

Glycosaminoglycans and the Control of Arthritis

For the past few years veterinarians have been talking to dog owners about glycosaminoglycans, nutrients that help treat arthritis, including Adequan injections, glucosamine and chondroitin. Recent research shows that GAGs don't work by helping to lubricate the joints, as we had thought, but instead reduce inflammation and cartilage deterioration.

Once the cartilage that lines and cushions the bones and joints has worn away and arthritis is advanced, these products are not likely to be effective. The take-home message here is that **you should not wait for symptoms of arthritis to become severe to treat for it**. Research proves that the sooner these nutrients are added to the food or given as injections the slower arthritis will progress. Once the cartilage has worn away these treatments are no longer effective.

It has also become clear that much lower doses of medications to control pain and inflammation are required in those dogs that were started on these medications as soon as the first symptoms appeared. Early intervention slows the disease process and preserves joint function. Don't wait until your pet can't get up, can't go for a walk or won't climb the stairs. Start feeding a diet high in glucosamine as soon as your pet hits middle age, and begin anti-inflammatory therapy as soon as the first signs of stiffness appear. Waiting to start therapy until the arthritis is crippling is like waiting to improve your diet and exercise routine until after you've had the heart attack. By then a lot of damage has already been done.

Do you have an older pet? Ask your veterinarian how nutritional supplementation and aggressive pain management can lengthen your pet's life and greatly improve the quality of life. Have your dog's hips and spine x-rayed to look for early signs of arthritic disease. Pay attention to your pet's attitude – early signs of pain include the pet appearing tired, lethargic, clingy or sad, and reduced interest in walks, playtime or other activities he used to enjoy. Know the signs and act early!