



ABOUT THE DISEASE

Osteoarthritis, arthritis, and degenerative joint disease are all terms used to describe the painful degenerative inflammation of the bones and joints in canine and feline patients. This degeneration and self-perpetuating disease results in joint pain (lameness, weakness, etc.) and decreased joint function (stiffness, limping, etc.).

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

A physical examination along with a thorough medical history will often yield a presumptive diagnosis of **osteoarthritis**. Radiographs (x-rays) will often provide a more definitive diagnosis for severity of boney changes.

TREATMENT

There are many different treatment options for **osteoarthritis**. The veterinarian will decide the best option for each patient.

1. Supportive Management – Life-style changes

- a. **Weight Loss:** Most pets with **osteoarthritis** are overweight and weight loss is one of the best treatments to reduce the workload on bones and joints. Prescription weight-loss food with a complete halt of treats and people-foods will yield effective weight loss while maintaining patient's appetite (reduce food seeking).
- b. **Reduced High-Impact Activity:** A reduction or removal of jarring, traumatic, and damaging activities (running, chasing, ball play, frisbee play, etc.) will help prevent inflammation and ongoing joint degeneration.
- c. **Increased Controlled Activity:** Controlled exercise and strength can be very beneficial to stabilizing joints and reducing inflammation. On-leash walks, swimming, and other types of controlled low-impact exercises should be considered.

2. Pharmaceuticals – Daily or As-Needed Medications

- a. **Anti-inflammatories:** This class of medications help locally reduce inflammation and provide pain relief. Veterinary-approved NSAIDs (carprofen, meloxicam, firocoxib, deracoxib, etc.) are preferred as they carry less side effects than human medications (aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, acetaminophen, etc). Patients on long-term NSAID therapy should have liver enzymes regularly checked to determine if medication doses need to be changed.
- b. **Central Acting Analgesics (pain reliever):** Traditionally these medications are either injectable opiates or synthetic oral equivalents (tramadol). Canine patients are rather resilient and less affected when compared to humans. Feline patients are a bit more sensitive, but more so to the effects of disorientation, sedation, and hyperactivity. Recently, these have fallen out of favor.
- c. **Nerve Transmission Analgesics:** Recently increased in use, this class of pain relievers affect how the nerves transmit the pain impulse from the site of discomfort to the brain. Both canine and feline patients are often placed on gabapentin as a secondary analgesic to NSAIDs. In fact, some patients use this as their only analgesic. It has minimal side effects and is safe long-term.

3. Nutraceuticals – Daily nutritional supplements

- a. **Glucosamine/Chondroitin:** This is not a replacement for pain relief, but may aid in the reduction of joint inflammation and help in repair.
- b. **Adequan-Canine:** An injectable compound used to inhibit cartilage loss and may help to restore joint lubrication, relieve inflammation, and renew building blocks of healthy cartilage.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Early intervention can help salvage cartilaginous tissues.
- Nutraceuticals are not a replacement for good pain relief and anti-inflammatories.
- Weight loss is single handedly the most effective measure to reduce the effects of **osteoarthritis**.