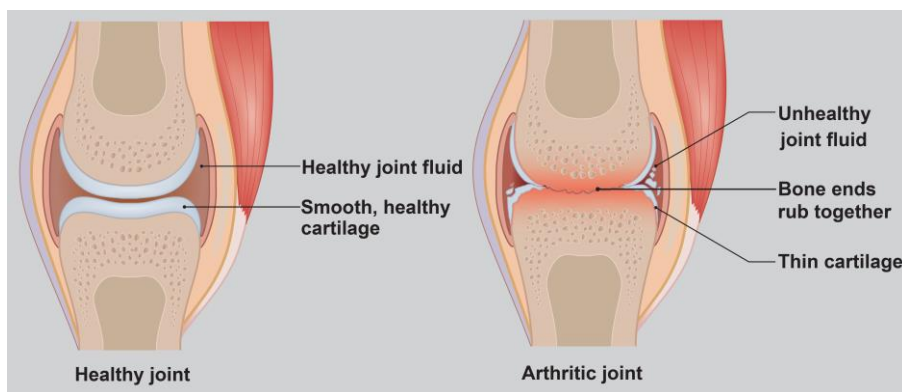


Arthritis in dogs

Overview

Arthritis (osteoarthritis) is a common condition that causes painful, swollen joints. It makes moving around difficult and uncomfortable.

Arthritis gets slowly worse over time and can't be cured. Fortunately, there are several treatment options to slow it down and manage the associated pain.



Healthy joint vs an arthritic joint

Keep your dog's joints as healthy as possible by:

- Keeping them slim
- Giving regular, sensible exercise

What is arthritis?

Arthritis (osteoarthritis), is a condition that causes joints to become swollen and painful.

Bones in a healthy joint have a smooth surface which allows them to glide past each other when your dog is moving around. In an arthritic joint, the smooth surface is worn down and uneven.

Instead of gliding past each other, the bones rub each other like sandpaper. This causes swelling and pain.

Over time, arthritic joints become gradually more thickened and stiff because and they start to produce extra bone that isn't needed. Extra bone gets in the way and causes a lot of pain when your dog moves around.

Symptoms

Symptoms of arthritis in dogs include:

- Stiffness (especially when getting up or after walks)
- Limping (all the time or just every now and then)
- Narrowing of the hips and back end (weak muscles in the back legs)
- Slowing down on walks
- Being quiet or grumpy
- Spending a lot more time lying down or in bed
- Saliva stained joints due to licking or nibbling their legs/feet more than usual
- Reluctance to jump or climb stairs
- Swollen or hot joints

Causes

Normal wear and tear

- Normal wear and tear of joints can lead to arthritis later in life.

Injuries

- Injuries very often lead to a dog developing arthritis later in life.

Abnormally shaped bones or cartilage

- If your dog has a condition that causes abnormally shaped bones or abnormal cartilage e.g. hip dysplasia or elbow dysplasia, there is a high chance they will develop arthritis in these joints.

Genetics

- Unfortunately, some breeds of dog are born with a high chance of developing arthritis:
 - Labradors (hips and elbows)
 - Springer Spaniels (hips and elbows)
 - German Shepherds (spine, hips, elbows)
 - Golden Retrievers (hips)
 - Rottweilers (hips and elbows)
 - Bernese mountain dogs (hips and elbows)
- Breeding schemes are in place for some of these breeds to try to improve their genetics, for example those operated by the British Veterinary Association and Kennel Club.

Arthritis is most common in old dogs due to wear and tear throughout life but it can also affect young dogs if they've had an injury or their joints haven't developed properly.

Treatment

Your vet will work with you to make your dog a lot more comfortable and help them move around more easily. Treatment may include:

Pain relief

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) reduce swelling and pain. They are usually given every day or for a few weeks at a time.

- If anti-inflammatory medication doesn't give enough pain relief, other types of pain relief may be used at the same time.
- Your vet will be able to recommend which medications might be appropriate for your dog.

Joint supplements

- Joint supplements such as omega 3, glucosamine (and many others) can be used at the same time as other medicines to try and help slow down the progression of arthritis.
- Joint supplements aren't a replacement for medications, and don't work for all dogs.
- There are many joint supplements of varying quality on the market. Your vet will be able to advise on a suitable product.

