



Introduction

Arthritis basically means inflammation of a joint. Left unmanaged, arthritis results in severe cartilage destruction, leaving the underlying bone exposed. Bone-on-bone grinding within the joints causes chronic pain which leads to decreased exercise, resulting weight gain and muscle wasting. Arthritis affects up to one in five adult dogs, yet pet owners often fail to recognise the condition. Owners often attribute their dog's limping or general slowing down to old age. Arthritis is the most common cause of chronic pain in senior dogs, and can greatly diminish your pet's quality of life.

There are many kinds of arthritis, however we will concentrate on degenerative joint disease (DJD), as it is by far the most common type.

Physical Signs

Arthritis most commonly affects the hips and knees of dogs, especially in older large breed dogs. Typical physical signs of arthritis include limping, difficulty rising, stiffness, decreased activity levels, decreased appetite, reluctance to run/play/climb stairs, or changes in behaviour such as aggression or withdrawal.

Causes of Arthritis

Arthritis can affect any dog of any age, but certain factors can make dogs more inclined to develop the disease:

- **Age:** Arthritis is mostly seen in dogs over seven years of age.
- **Breed or conformation:** Large breed dogs and poor joint conformation increases susceptibility.
- **Obesity:** Excess weight means excess stress on the joints, which exacerbates arthritis.
- **Nutrition:** Essential nutrients and fatty acids are vital to healthy joints.
- **Trauma:** Physical damage to the joint can lead to arthritis.
- **Developmental problems:** Some breeds are prone to developing elbow, hip and shoulder dysplasia which can result in arthritis.

Managing Arthritis

Conservative Treatments

- **Weight loss:** This is the cheapest, and most effective treatment. Nicklin Way Veterinary Surgery offers a free weight loss clinic with regular weigh-ins and advice, with the purchase of Royal Canin Obesity Food.
- **Exercise:** Limit play that jars the joints and try to exercise on soft ground.
- **Swimming:** Low impact swimming in deep enough water is highly beneficial.
- **Nutrition:** There is now a prescription diet made by Royal Canin especially for arthritis which contains arthritis supplements. This takes the work out of adding the right dosage of supplements to your dog's regular diet.

- **Supplements:** We strongly advocate the use of joint supplements, such as glucosamine and chondroitin (*Flex* or *Joint Guard*), green lipped mussel (*Sasha's Blend*), and the oils omega 3s and 6s. These supplements have no side effects. We advise veterinary supplements to minimise side effects, like diarrhoea.

Medical Treatments

- **Cartrophen:** This is a unique drug that slows down cartilage destruction, lubricates the joints and improves blood supply. The side effects are negligible. Cartrophen is given as a course of four weekly injections, then boosters as required.
- **Anti-inflammatories:** Very effective at breaking the 'pain cycle'. Usually only given as short courses but newer products are available and can be given regularly for years. All pets significantly improve when given anti-inflammatories. Owners often tell us that their dogs 'act like a puppy again'!
- **Tramadol:** This is a very strong pain medication similar to morphine but with few sedative effects. Often used in cold winter snaps in addition to anti-inflammatories.
- **Cortisone:** Is no longer frequently used as it has more side effects and tends to cause weight gain.

While there is not cure for arthritis, there is much we can do to dramatically improve the quality of your pet's life.

Is your pet over 7 years old?

If so, why not join our Senior Wellness Clinic. This clinic is specifically designed for older dogs and cats, and can detect early signs of arthritis enabling you to start your pet on arthritis supplements, as well as an exercise regime that will help to reduce the painful effects of this disease.

Would you like more information?

Call us to make an appointment with one of our veterinarians at Nicklin Way Veterinary Surgery on 5493 2655.

