

Caring for Dogs and Cats with

Arthritis



Approximately 20% of adult dogs and 50% of cats, over the age of 10, are affected by arthritis in the UK.*



What IS Arthritis?

'Arthritis' is a painful degenerative disease of the joints that reduces your pet's mobility.

In arthritis the degeneration of the joint causes cartilage erosion, it is this damage that is responsible for the chronic pain and restricted joint function that can spoil your pet's quality of life. Any joint can be affected, but it is most common in the hips, elbows, shoulders, knees and back.

There are three key types of arthritis that may affect your pet:

- Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis in dogs. Also known as Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD), osteoarthritis is the result of excessive wear and tear on the joints that can be caused by a number of factors.
- Rheumatoid arthritis is caused by an abnormality in the immune system leading to an inflamed joint.
- Infective or septic arthritis is usually caused by a bacterial infection of the fluid and tissues of a joint, making them painful and swollen.

*Reference: Liverpool University www.liv.ac.uk



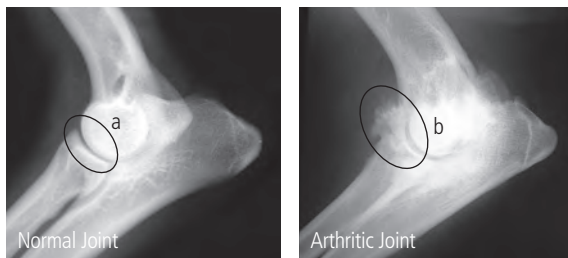
Arthritic Damage

Elbow Joint Damage

Traumatic injury, such as fractures or dislocations, can result in degenerative joint disease (DJD) in the elbow. In addition, large breeds may suffer from developmental problems that can lead to osteoarthritis of the elbow.

The normal joint x-ray shows the clear even line of the joint space (a). This reflects the smooth surfaces of the cartilage in the joint, allowing easy well-supported movement.

In the arthritic joint the cartilage-covered faces of the joint have become damaged leading to instability of the joint and new bone formation (b) resulting in serious stiffness and pain for your pet.

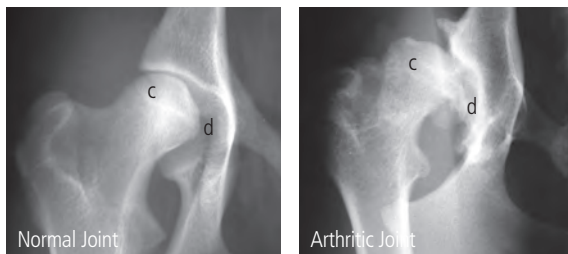


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Hip Joint Damage

Hip dysplasia is the most common cause of arthritis in the hip. Dysplasia is particularly common in many of the larger working breeds of dog, where a deformity in the structure of the hip joint leads to abnormal wear and tear.

In a dysplastic hip, the ball at the head of the femur (leg bone) (c) and the socket in the pelvis (d) do not fit together snugly, causing friction when the limb is moved. This is painful and further damages the cartilage surface resulting in inflammation of the joint and more pain.

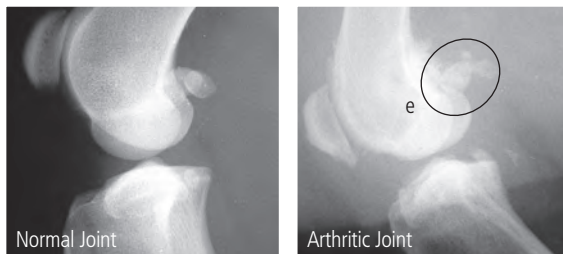


Stifle (Knee) Joint Damage

Rupture of the supporting 'cruciate' ligaments is one of the most common injuries in dogs. It is a major cause of degenerative joint disease in the stifle (knee) joint.

The 'blurred' image of the arthritic joint shows the joint effusion (swelling) and new bone formation (e) that is a feature of DJD following stifle joint ligament rupture, causing pain in and around the joint and reducing mobility.

If untreated, the instability of the joint will quickly result in arthritis. Arthritis caused by stifle joint damage is usually more severe in large dogs than smaller pets.

