

## Arthritis: Options for your pet

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Degenerative joint disease (DJD), commonly known as arthritis, is the number one cause of chronic pain in dogs and cats. The condition results when cartilage in the joint is damaged, either following a traumatic event or with wear and tear that increases with obesity, extremely athletic animals, or when the joint is congenitally abnormal. When cartilage is damaged, a chain reaction of inflammatory processes occur, which leads to the eventual destruction of the cartilage and damage to the underlying bone. Cartilage contains no nerves – if your pet is showing any signs of pain, the damage and changes in underlying bone have already begun. Surgery may be able to help in some situations, but most of the time the degeneration of the joint cannot be reversed and treatment focuses on preventing progression of damage. DJD pain is best addressed by what is called a **multi-modal approach**, meaning that several approaches combined yield better results than any single therapy.

Signs of DJD include, but are not limited to:

- Difficulty climbing stairs, climbing in the car, on the bed or a sofa or difficulty rising from rest
- Limping
- Licking of a single joint
- Stiffness (that may diminish once the pet has 'warmed up')
- Spends less time playing (which is often misunderstood as a sign of 'aging')

### What can you do for your pet?

- *Nutraceuticals*: such as glucosamine and chondroitin support cartilage structure, prevent further deterioration, suppress inflammation, and reduce free radical damage.
- *Prescription Drugs*: Drugs are available that can reduce inflammation and suppress pain in dogs with more advanced disease. Side effects can be minimized by monitoring your dog's blood work regularly.
- *Weight Reduction*: If your pet is overweight, discuss a weight loss diet with your veterinarian.
- *Controlled Exercise*: Low-impact exercise is best; swimming or walking through shallow water is ideal. Leash walking and controlled jogging are also acceptable. Proper exercise is excellent physical therapy for the arthritic pet, as it is crucial to maintain as much muscle mass as possible to support the abnormal joint.
- *Massage*: Provides additional non-drug pain control to increase flexibility and blood flow.

### Medications

#### **Glucosamine and Chondroitin Sulfate**

These supplements contain cartilage components harvested chiefly from sea mollusks (i.e., cartilage is made up of chondroitin sulfate and glucosamine metabolites). By taking these supplements orally (by mouth), the patient obtains the necessary building blocks needed to repair damaged cartilage.

#### **Omega Three Fatty Acids**

Cold water fish oils, have been found to have anti-inflammatory properties. While this option is

primarily used in the treatment of itchy skin, many arthritic dogs and cats also benefit from supplementation. Numerous brands are available and chances are your veterinarian has one. NOTE: Flax seed oil is readily converted to omega three fatty acids in the human body, however this conversion does not occur in dogs or cats. Therefore, it serves no purpose to add flax seed oil to pet food to benefit DJD; fish oils are necessary.

### **Anti-oxidants and Free Radical Scavengers**

Free radicals are harmful bio-chemicals that can attack us from external sources (such as pollution, sunlight, etc.) or we make them ourselves as by-products of oxygen use; they attack our structural proteins and our bodies use natural anti-oxidants to inactivate free radicals. Supplemental anti-oxidants can slow age-related pathology.

### **Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAID's)**

These medications act by suppressing the inflammatory bio-chemicals that cause the pain of arthritis and cartilage damage. None of these medications can safely be combined with one another. Never use a human medication of any kind in a pet without specific instructions on how to do so from your veterinarian; human NSAIDs can be toxic to pets, especially cats.

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