

Canine & Feline Arthritis

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Arthritis is one of the most common ailments seen in aging dogs and cats. This article offers some treatment options for easing the discomfort of your dogs or cats suffering from arthritis.

Arthritis is an inclusive term for a number of degenerative joint diseases. Pain, swelling and/or stiffness occur in all of them.

In dogs, arthritis usually takes the form of hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, spondylosis, joint degeneration or dislocation of the knee. Osteoarthritis is caused by wear and tear and is seen mostly in older dogs. Rheumatoid arthritis is a disorder of the membrane surrounding the joints and can occur at any age.

Osteoarthritis is the form most often seen in cats. Although they don't often show it, arthritis occurs more often in cats than previously believed. Cats will not show the same symptoms as dogs, and are much less likely to exhibit signs of pain. The most apparent symptom would be the unwillingness or inability to jump as high as they used to. You might see an overall reduction in activity (but with cats, how can you tell?).

The good news is that the disease can be managed and discomfort kept to a minimum. Nutrition is the core of any treatment plan. A natural diet is essential. Supplements such as vitamin C, alfalfa or kelp are helpful. Glucosamine is commonly recommended. Glucosamine is a substance which works to stimulate joint function and repair. It has been proven effective for relief of osteoarthritis pain, rehabilitation of cartilage, and repairing joints.

A key component of cartilage and a naturally occurring compound, glucosamine can be used before symptoms begin to protect the joints from aging. It is sometimes used in conjunction with chondriton, another natural substance that protects the joints, and or MSM, a form of sulfur that helps reduce inflammation.

Homeopathic remedies, such as Rhus Tox or Pulsatilla may work. There are many herbal anti-inflammatories; licorice and black cohosh are but two possibilities. Yucca and Devil's Claw are commonly used for arthritis for inflammation and pain.

A good adjunct to remedies or supplements is acupuncture. It can be very helpful in easing pain and stiffness in many arthritic conditions.

Other forms of physical therapy are becoming available for dogs in many areas. Regular mild exercise also help to keep the dog mobile, but don't push - let your dog tell you how much he can handle. Keeping the dog's weight down will take some of the stress off the joints, making movement easier and less painful.

Digestive enzymes and probiotics may also ease the symptoms of arthritis, though there is little research to bear this out. Poor digestion can result in partially digested proteins and other particles being reabsorbed into the bloodstream. This can then result in immune dysfunction and inflammation.

When all else fails, there are pharmaceutical anti-inflammatories and pain medications. Two of the most common ones are Rimadyl and Etogesic. These medicines can have serious side effects and require careful monitoring of the dog's health.

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