



What is Osteoarthritis?

Just like us, Osteoarthritis (or Degenerative Joint Disease) is a condition that causes changes in your pet's joints that can lead to pain, swelling and stiffness.

What causes it?

There are several causes; sometimes arthritis may be a result of an old injury (for example a previous fracture), or the joint may become damaged simply through wear and tear because of old age and obesity.

It's thought that as many as 1.4million dogs and many cats in the UK suffer from Osteoarthritis, with the majority of them being over 8 years old.

In dogs, the most commonly affected joints are the knees, elbows, hips and spine. In cats the hips and elbows tend to be the most common.

How do I know if my pet has it?

Things to look out for:

- **Reduced mobility** – difficulty getting up, jumping or climbing stairs
- **Reduced activity** – reluctance to walk or play
- **Stiffness/lameness** (limping) – especially after a long rest or after a long walk
- **Behaviour changes** – licking or chewing at joints, less grooming, less tolerant with other animals or people, sleeping more, anxious or clingy

If you've noticed any of the above then it's time to get your pet checked by your vet. Your vet can examine your pet for signs of arthritis, usually this can all be done in a consultation but occasionally an x-ray is needed to find out exactly what is going on and which joints are affected.

Treatment

Luckily there are now many options available for treating this condition and although we cannot reverse the damage already done, we can slow its progression and manage the symptoms, hopefully giving your pet a whole new lease of life.

1) Weight Control

Arthritis is most common in overweight dogs and cats. Keeping your pet's weight down is very important in controlling this disease. If your pet is carrying extra weight, it will be putting more strain on their joints and even with all the other treatments we are unlikely to be able to manage their arthritis. There are special diets available to help them to lose weight; our nurses can help you find the right one for your pet.

2) Exercise

The target for animals with arthritis is "little and often". Long walks will put a large strain on your dog's joints however long periods of inactivity will cause them to seize up. For this reason it is best for your dog to have short periods of low level activity, for example 2-3 short walks every day. Little or no exercise during the week and a long walk/run at the weekend should be avoided. Hydrotherapy (swimming) is a very good exercise for your dog as it allows them to build up muscles to take the pressure off their joints without putting a strain on the joints; it can help them lose weight too! Under the supervision of a physiotherapist this can make a huge difference to your dog's mobility.

3) Medication

The medications we most often use are Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. They act to reduce inflammation in the joints and act as a pain-killer. Animals with arthritis can undergo a process called "central sensitisation", animals (and people) who have been in pain for a long period of time will actually start to build up more nerve pathways, making them more sensitive to the pain. Luckily this process can be reversed but it can take time. For this reason we like to control

your pet's pain as soon as possible and generally keep them on this medication for life. There are many different types of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories and it is usually "trial and error" to find the one that is right for your pet.

4) Supplements and Nutraceuticals.

Glucosamine and chondroitin have been shown to have beneficial effects on the joint and cartilage. There are many forms on the market; they differ in concentration, naturally occurring versus synthetic and how easily they are absorbed. Ask your vet which ones are best.

Omega 3 fatty acids can be a beneficial for the joints and green-lipped muscle extract is thought to help reduce inflammation, these are not appropriate for all cases so ask your vet.

5) Complimentary Therapies

- Physiotherapy/Hydrotherapy (as discussed above)
- Magnetic collars - these are thought to increase blood flow and decrease pain.
- Acupuncture

These can all be beneficial in certain cases.

6) Other Therapies

- Joint injections
- Surgery

Used very rarely for specific problems.

As you can see, there are lots of options for the management of arthritis and there is no need to consider it a "normal" part of growing old that your pet must endure. Your vet will be happy to examine your pet for you and discuss a management programme that will suit both you and your pet.