

Arthritis and your dog:

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is the inflammation of a joint, which can cause pain and swelling. An arthritic joint can cause immense pain, especially in the morning and during cold weather, so keep your eyes open for these signs:

- Becomes less active
- Walks stiffly or limps
- Yelps or cries , especially during exercise
- Gets up slowly
- Has swollen joints
- Hesitates or refuses to climb stairs or to jump up
- Seems depressed

Comprehensive exams will help your veterinarian detect and treat arthritis before it becomes too painful. If your dog doesn't receive regular exams, the arthritis may already be advanced when you notice it. If you do notice signs of arthritis, see a veterinarian to discuss your options for treatment. Your doctor will perform a complete physical exam and may use blood work and radiographs to help determine the cause and severity of the arthritis.

Where does arthritis take a toll?

A joint is the "hinge" between bones that allows the bones to move like levers. A joint consists of two or more bones and their connections. The synovium is the lining that protects the ends of the bones and produces synovial fluid, a substance that lubricates and nourishes the joint. The joint capsule holds the joint together, offering protection and structure. When arthritis strikes, all of these structures can be permanently affected, leading to painful bony spurs common in arthritis. Because the hip and shoulder are ball-and-socket joints, they have a wider range of motion than other joints making arthritis more painful in these areas.

What are the treatment options?

Veterinary care can help reduce inflammation and ease the pain of arthritis. Here are some of the medications your veterinarian may use to treat your dog:

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) help control the debilitating effects of degenerative arthritis. These medications can effectively control pain and inflammation in dogs.
- Chondroprotective agents, including glucosamine and chondroitin, are natural compounds that the body uses to replenish joint material.
- MSM (natural dietary sulfur), antioxidant vitamins, and fatty acid supplements such as fish oil may decrease the inflammatory effects of arthritis.

- Cortisone can be effective in the treatment of arthritis but can have negative side effects with prolonged use in high dosages.

What can I do for my pet?

There are many therapeutic options to help dogs deal effectively with this common condition of old age. Lightening the load on joints may help decrease the pain associated with arthritis, so if your dog is overweight, proper diet and weight control are essential. Discuss with your veterinarian a diet and exercise program, such as regular walking, to safely reduce your dog's weight. Providing a padded bed, a warm, dry environment, and appropriate medications for your dog can also help control discomfort.

Compiled from information courtesy of Banfiled, The Pet Hospital