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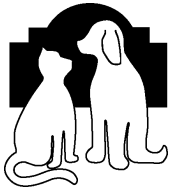
My dog has trouble getting up

Severe, debilitating arthritis is the second-leading cause of euthanasia in dogs, right behind behavioral problems. There are several categories of arthritis: arthritis from infection (septic arthritis), immune-mediated arthritis, and osteoarthritis (degenerative arthritis). Osteoarthritis is the most common by far and is the focus of this article.

Osteoarthritis has two main causes. Primary arthritis is due to chronic overuse, and is less common than secondary. Secondary arthritis is the more common and generally develops as a result of congenital joint problems such as hip or elbow dysplasia, bone or cartilage defects, and trauma. While nothing could be done about arthritis in the past, we now have several options to decrease your arthritic pet's pain and increase the quality of their lives.

What are the signs of arthritis? Your pet could be running less, reluctant to jump, exercise intolerant, have difficulty rising (especially on slippery floors, when it's cold or damp or after exercise), cry out, or pant excessively. At what age could it start? Usually this occurs in older pets, but could be present in young dogs with severe dysplasia. How is it diagnosed? A good history and physical examination are key. Radiographs (x-rays) are very useful, as well as blood tests to rule out immune or septic arthritis. Is my dog going to get arthritis? Arthritis is more of a problem of larger dogs, but can happen to any size dog and any breed. It can even occur in cats and rabbits. Most commonly, we see severe arthritis in Labradors, golden retrievers, rottweilers, German shepherds, chow chows, and shelties.

My dog has arthritis, what can be done? In dogs, there are several options. One is to correct the problem with surgery or arthroscopy. In the case of hip or elbow dysplasia, the problem should be corrected before the arthritis set in. In certain breeds we recommend hip and elbow radiographs when we spay or neuter the dogs at six months of age to check for hip or elbow dysplasia. If present, we would refer your pet to a veterinary orthopedic specialist to have surgery to correct the problem and prevent arthritis from setting in. If your pet has arthritis, it isn't too late for surgery. Hip replacements, spinal surgery, arthroscopic surgery, and knee surgery are routinely performed on dogs at these specialists. Although, the cost for these surgeries is high, the pets have less pain and the long-term costs are much lower than using medications and dietary supplements for arthritis. If surgery is not an option, there is a medical approach. We use Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) as a powerful weapon against arthritis. NSAIDs in humans include aspirin, Tylenol, ibuprofen, Vioxx, Celebrex, and others. Most of these products are very toxic to dogs and cats and should not be used. We have prescription medications now which work very well and with minimal side effects. They are the doggie equivalent to Vioxx or Celebrex. They should always be given with food and can have liver or kidney side effects. Blood monitoring is required for these drugs. Another drug that we use is called Adequan. It is a compound called a



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proteoaminoglycan, and is used to stimulate cartilage re-growth, reduce inflammatory mediators in the joints, and support proper joint structure. It is an injection, which was originally developed for racehorses and has minimal side effects.

Lastly, we have nutritional supplements. These are compounds called chondroitin sulfate and glucosamine and are in the category called chondroprotective agents. These products work well for mild arthritis and work together with NSAIDS for more severe cases. They are not under FDA control and as such, what is on the label may be not what is in the bottle. In a University of Maryland study of human chondroprotective agents, many were found to contain 0 to 15 % of what was on the label. For that reason, we do not recommend using human preparations. We carry a product here called Cosequin. Several independent laboratories have verified that Cosequin continually has almost all of the labeled ingredients inside each chewable tablet. Another good source is in your dog's food. The Eukanuba Veterinary Diet called Senior Plus has high levels of chondroitin sulfate and glucosamine and is recommended for overweight arthritic dogs.

If you think your pet has arthritis, you should make an appointment right away. With the chondroprotective agents, Adequan, and the newer NSAIDS, we can not only treat pain, but also actually slow the progression of arthritis. Between surgical options and these newer drugs early diagnosis and intervention are the keys to ensure that your pet has a long, happy, pain-free life.