therapeutics, there's no reason for any pet to suffer from the pain of arthritis.**

It's important to remember that arthritis is a chronic disease that requires continuous treatment and communication with your veterinarian. Pain and inflammation can return if medications or therapy are discontinued, so be sure to follow your veterinarian's instructions carefully. Your pet will appreciate your additional care and commitment during his or her senior years to help preserve a good quality of life!