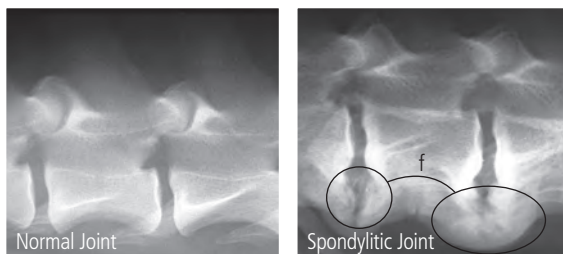


Spinal Damage

Spondylosis, or ankylosing spondylitis, is not strictly osteoarthritis, rather it is a disease of ageing that is characterised by the formation of bony outgrowths between the vertebrae.

As can be seen on the x-ray, the bony growths of the separate vertebrae eventually fuse together. This bridging between the vertebrae reduces the flexibility of the spinal column and can lead to an abnormal gait (stride action) and reduced agility.

Spondylosis can often be present without showing any clinical signs, but may result in pain from the bony growth pressing against the nerves in the spine (f), and can in turn cause other problems as the nerves become less able to carry information.



Reports suggest that between 25-40% of dogs are overweight. Excess weight is one of the biggest causes of the joint damage that leads to osteoarthritis.*

Symptom Spotting

Limping

Does your pet suffer from stiffness/limping, especially after lying down or going for a long walk?

Less active/laziness

Has your pet stopped wanting to play with you, to fetch a ball or to go for that long walk across the fields he used to love?

Reduced agility

Difficulty in entering or exiting the car, climbing the stairs or even simply getting up.

Twitchiness

Resistance to being stroked or petted, especially around the paws, legs or hips.

Sleeping/resting

Does your pet seem to spend a lot of time lying around and staying in the same spot?



Pet owners often mistake some of the key early signs of arthritis as 'laziness' in their pet, a change in personality, or as simply the natural slowing down of old age.

In fact it is probable that well over half a million cases of cat and dog arthritis go unreported in the UK each year. This isn't because the owners don't care, but is a result of pets bravely adapting their lifestyle to disguise the signs of their suffering.

IMPORTANT: It is important that the causes of your pet's symptoms are diagnosed by your veterinary surgeon, as these signs could be also due to other conditions. Your vet may want to x-ray your pet and carry out blood tests to check your pet is not suffering from any other illnesses that need to be taken into consideration.



Grumpiness

Has your pet become less tolerant and even snappy around other pets and children who want to play?

Detachment

Many pets can appear to become detached from their family; seeming disinterested and aloof when actually they are in pain and feeling stressed.

More 'clingy'

Whilst some pets become grumpy, others can get anxious, needing reassurance when once they were much more confident.

Joint chewing or licking

This can sometimes be so marked that it causes bald or raw spots.



What Causes Arthritis In Your Dog Or Cat?

The good news is that there are many effective treatments and therapies that can relieve the symptoms of arthritis, significantly increasing mobility and quality of life for your pet.

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis in dogs and cats. Also known as Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD), osteoarthritis is the result of excessive wear and tear on the joints that can be caused by a number of factors.

Old Age

Just like you and I, as your pet approaches old age the chances of suffering from arthritis increase. Older animals are more prone to arthritis caused by years of wear and tear on their joints.

Obesity

This is a growing problem in household pets, and reportedly affects up to 40% of dogs* and around 25% of cats** in the UK. Weight problems can increase the chances of your pet developing arthritis at an earlier age because of the extra strain it puts on their joints.

Breed

Certain dog breeds are more susceptible to arthritis than others. Larger dogs are most at risk because of the amount of pressure their size places on their joints. Some dog breeds are prone to abnormal joint development such as occurs in 'hip dysplasia' where the ball and socket of the hip joint are poorly formed and ill-fitting leading to arthritis often at a very early age.

Injuries

Any injuries to the bone, joints or ligaments, especially if not properly treated, can increase the chances of your pet developing arthritis.