"Cartrophen" (Pentosan polysulphate sodium)

- A monthly injection that may help rebuild damaged cartilage and keep joint fluid healthy. Cartrophen is more effective in some pets than others.
- Your vet will be able to advise whether it may be an option for your pet.

Hydrotherapy

- Hydrotherapy can be used to give your dog exercise without putting too much strain on their joints. Your vet will be able to advise an appropriate hydrotherapy centre.

Acupuncture

- Acupuncture can help manage pain and allow your dog to move around more easily. Speak to your vet about whether this may be useful for your dog and about how to find a qualified veterinary acupuncturist.

Surgery

- If your dog's pain from arthritis is severe and uncontrollable, surgery might be considered. For example a hip-replacement or fusion of the joint. These surgeries are usually only available at specialist veterinary hospitals.

Home care

On top of medications and treatments prescribed by the vet, some of the things you can do to make your dog more comfortable include:

Regular, sensible walks

- Unless your vet advises otherwise, make sure your dog has regular short walks that stay the same each day. A sudden increase in exercise could cause your dog to become stiff and painful.
- Allow them to walk and run but don't allow them to jump, skid, chase balls, or run on uneven ground.

Keep your dog moving

- Unless your vet advises otherwise, throughout the day encourage your dog to get up and move around.
- Lying down for hours can cause joints to become stiff, a little bit of movement every now and then can help.

Keep your dog slim

- Keeping your dog slim is really important. Being overweight or obese put lots of extra pressure on joints.

Give your dog a choice of comfortable beds

- Allow your dog to choose whether to snuggle in an enclosed bed or stretch out on a flat mattress. Memory foam beds for dogs are very kind to joints.

Don't let your dog get cold

- Always dry your dog after wet walks.
- Heat soothes painful joints. A heat pad under their bed may give your dog extra comfort especially on cold days.
- You can focus heat on specific joints by applying a hot water bottle wrapped in a blanket or towel, but never leave your dog alone with a hot water bottle as they may get burnt.

Cover slippery floors in your house

- Dogs with arthritis have weak muscles which means they slip a lot more easily and struggle to rise up from tiled or wooden floor.
- Slipping can cause an injury on top of their arthritis. You can use rugs, carpets or anti-slip mats to make floors less slippery.
- If you can't cover the whole house, focus these in the areas that your dog uses the most.

Find out more

- 'Canine arthritis management' is a fantastic website full of information and support for owners of dogs with arthritis.

When to contact your vet

Symptoms of arthritis often develop slowly which means it can be difficult to know when to seek help. Book an appointment with your vet as soon as you notice any of the symptoms listed above.

Older dogs benefit from regular check-ups so your vet can pick up any early signs of arthritis.

You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Outlook

Arthritis is a lifelong condition that needs long-term management

- Arthritis gets slowly worse over time, but if it's managed well most dogs live happily for years after being diagnosed.
- You will need to work closely with your vet to make sure your dog is as comfortable as possible. This usually means giving medication and making lifestyle changes.

Dogs with well-managed arthritis can live happily for many years

- Let your vet know if you think your dog's pain isn't well controlled or you see symptoms returning.
- There are lots of different pain relief and anti-inflammatory medicines. If one isn't working your vet may suggest swapping to a different medication or adding a new one.
- Further down the line, severe arthritis might stop responding to treatment. If your dog is in pain or very uncomfortable even with medication, you may need to consider making the very difficult decision to put them to sleep. The right time will vary for everyone but the important thing is to think about whether your dog still has a good quality of life.

Prevention

There are many things you can do to help reduce the chance of your dog developing arthritis:

Weight Control

- Keep your dog slim to ensure no extra strain is put on their joints.

Regular exercise

- Regular exercise and staying fit will help your dog's muscles stay strong and take some pressure off their joints.

Good quality food

- Feeding a good quality food that is correct for your dog's life stage (e.g. puppy, adult or senior) will help them grow at the correct rate and receive the correct nutrients throughout their life.

Cost

Treatment for arthritis can cost a lot over a dog's lifetime. Think about insuring your dog as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start, so you have all the support you need to care for them.

It's also very important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your dog. There are often several treatment options so if one doesn't work for you and your pet then your vet may be able to offer another.

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