

Arthritis (Osteoarthritis)

What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a chronic degenerative disease within any joint and the tissues surrounding that joint. A dog's hip, elbow, shoulder, stifle (knee), carpus (wrist), hock, (ankle) and intervertebral joints (in the spine) are often the joints commonly affected. It occurs when cartilage in the joint is damaged. Damage can be the result of a traumatic event, obesity, normal wear and tear of an athletic dog, or when the joint is abnormal from birth.

Cartilage is like a gelatinous shock absorber and operates to decrease joint stress by reducing impact on the ends of the bones in the joint. When cartilage is damaged, inflammatory changes occur, leading to destruction of the cartilage and damage to the underlying bone. There are no nerves in cartilage so if your pet is showing signs of pain, the damage and changes in underlying bone have already begun.



Healthy hip joint

Osteoarthritis

What are the signs of osteoarthritis:

Signs of osteoarthritis may be subtle and easy to miss.

- Reluctance to do usual activity such as walks
- Stiffness (may disappear once the pet 'warms up')
- Difficulty climbing the stairs, climbing into the car, or on the bed/couch
- Difficulty getting up
- Limping or abnormal gait
- Licking a specific area or joint
- Withdrawn, spending less time playing with family
- Soreness when touched (rarely, aggression when touched or approached)

See reverse ...

What can I do to help my dog?

In order to slow the progression of arthritis, it is important to implement multiple modes of treatment as soon as possible.

- **Weight Reduction**: Ask our veterinary team about your pet's body condition score, which should be normal (5/9) or slightly underweight (4/9). If your pet is overweight, our veterinary team can help you determine an appropriate weight loss program for your dog. Maintaining a lean body weight is key for maintaining a good quality of life for arthritic patients.
- **Environmental Support**: Soft bedding with cushion will be appreciated by your furry friend. Place rug runners on slippery floors to allow movement throughout the house. Keep your pet in a warm dry place away from cold and dampness. Minimize stairs climbing or jumping by supplying ramps around the house and in/out of the car.
- **Controlled Exercise**: Low-impact exercise is recommended. For example, swimming or walking in shallow water, leash walking or controlled jogging are also acceptable. Proper exercise is important to maintain muscle mass and decrease pain.
- **Nutraceuticals**: Synergistic combinations of nutraceuticals such as **glucosamine/chondroitin sulfate** and/or **omega-3 fatty acids** contain compounds that support cartilage structure, prevent further deterioration, suppress inflammation, and reduce free radical damage. These nutraceuticals are most effective when started early and maintained long term. Not all nutraceuticals are created equally and *only* the veterinary brands are manufactured by pharmaceutical organizations that must meet FDA guidelines.
- **Injectable Chondroprotective Agent**: Adequan® is the only FDA approved chondroprotective drug. Research suggests that Adequan® also has pronounced analgesic (pain control) qualities and excellent anti-inflammatory properties.
- **Acupuncture and Massage**: Both of these therapies may provide additional non-drug pain control. Acupuncture is the insertion of needles into specific points on the body to produce the release of endorphins (feel good chemicals), nerve stimulation, increased blood flow, and immune system stimulation.
- **Prescription Drugs**: Drugs are available for dogs 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. Please do not give your pet human medications to help relieve pain. A dog's body responds differently to human medication and can be detrimental.