



CLIENT INFORMATION: ARTHRITIS IN DOGS

INTRODUCTION

Arthritis (aka osteoarthritis, degenerative joint disease) is a common condition in dogs affecting one or more joints. Underlying problems that may lead to arthritis include hip dysplasia, previous traumatic injury to the joint or congenital/inherited malformations. For most dogs the underlying cause of arthritis is not known.

According to some surveys as many as 20% (1 in 5) adult dogs may be affected with arthritis. It may surprise you that:

***While most affected dogs are older, arthritis may occur at any age.

***While many arthritic dogs are overweight, dogs of any body type may be affected.

***While larger breeds are more commonly affected, any breed may develop arthritis.

***While the hips and/or elbows may be most commonly affected, dogs may develop arthritis in any of their joints, including the spine.

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Joints are the connections between the bones and function to allow fluid motion without friction. These functions are accomplished with the presence of joint fluid and cartilage within the joint which help to cushion the body from the stresses that may occur with movement and prevent situations of one bone rubbing directly on another.

With the onset of arthritis the structure and environment of the joint are changed. Defects in the cartilage may develop which lead to the exposure of bony tissue beneath it and/or the development of bony prominences within the joint. Inflammatory changes may also occur in the synovial membrane tissues that line the joint and produce the joint fluid. While the underlying causes that bring about these changes may be many and varied, the end result is a decrease in joint motion and function, and an increase in joint deformity, instability and pain.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY DOG HAS ARTHRITIS?

Unfortunately, our pets cannot directly tell us when they are painful or tell us where it hurts. Signs of arthritis may be specific, such as limping on a certain leg consistently, crying in pain when a certain spot is touched, or having difficulty rising or climbing stairs. Sometimes general signs, such as a reluctance to go for long walks, changes in appetite, or changes in personality may be all that you see. Changes in the weather (e.g., a cold or rainy day) may make the signs more noticeable. As dogs vary in the level of pain that they will tolerate, signs of arthritis may not be readily apparent.

If you suspect your dog may have arthritis a physical exam is the best first step, as other diseases may cause signs similar to those described above. In some cases x-rays may be needed in order to confirm the diagnosis or to evaluate the severity of the condition. While arthritis cannot be diagnosed with blood tests, bloodwork may be needed to rule out other causes of the dog's clinical signs as a pre-anesthetic screen if x-rays need to be taken under sedation or evaluate the dog for adverse effects of medications used to treat arthritis.

TREATMENT OF ARTHRITIS

Unfortunately, there is no definitive cure for arthritis. A multi-pronged approach is often helpful in the management of arthritis and its associated pain.

First, analgesics are used to lessen the pain. **Carprofen** (Rimadyl), **Deramaxx** or **Meloxicam** are **NSAIDs** (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), prescription drugs designed specifically for arthritis in dogs. Generally, these medications are used on an as needed basis up to a maximum daily dosage; specific regimens are individually tailored to each dog's needs. Also an NSAID, buffered aspirin may be used in some dogs as an alternative. While it has a low cost, in some dogs aspirin may lead to stomach upset and/or bleeding problems, or may not be enough to relieve the discomfort. **Other over-the-counter pain medications (e.g., Tylenol, Advil, etc.) should NOT be used without consultation with the Dr., as they may be toxic to your pet.** For dogs who cannot tolerate NSAIDs or for which NSAIDs alone do not provide enough pain relief, other analgesics (e.g., Tramadol, gabapentin, amantadine) may be used.

Second, **nutritional supplements** may be used to help the joint stay healthy for as long as possible. **Dasuquin** and **Cosequin** are nutritional supplements for dogs similar to glucosamine supplements used by people with arthritis. They are rich in proteins important to joint function. While their exact mode of action is not known, many dogs seem to improve with the addition of one of these supplements to the diet.

Third, weight loss often helps decrease a dog's discomfort. Many dogs with arthritis tend to be overweight. Often, their discomfort makes exercise, an important component to weight reduction, difficult for them. Special diets and/or reduced food intake may help your dog lose unneeded weight and be more comfortable.

For some dogs the above described treatments do not provide enough relief. Occasionally, surgery is used to provide relief. Alternative therapies (e.g., acupuncture) may also be considered on an individual basis. Consultation and treatment by veterinarians who specialize in rehabilitative medicine (e.g., PAWS in MOTION in Natick) may also help improve the quality of life of arthritic pets.

In summary, while more common in older and larger breeds, any dog can develop arthritis. Our goal in treatment is to provide relief through various means so that we can maximize your pet's quality of life for as long as possible. Please feel free to contact the Drs. or staff if you have any comments or questions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Anti-inflammatories

NSAIDS : **Carprofen** --or-- **Deramaxx** --or-- **Meloxicam**

Used as needed up to maximum daily dosage

NOTE: When using NSAIDs do NOT switch from one to another without consultation with the Dr.
Periodic blood monitoring may be necessary to detect adverse effects of long-term use of the medication.

OTHER PAIN RELIEVERS: **Tramadol** --and/or-- **Gabapentin**

Used in place of, or in addition to NSAIDS

NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS **Dasuquin** --or-- **Cosequin**

Use every day as directed by manufacturer