

Arthritis

What is Arthritis?

Arthritis in dogs is very similar to arthritis in people. It is a degenerative disease that causes stiffness in the joints and muscles. The pain that comes from arthritis is due to the loss of cartilage in the joint, which serves as the joint is shock absorber. In response to the loss of cartilage the body makes new bone which does not absorb shock at all, and results in pain and discomfort. Arthritis can occur in any joint causing loss of function to some degree.

Who is at risk for arthritis?

Arthritis is more common in older dogs. However, younger dogs can be affected by this disease as well. Some of the causes of arthritis in younger dogs can be from injuries or accidents. Another common cause of arthritis that can affect the younger dogs is Canine Hip Dysplasia. This condition is a common developmental disorder of the hip found primarily in large breed dogs. Regardless of age arthritis is the most common source of chronic pain that is treated by veterinarians.

What are the clinical signs of Arthritis?

Some signs to watch for are:

- Gradual onset of pain and lameness in one or more limbs
- Difficulty standing, sitting, or getting up
- Seem to be stiff or have sore joints
- Hesitancy to jump, run, or climb stairs
- Decrease in activity or not wanting to play
- Weight gain
- Attitude or behavior changes
- Sleeping more
- Being less alert

If your animal appears to have some of these symptoms take your pet to the veterinarian for an arthritis evaluation. The arthritis evaluation will include a thorough physical exam and possibly an x-ray. The best management for an animal with arthritis is to get it diagnosed correctly and start a veterinarian-prescribed treatment plan.

What are the causes of Arthritis?

Arthritis is often caused by traumatic injury resulting in joint instability. For example, a common injury in dogs both large and small breed is the tearing of the cruciate ligament. This type of injury results arthritis as the pet ages. Obesity is another cause of arthritis due to the constant and excessive concussive forces in the joint. Finally, joints may be genetically unstable or weaken as occurs in case such as hip dysplasia, or in the younger dogs, it may be caused by failure of appropriate bone development.

What medications are used to treat arthritis?

The treatment goal for treating arthritis is to control pain, increase mobility, slow down the destructive process in the joint and promote cartilage repair. Due to possible devastating side effects never use human medication on your pets without first checking with your veterinarian. Drugs like Tylenol and Ibuprofen are very toxic to dogs and cats. Please consult with one of our veterinarians to implement a plan to treat your arthritic pet.

Are there any other ways, besides drug therapy, to treat arthritis?

Drug therapy is the most effective when combined with appropriate exercise and weight management. Non strenuous exercises, such as swimming and walking, is therapeutic and strengthens the muscles around the joints, which reduces stress on the joint. Dogs should be exercised on a regular basis and strenuous activities should be avoided. Overweight arthritic dogs should be placed on an appropriate diet.