

ARTHRITIS IN DOGS

Just like people, dogs can suffer from arthritis and it can be a debilitating disease. Osteoarthritis and degenerative joint disease is characterized by a loss of cartilage that acts as the shock absorbing tissue covering the surfaces of bones where they meet to form joints. It can occur in dogs of any age and can be a result of poor conformation (eg hip dysplasia), traumatic injury or normal wear-and-tear over a lifetime. All joints can be affected by osteoarthritis and, while it is more commonly observed in older dogs, young dogs with poor conformation or developmental disorders can be affected. In these cases hip and elbow problems are more commonly observed. Working dogs and overweight animals are also at higher risk of developing arthritis due to the amount of strain placed on joints.

The outward signs of osteoarthritis are associated with pain and dogs may be reluctant to perform certain movements, be less active, have a stiff gait or limp, gain weight or exhibit behavioural changes such as depression or aggression. Swelling and decreased range of movement of the affected joints may also be observed and muscle wastage can be seen in badly affected limbs.

There are a number of treatments for osteoarthritis that can be undertaken to alleviate the pain associated with the condition. Correcting physical deformities such as cranial cruciate rupture (knee ligament repair), luxating patellar (slipping knee cap) and hip dislocation/dysplasia with surgery is the first point of call in some cases where arthritis occurs secondary to a physical deformity. Weight reduction and weight management help reduce strain on joints and supplementation with Omega 3 fatty acids can help reduce inflammation.

Drug therapy plays an important role with non-steroidal anti-inflammatories the most frequently used medication to alleviate pain, slow down the destructive processes in the joint and increase mobility. However, it should be noted that anti-inflammatory therapy should only be undertaken under the prescription of a veterinary surgeon. Human medication should never be used in pets as common pain killers such as Ibuprofen (eg Advil, Nurofen, Herron Blue) and acetaminophen (eg Tylenol) can be highly fatal.

Oral supplementation with glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate can also help cartilage repair and slow down destruction. Another therapy commonly used is a course of injections to stimulate the production of joint lubricant and encourage cartilage repair. Combination therapy with these treatments combined with weight control and physical therapies such as massage, physiotherapy and muscle strengthening activities can greatly decrease pain associated with osteoarthritis. For further information regarding these therapies or how they best suit your dog please consult your veterinary surgeon.