

# Arthritis

## What is arthritis?

Arthritis, also known as inflammation of the joints, is the most common source of chronic pain in pets. It is a progressive degenerative joint disease that affects dogs of any age, breed, or size. One out of five adult dogs, more than 8 million total, suffer from arthritis. Causes of arthritis include:

- ◆ Hip or elbow dysplasia
- ◆ Genetics
- ◆ Joint cartilage breakdown due to aging
- ◆ Injury or accident

## What are the signs of arthritis?

Dogs with arthritis may exhibit one or more of the following signs:

- ◆ Limping
- ◆ Decreased activity
- ◆ Withdrawing from family
- ◆ Decreased appetite
- ◆ Difficulty walking, jumping, or running
- ◆ Excessive barking, panting, or whining
- ◆ Loss of flexibility
- ◆ Behavioral changes such as aggression
- ◆ Difficulty rising from a resting position, stiffness

## How do you diagnose arthritis?

Arthritis may be diagnosed based upon clinical signs and a physical exam. X-rays are often needed to confirm the diagnosis and help rule out other potential causes such as injury or Valley Fever.

## How do you treat arthritis?

### 1. Weight control

Weight gain, from decreased activity and overeating, causes additional stress on the joints. This results in more pain and causes the disease to progress quicker. Weight loss alone can result in significant reduction of pain. We can help with a weight loss plan designed specifically for your pet's needs.

## **2. Exercise**

Using exercise to strengthen the muscles will increase flexibility and maintain muscle mass. Exercise also helps to increase blood flow to the joints. The exercise should be mild to moderate in duration and must be done regularly. Daily walking or swimming is preferred. Infrequent or strenuous exercise can actually be harmful to your pet's joints. Ease into the program and gradually increase the exercise as tolerated.

## **3. Nutritional Supplements**

Daily nutritional supplements designed to support joint health can be beneficial in the treatment of arthritis. Glucosamine and chondroitin have been shown to help maintain the structure of joint cartilage while slowing down the enzymes that break down cartilage. While many pet foods contain glucosamine and chondroitin, the quantity is often too small to be of much benefit so an additional supplement is recommended. Among both human and veterinary supplements, *Cosequin is the only product proven to be safe and effective in pets*, making it the preferred choice for your pet.

## **4. Adequan injections**

Adequan is a prescription drug that is given by injection. It blocks the enzymes that break down joint cartilage and improves joint lubrication. It is given weekly for 4 weeks and then once every 1-3 months for maintenance.

## **5. Pain Medication**

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, NSAIDS, are medications used to block inflammation and help control pain. Because arthritis is progressive, many pets will ultimately need NSAIDS to improve their quality of life. While NSAIDS are commonly used in pets long-term, your pet should be monitored and have bloodwork done periodically to ensure that no complications with the liver or kidneys are developing. NSAIDS may also cause gastrointestinal upset (ulcers, vomiting, diarrhea, and decreased appetite) and should only be used under a veterinarian's supervision.