

ARTHRITIS

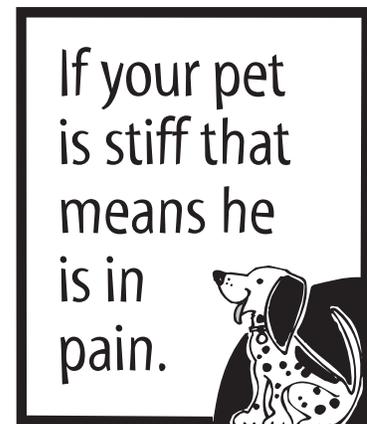
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videos on arthritis and
canine rehabilitation.

Arthritis is extremely common in older pets, especially the larger breeds of dogs. It can affect any joint, but the hips, shoulders and back are most common. If a pet has had surgery to, or injury of a bone or joint, arthritis will be more likely to occur. A recent study showed that most cats over age 12 have some degree of arthritis also.

Arthritis is progressive, becoming worse over time - sometimes quickly but usually slowly and gradually. It may start as intermittent, occasional sore days or in very cold weather or with strenuous exercise. As it progresses, the lameness and stiffness become more frequent. It is usually worst when your pet first gets up after lying down and gets a little better as he or she moves around.

Other symptoms include decreased activity; reluctance to walk, climb stairs, jump or play; limping; difficulty rising from a resting position; lagging behind on walks; soreness when touched; yelping or whimpering in pain; acting aggressive or withdrawn, or other personality changes. With cats you may notice a decreased ability to jump up or climb stairs and occasionally a change in litterbox use.

There are several other diseases and conditions that cause symptoms similar to arthritis, including intervertebral disc disease, Lyme Disease, spondylosis, ligament tears, and discospondylitis. It is important to have x-rays done to be sure arthritis is really the problem. Other diseases require different treatment than arthritis. Discospondylitis, an infection of the bones of the spine, progresses quickly, causing irreversible damage in a short period of time. Early diagnosis is important if proper treatment is to be effective. If your pet hurts, we need to find out what's wrong as soon as possible.



Animals don't moan, whimper or stop eating until the pain is intolerable. There is no need for your pet to suffer from untreated arthritis or other conditions. Pain medications can be prescribed to keep your pet comfortable. **In fact, the sooner medications are begun and the more faithfully they are given, the slower the arthritis will progress.** Waiting to begin medications until arthritis is severe is a lot like waiting to change your diet and exercise routine until after you've had the heart attack. It's better to start a healthy lifestyle early and prevent serious problems later.

Once the cartilage is eaten away from the joint and arthritis is severe, the treatment options are fewer and the prognosis is much worse. The goal with an inflammatory disease like arthritis is to slow or stop the inflammation, which slows the progress of the disease. If we can preserve cartilage and joint function longer we will have a pet who is much more comfortable as it ages. Both anti-inflammatory medications such as Rimadyl and nutritional supplements like glucosamine work best when started early. There are lots of effective treatments available today to increase the quality of life of arthritic pets. We're always happy to help.



Newer pain medications such as Rimadyl® and Deramaxx® have fewer risks and side effects than older medications like aspirin. Many human pain medications are toxic to pets, especially Tylenol for cats and ibuprofen for dogs. Some dogs tolerate aspirin well but many will develop serious side effects such as vomiting, stomach ulcers or kidney disease. Newer medications made for animals can cause these side effects too, but usually in a fraction of the number of pets as the older medications.

The medications used for arthritis and other diseases are lifelong, especially the anti-inflammatory ones like Rimadyl®.

Since these drugs can cause side effects, and since your pet will be on them for a long time, it is important for your dog to have regular examinations and blood tests to monitor for side effects, especially with liver and kidney function. Usually blood screening is recommended every 6 months. Visit our website to see our video on long term use of NSAID drugs.

Arthritic pets need regular, gentle exercise. For dogs, short walks are best. Over-exertion, as with fetching, frisbee tossing or running, tends to aggravate arthritis, but slow walking or swimming is very beneficial. Two 15 minute sessions are generally better than one 30 minute one. Do not over-do on cold or hot days, as older pets are less tolerant of temperature extremes. For arthritic cats, encourage gentle play.

Heart or respiratory disease and obesity decrease exercise tolerance. If your pet wants to stop, don't force him to keep going. If your pet is a hunting dog, you may have to force him to stop if he tries so hard he endangers his health. Some older pets are like older people - they don't want to admit they can't do the things they did in their youth. Simple household changes such as building a ramp, using a more shallow litter pan or moving the litter box so your cat doesn't have to go up stairs can help your pet to function better.

To control obesity, ask us for specific feeding recommendations. Older, inactive pets may only need half the calories they did when they were younger. Feeding appropriately and reducing weight increases activity. More exercise combined with less weight to carry around can reduce arthritis symptoms dramatically.

Arthritic pets are most stiff when they lay around, especially on cold surfaces. Encourage your dog to sleep on a bed or blanket and not on the cold, hard floor or ground. Pet sized water beds are available through pet supply catalogs and larger pet stores. These can be extremely beneficial to stiff, sore pets.

Arthritis gradually worsens with time. Other diseases may progress at varying speeds and more than one may be present at a time. Your pet's activity level and medications will need to be adjusted as the months pass. Keep in close contact with us so we can keep your pet as healthy and pain free as possible.

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