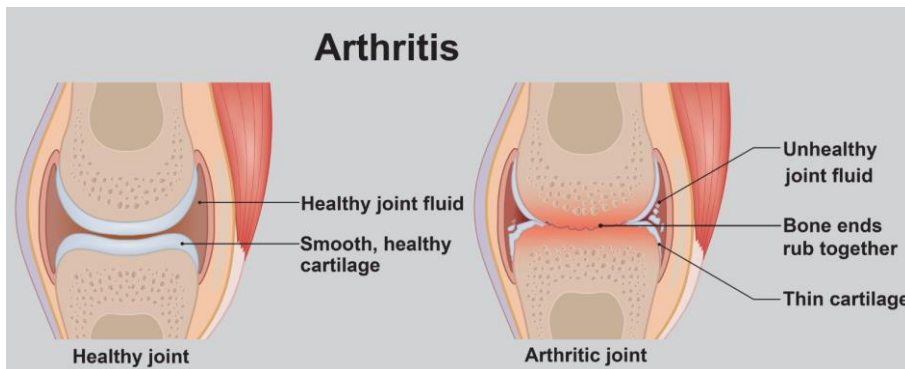


Arthritis in dogs

Overview

- Arthritis (osteoarthritis) is a very common condition that causes stiff, painful, swollen joints.
- Arthritis makes moving around difficult and uncomfortable.
- Arthritis is progressive, meaning it gets slowly worse over time.
- Arthritis can't be cured but fortunately, there are several treatment options to slow its progression and manage pain.
- Keep your dog's joints as healthy as possible by keeping them slim and giving them regular, sensible exercise
- Contact your vet if you suspect your dog might have arthritis.



What is arthritis?

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

Bones in a healthy joint have a smooth surface, which allows them to glide past each other when moving around. A joint with

arthritis has an uneven and worn surface, which means that instead of gliding, the bone surfaces rub against each other, causing swelling and pain.

Over time, arthritic joints become gradually thickened and stiff because they start to produce new bone that isn't needed. The extra bone causes more pain when your dog moves around.

Symptoms

Symptoms of arthritis in dogs include:

- Stiffness (especially after rest or after walks)
- Limping/lameness
- Narrowing of the hips and back end (weak muscles in the back legs)
- Slowing down on walks
- Being quiet, grumpy or sleeping more
- Low energy (lethargy)
- Saliva stained fur around painful joints
- Reluctance to jump or climb stairs
- Enlarged or swollen joints

Causes

Normal wear and tear

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

Genetics

- Unfortunately, some breeds of dog are born with an increased risk 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)
- Screening 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.

Abnormally shaped bones or cartilage

- If your dog has abnormally shaped bones or abnormal cartilage such as hip dysplasia or elbow dysplasia, there is a high chance they will develop arthritis.

Injuries

- Injuries often lead to arthritis later in life.

Treatment

Watch our video: 'Managing arthritis in dogs'

Treatment may include:

Pain relief

- Anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) reduce swelling and pain. They are usually given as an ongoing daily dose, or in pulses for a few weeks at a time.
- If anti-inflammatory medication doesn't give enough pain relief, other types of pain relief may be an option. Your vet will be able to recommend which might be appropriate for your dog.

Joint supplements

- Joint supplements aren't a replacement for medications, and don't work for all dogs.
- Joint supplements can be used at the same time as most other medicines.

- There are many joint supplements of varying quality on the market. Your vet will be able to advise on a suitable product.

Hydrotherapy

- Hydrotherapy can be a useful exercise that doesn't put too much strain on joints. Your vet will be able to advise an appropriate hydrotherapy centre.

Surgery

- If your dog's arthritic pain is severe and uncontrollable, joint surgeries such as fusion (arthrodesis) or replacements may be considered. These surgeries are often only available at specialist veterinary hospitals.

Home care for arthritis

Besides medications and treatments prescribed by your vet, there are things you can do to make your dog more comfortable including:

Regular, controlled walks

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

Keep your dog moving

- Unless your vet advises otherwise, encourage your dog to get up and move around throughout the day.
- 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 important – being overweight 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 kind to joints.

Keep your dog warm

- Heat soothes painful joints - a heat pad under your dog's bed may give them extra comfort, especially on cold days.
- Always dry your dog after wet walks.
- You can warm individual joints by using a hot water bottle wrapped in a blanket or towel but never leave your dog alone with a hot water bottle.

Cover slippery floors in your house

- Use rugs, carpets or anti-slip mats to make floors around the house less slippery.
- Dogs with arthritis have weak muscles, which means they are prone to slipping and struggle to get up. Slipping can cause further injury.
- 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 if 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 you are still concerned, contact your vet.

Outlook

Arthritis is a long-term condition that needs life-long management. Arthritis slowly worsens over time, but if well managed, most dogs can live happily for many years after diagnosis.

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.

Later in life, 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 several 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, controlled exercise and staying fit will help your dog's muscles stay strong and take some of the strain 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 become expensive. 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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