

Arthritis
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Unfortunately, arthritis occurs in many of our dogs and cats. There are many causes of arthritis including genetics, trauma, and plain old wear and tear. While there are some surgeries that can improve some of the causes of arthritis there is no cure. There are, however, many things we can do to help control the clinical signs and improve the quality of life of our pets living with arthritis.

The most important thing to do is to keep our pets at a healthy weight, maybe even slightly on the thin side. The less weight, the less strain on the joints. If your pet is overweight and has arthritis you will definitely notice an improvement in your pet if you can get him/her to lose those extra pounds.

Another thing that can help your arthritic pet is a constant level of exercise. You want to keep the joints moving, but not put too much strain on them. Exercise also prevents muscle wasting. Walking, especially with some hills, and swimming are best. Try to keep on a schedule and avoid the “weekend warrior” kind of activities, like Frisbee and mountain climbing. Obviously this is harder to achieve with cats, but trying to keep them active (without jumping) can be helpful. Exercise can also help keep your pet at a healthy weight.

Recent research has shown that supplementing your pets diet with omega 3 fatty acids may also improve arthritis. The fatty acids act as an anti-inflammatory and help stabilize the cells found in cartilage. Fatty acids are also good for the skin and coat and may even aid in cancer prevention. We have two prescription diets for dogs that contain extra fatty acids at the Dunstable Animal Clinic. One is by Science Diet called j/d, which stands for Joint Diet. And the other is by the Iams Company called Senior Dog Plus, which also contains some glucosamine and chondroitin. We also have fatty acid capsules and liquid you can add to any food.

Glucosamine, chondroitin and MSM are nutritional joint supplements that have been used a lot in humans and horses as well as dogs and cats, and have been helpful in many pets with arthritis. Exactly how they work is still not known, but they are believed to decrease inflammation and decrease the pain of arthritis. There are many products available to buy. Unfortunately they are not regulated by the FDA so quality can be a problem. We recommend two brands at the Dunstable Animal Clinic: Glycoflex and Cosequin. If you want to get one at a regular pharmacy you want to use a brand you know and like, or if you’re unsure you can go to the web page www.consumerlab.com to check out reviews. These are natural supplements and therefore we don’t generally have to worry about side effects. Once your pet starts one of these, they usually stay on them for life.

Many pets with arthritis also need NSAIDs (Non Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs). These drugs can potentially have side effects, especially when used long-term, but they can make a huge difference in the mobility and quality of life for our pets. We currently have many prescription medications available made especially for dogs that work very well with little risk of problems. We do try to use the lowest effective dose. It is important that you never use anything over the counter without checking with your veterinarian. This is especially true of cats; one extra-strength Tylenol can kill a cat.

Even though there is no cure for arthritis, many times a combination of weight management, exercise, omega three fatty acids, nutritional joint supplements and conventional joint medications (NSAIDs) can keep our arthritic pets happy and healthy for a long time.