

Arthritis.

Arthritis is a condition where there is inflammation in the joints resulting in joint pain, swelling and stiffness. Sadly, there is no cure for arthritis, and the condition will progressively worsen with time. However, there are numerous ways to help your pet live a happy, comfortable life.

These range from simple changes you can make at home to your pet's lifestyle to combinations of different medications to manage the inflammation and pain associated with arthritis.

What signs suggest my pet has arthritis?

The signs can be easy to miss as they often progress gradually, and it is easy to dismiss them as just being due to "old age". They include:



Limping or stiffness (especially after rest)



Difficulty jumping or climbing stairs



Becoming less playful



Grooming less or excessively licking at joints



Changes in behaviour e.g. seeming grumpier than normal, interacting less

What causes arthritis?

Usually arthritis is due to either abnormal rubbing within the joint (e.g. after ligament damage or joint instability), abnormal cartilage development or damage due to trauma.

These changes mean that the cartilage, which normally allows the bones in the joint to glide smoothly past each other, becomes less smooth. This results in bone surfaces rubbing together instead, causing pain and further damage to the cartilage. It also causes new bone to develop around the joint, making it stiffer and restricting the movement of the joint.

Changes at home



Keep your pet at a healthy weight

Carrying extra weight puts additional strain on the joints, worsening the pain of arthritis.

We will advise you if your pet needs to lose weight. All our surgeries have nurse lead weight clinics to provide support and guidance if you would like help getting your pet to their target weight.



Keep a gentle, consistent exercise regime

A consistent level of gentle exercise stops your pet's joints from stiffening up, but without overdoing it. Avoid very energetic exercise and lots of climbing or jumping.



Keep them comfortable

Make sure they have a soft, comfortable bed to lie on.

Provide ramps to avoid stairs, raised food bowls to make it easier for them to eat and drink.

Limit access to slippery floors or cover them with rugs or non-slip matting to minimise the risk of a painful slip.

While these all sound like simple changes, they can make a **REAL** difference to your pet's quality of life.

Joint Supplements

Just as in people, there is some evidence that providing additional omega-3 fatty acids helps to preserve joint cartilage. Most supplements also include glucosamine, chondroitin sulphate & anti-oxidants.

There are 2 ways of giving these to your pet:

1. Included in a complete diet. Several companies produce a pet food which is tailored for joint problems and has joint supplements added to it. These diets are all also designed to help keep your pet at an optimum weight.
2. As a separate tablet. You can keep your pet on their usual diet and give the joint supplement as a daily tablet instead. Again, there are several makes of joint supplement tablets available.

Anti-inflammatories (pain relief)

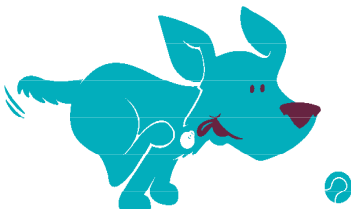
Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories are commonly prescribed to pets with arthritis. They act to provide pain relief and reduce inflammation in the joints.

While treatment with anti-inflammatories is often life long, in some cases your pet may only occasionally need to take these medications to keep them comfortable. However, it is common for pets with arthritis to need to take an anti-inflammatory every day as the disease progresses.

Most pets tolerate anti-inflammatories very well. They should be given with food to minimise the risk of any problems and only given to them at the prescribed dose.

In some cases, they can cause gastrointestinal upsets. If your pet develops any vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite or seems more tired than usual, you should contact the surgery.

When used long term it is advisable to regularly check a blood sample and urine sample from your pet to make sure it is still safe for them to continue to take anti-inflammatories. Occasionally kidney problems and even more rarely, liver problems can be seen in animals taking these medications long-term, so it is important they are monitored for signs of problems. We will advise you how often examinations are required, as this varies between patients, but it would be at least every 6 months.



If your pet is still uncomfortable despite taking anti-inflammatory medication there are other pain killers available that may be appropriate to prescribe to your pet. We would discuss these options on an individual basis if they were necessary.

www.caninearthritis.co.uk is an excellent online resource if you would like further information and advice about arthritis.

Alternative therapies

Acupuncture is offered at our main hospital in **Thornbury** and at our **Meanwood** surgery. It has been proven to harness the body's own opioids to help control pain.

It can also help to reduce painful muscle spasm and encourage blood flow to the muscles.

We often use acupuncture alongside other treatments, but it can also be useful on its own, especially for pets with other diseases that mean we want to minimise anti-inflammatory use.

Physiotherapy and Hydrotherapy are very helpful to build up your pet's muscles which helps support the joints. When an animal has arthritis, they tend to use the affected leg(s) in different ways to reduce the discomfort of standing on this leg. This can lead to muscle loss, which in turn can lead to instability in the joint. Please ask a member of the team if you would like your pet to be referred for physiotherapy or hydrotherapy.

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