

Common Conditions in Senior Dogs: Arthritis



Arthritis, a painful, progressive degenerative joint disease that affects one in five adult dogs in the United States, is even more common among older dogs, particularly overweight and larger breed dogs. Unfortunately, many cases go undiagnosed because owners attribute the subtle changes in their dogs to “old age” or “slowing down.”

Caused most often by elbow or hip dysplasia, canine arthritis can also be a result of the normal aging process or injury. Arthritis involves the deterioration of joint cartilage, can affect one or more joints, and can lead to pain, stiffness, joint swelling, lameness and reduced mobility, all of which can result in a reduced quality of life. As the disease progresses, there can be additional destruction of cartilage on the bone surface, and production of extra bone around the joint. If left undiagnosed and untreated, arthritis causes irreversible damage and can prevent dogs from fully participating in everyday activities such as walking, running, and swimming.

What Are the Signs of Arthritis Pain?

Any dog can develop arthritis, and knowing the signs of arthritis pain will help you determine when to consult your veterinarian:

- Decreased activity
- Reluctance to walk, run, climb stairs, jump or play
- Stiffness
- Limping
- Difficulty rising from a resting position
- Lagging behind on walks
- Soreness when touched
- Yelping or whimpering in pain
- Acting aggressive or withdrawn
- Exhibiting other personality changes

If you've observed any of these signs, it's possible that your dog is suffering from arthritis. Arthritis is one of the most common sources of chronic pain treated by veterinarians. Signs typically increase in severity as the disease progresses, so the sooner your dog is properly diagnosed and treated, the sooner he or she can overcome the pain and become an active member of your family again.

What Can I Do to Help Manage My Dog's Arthritis?

While there's no cure for degenerative joint disease and arthritis in dogs (with the exception of joint replacement), the pain associated with these conditions, and the stiffness and lameness they cause, can be managed.

- If your dog is overweight, losing those extra pounds can relieve some of the stress on painful joints. Ask your veterinarian about a weight management program for your dog.
- Moderate exercise can help strengthen joints and reduce the chances of further damage. Rehabilitation and physical therapy for dogs with arthritis is a rapidly

- growing field, encompassing simple, low-impact exercise routines you can do at home with your dog as well as sophisticated therapeutic techniques available at specialty clinics ranging from massage and heat and cold therapy to walking on an underwater treadmill.
- Your veterinarian can prescribe a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, commonly known as an NSAID, to relieve arthritis pain and inflammation. These drugs provide safe and effective pain relief and can have a significant effect on your dog's quality of life.

With recent advances in veterinary medicine and therapeutics, there's no reason for any dog to suffer from the pain of arthritis.

It's important to remember that arthritis is a chronic disease that requires continuous treatment. Pain and inflammation can return if medications or therapy are discontinued, so be sure to follow your veterinarian's instructions carefully.

