



# Park Veterinary Centre

256 Cassiobury Drive. Watford. Herts. WD17 3PA

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## Arthritis

Arthritis is a degenerative joint disease whereby pain and stiffness develop as a result of wear and tear to the joints involved.

In the normal joint, the bone surfaces, which meet and rub together, are covered by a thin layer of cartilage – an elastic substance acting as a self-repairing, shock absorbing layer.

The moving parts of the joint are encased within a capsule filled with synovial fluid, which acts as a lubricant. Wear and tear, which occurs throughout life, may reach a stage where areas of the cartilage become worn, exposing the underlying bone and leading to pain and/or impaired movement.

Your dog's hips, knees and elbows are the most susceptible joints. In some individuals and certain breeds, abnormal wear can start quite early in life. This may be the result of injury or an inherited condition.

### **When old age becomes a pain:**

As we all know, getting about can become difficult with age and may become associated with considerable pain. Like humans, many dogs which have arthritic joints suffer in this way, but, because they are often much more stoical than we are, they seldom complain.

If your dog is to live life to the full, in spite of increasing pain and stiffness, you need to look out for the clues which may help to identify potential problems early, so that you can take necessary action as quickly as possible. Early action means treatment will be more successful and your dog will be comfortable for longer.

Here are some of the signs that suggest your dog may be in pain:

- Licking or self injury
- Reluctance to walk or play
- Difficulty in getting up
- Difficulty in climbing stairs/jumping into car/chair
- Limping or stiffness
- Change in character or aggression
- Reduced interaction with people
- Reduced appetite
- Increase in anxiety/clinging, etc

### **Exercise:**

Often, regular gentle exercise helps to maintain mobility, as joints that do not have regular movement may stiffen up, encouraging your dog to become less and less active. Even if your dog is keen to chase a ball, it may be better to avoid such energetic activities. Frequent gentle walks may be of more benefit.

Hydrotherapy is an increasingly popular complementary therapy for dogs with osteoarthritis. It involves purpose built pools that allow safe, controlled swimming for your dog. Swimming helps build up muscle mass which will support the joint. It is a 'low impact' exercise so won't aggravate joint pain. Speak to us about the correct type and level of exercise for your dog. We also have contact details of hydrotherapy pools in the area. Some insurance companies cover hydrotherapy.

## **Weight loss:**

Joint problems are aggravated by excess weight. Carrying excess weight causes both additional pain and increases damage to the joint. There have been studies done that have shown slim dogs to live longer than overweight dogs. Ask us if your pet is overweight. We offer free weight clinics.

In younger animals exercise plays a big part in controlling the weight. This is more difficult in older dogs with arthritis as we usually advise limited exercise. This means that usually a reduction in food intake is necessary. Sadly this can become a case of being 'cruel to be kind'. Talk to us about your dog's diet.

## **Treatment:**

Treatment of the older dog is aimed at reducing pain and stiffness so improving quality of life. As in humans, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) are now commonly used to achieve this, since they reduce the formation of substances in the body which give rise to both pain and inflammation. Early intervention is important to reduce the likelihood of more severe pain developing.

Remember that arthritis is a progressive disease and regular reassessment by your veterinary practice is essential to ensure that your pet is receiving the best possible care. As part of this assessment we might suggest blood testing to check liver and kidneys amongst others. This is important, as we might need to adjust the treatment accordingly once we have those results.

## **Supplementary therapies:**

Supplementary therapies include such things as nutritional supplements, acupuncture, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy (mentioned above).

These are becoming more popular and more common.

When choosing a physiotherapist make sure he/she is a chartered animal physiotherapist which means that they have had the training and have a governing body.

We can also give you details of acupuncturists.

There is a wide range of nutritional supplements (nutraceuticals) now that may help to support the normal function of your dog's joints. In the UK, vitamins, minerals, supplements and a variety of related nutritional products including nutraceuticals fall into 2 categories, licensed and unlicensed preparations. Licensed products are assessed for safety, efficacy and quality in accordance with legislation. Unlicensed products do not allow for medicinal claims, but can claim for health maintenance. The current regulatory position still has not really clarified the situation very much for the consumer. The same ingredients can still be found in licensed and unlicensed products. The key difference is that licensed products have therapeutic indications and may make claims as such, having had to provide a dossier of evidence to support efficacy, quality and safety claims.

There are 3 main ingredients in most joint supplements now:

- Glucosamine: only glucosamine hydrochloride is highly absorbed into the bloodstream (84%) compared to glucosamine sulphate. It provides a natural building block for growth, repair and maintenance of cartilage, it is supposed to slow deterioration of cartilage, relieve pain and improve joint mobility.
- Chondroitin: This is believed to enhance the shock-absorbing properties of collagen and block the breakdown of cartilage. This is often not contained in regular preparations from health shops.
- Turmeric/Curcumin: This is a strong antioxidant and helps to prevent further breakdown of cartilage. It also acts as a strong anti-inflammatory agent. Again this one is rarely found in most commercial unlicensed products.

Ask us about using Seraquin which contains all of the above.



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