* Reference: www.canineobesity.info

** Reference: Clarke, D. L. et al. Using Environmental and Feeding Enrichment to Facilitate Feline Weight Loss. *Journal of Animal Physiology and Animal Nutrition* (December 2005)

Treatments

Medication Options

Your vet will advise you on the most appropriate medication for your pet. There are wide range of drugs available for managing arthritic pain and inflammation which can radically improve your pet's quality of life.

The most common medicines used to relieve the pain associated with arthritis are known as NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs). This medication comes in a variety of presentations, including injectables, oral suspensions (liquids) and tablets.

It is important to ensure you keep up with any treatment your vet prescribes in order to achieve full, effective management of your pet's condition.

Injectables: Whether you have a cat or a dog, your vet may administer an injection for rapid pain relief. This will normally be followed by a treatment you can give your pet at home.

Oral Suspensions: This preparation form can be administered directly into the mouth, or simply added to your pet's food.

Oral suspensions are available in a range of strengths to match your pet's size and weight, and will usually come with a dosing syringe that makes administration simple and accurate.

Tablets: Most of the NSAID tablets available are only suitable for dogs. Many tablets are now available in a palatable form making them easy to administer or conceal in treats or food.

Possible Surgery

Surgery is sometimes necessary to treat osteoarthritis, and can involve joint or ligament replacement or, in some cases, fusing the joint into a set position to relieve chronic pain by preventing movement. It is advised to speak to your vet about all the options to see if this would be appropriate for your pet.



Therapies

Weight Management

To reduce the progression of arthritis ensure your pet eats properly and exercises regularly. Putting your pet on a strict diet may be a difficult part of arthritis treatment, but weight loss can dramatically improve their quality of life. Today many pet food brands offer specialised diet food ranges containing ingredients that are low in fat and that aid digestion; these will normally be available from your local veterinary clinic.

Your veterinary surgeon or nurse will be able to advise on the ideal weight for your pet and put together an appropriate weight loss programme.

Exercise

Exercise is just as important as diet in establishing and maintaining an ideal weight. Exercise that puts excessive stress on the joints is not beneficial to an arthritic pet. However, it is important to ensure they undertake the regular, gentle exercise that will help prevent joints stiffening up.

Swimming is an excellent way to give your dog great exercise without too much impact on the affected joints. Purpose-built hydrotherapy pools that allow controlled swimming exercise are an increasingly common therapy for both canine and feline arthritis. Your vet will be able to provide information on hydrotherapy.

Comfort and Care

Cold and damp can increase the discomfort caused by arthritis. When it's raining and chilly outdoors, ensure your home is warm and that your pet has a comfortable bed to sleep in.

You may wish to provide an orthopaedic foam bed to help distribute their weight evenly, this will reduce pressure on your pet's joints. A pet ramp may also help your dog get in and out of the car, maintaining your pet's independence and confidence. Placing stools for your pet to use to reach its preferred sleeping/observation areas can also help.

Nutraceuticals/Supplements

These can aid joint flexibility and may help reduce inflammation. These supplements usually contain glucosamine, a natural compound that is an essential component of joint cartilage.

Alternative Therapies

A number of complimentary therapies have been shown to relieve the symptoms of osteoarthritis in certain cases, these include: electromagnetic collars, acupuncture and physiotherapy.

It is advisable to discuss the range of alternative therapies on offer with your veterinary surgeon to ensure you are providing the best solution to arthritis pain for your pet.

Important notes on treating your pet's arthritis:

- Make sure you administer any medication as directed by your vet.
- Discontinuation of medication should only be done in consultation with your vet.
- Your pet's size and weight affects dosage, so you may need to consult your vet if your pet's weight changes.
- It is very important to note that human medications should never be given to your pet unless under the specific advice of your vet. Human medications can often behave completely differently in cats and dogs, and can be very dangerous to your pet.



Veterinary Practice Details

Is your pet showing any of the below signs of Arthritis?

- Limping/stiff
- Less active
- Reduced agility
- Twitchiness
- Sleeping/resting a lot
- Grumpiness
- Detachment
- More 'clingy'
- Joint chewing or licking

If so talk to your vet
today about treatments
and therapies available.



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