

Ways to increase your arthritic dog's comfort

Is your dog stiff? Does he/she have trouble laying down or getting up? Is stair climbing more difficult? Does he/she lag behind on walks? If so, your pet probably has arthritis. If you are seeing these changes in your dog, we strongly recommend a physical exam with your veterinarian. Once more serious medical conditions have been ruled out and a diagnosis of arthritis is made, veterinarians now have a variety of different treatments that can improve your pet's quality of life!!

Remember – many dogs don't complain about their discomfort. If your pet is stiff, he/she probably has some degree of discomfort and we can help

Weight loss

One of the most important factors affecting an arthritic dog's comfort is its weight. Obesity or even a weight excess of 5-10# can increase the load on arthritic joints significantly. An increased weight bearing load adds pressure to joints, increasing both inflammation and pain. If your animal is overweight, we can recommend diet changes and a weight loss program that will help.

Bedding

Just as in an arthritic person, comfortable bedding can help your pet. Many dogs tend to lie for hours on a hard floor or on an uneven dog bed. This can increase stiffness and discomfort. There are available in stores and pet catalogs a variety of dog beds designed for aging animals. Look for evenly cushioned beds that provide adequate padding and support. There are "orthopedic" beds that have an egg-shell design. These, in particular, are excellent for the arthritic pet.

Exercise

It is important to exercise your older dog regularly to decrease joint stiffness, preserve muscle mass and strength, and to increase your pet's quality of life. Joint movement stimulates joint fluid production thereby increasing lubrication and range of motion. It is, however, important to gauge the amount and type of exercise to your pet's capabilities. Shorter, more frequent walks are much better than long walks that occur occasionally. Get into the habit of exercising your pet regularly for short periods. REMEMBER never to push your pet's limits. If your dog is stiffer or more uncomfortable the day after the exercise then you did too much. Shorten the distance, the duration, or change the type of exercise the next time.

Physical Therapy

Just as in people, physical therapy can help dogs with arthritis increase their strength and mobility, and decrease stiffness or pain. Physical therapy uses heat, cold, massage, passive range of motion exercises, among other modalities. Many of the techniques are easy to do at home and may significantly help.

Gently massaging sore muscles can be a wonderful treat for your pet! Gently moving the limb through its normal range of motion can help increase circulation and decrease stiffness. Ask us to show you some simple things that you can do or we can contact a veterinary physical therapist to provide more advanced therapy techniques.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is the insertion of hair-thin needles at specific points in the body to create a cascade of physiologic reactions. By activating the central nervous system, acupuncture causes the release of the body's natural pain killers, the endorphins. Numerous scientific studies have verified that acupuncture not only relieves pain, but stimulates circulation and the immune system, decreases inflammation, relieves muscle spasms, and can induce a feeling of well-being. This is an excellent tool for the arthritic pet! It is a natural, drug-free way to increase your animal's comfort. It also can be effectively combined with the other arthritis treatments available for added benefit. Ask us for the name of a certified veterinary acupuncturist in your area!

Glucosamine / Chondroitin Sulfate

The combination of glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate (Cosequin®) is a natural nutritional supplement available for arthritic animals. These molecules are part of the normal make-up of cartilage and other joint tissues. Glucosamine stimulates the production of the cartilage matrix; chondroitin inhibits enzymes that degrade cartilage. Together they promote joint health and can significantly reduce the pain and inflammation of arthritis, as well as slow the progression of further joint degeneration.

This supplement is well-tolerated and can be combined with the other arthritis treatments. We recommend it for the majority of animals with arthritic changes. It can and should be started early, and can be continued for the life of the dog. Ask us for the proper dosage for your pet.

Antioxidants

As an animal develops arthritis, the joint cells become inflamed causing the release of substances called "free radicals". These free radicals contribute to further inflammation and damage to joint cells. Antioxidants, such as Comfort®, Proanthazone, and fish oil, Vitamins E and C, among others help neutralize free radical cell damage and inflammation. Ask us for specific antioxidants and doses that may help your pet.

J/D – Joint Diet

Hill's has developed a diet made specifically for dogs with arthritis. This diet contains glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate, as well as all of the antioxidants and vitamins needed to reduce joint inflammation. This is an economical way to supply the nutrients necessary for joint health and comfort. If you chose to feed J/D to your pet, you will still need to supplement glucosamine/chondroitin at ½ the normal dose. Additional antioxidant supplementation will not be needed.

Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS)

NSAIDS such as Rimadyl®, Deramaxx®, Metacam®, among others, are highly effective drugs used to reduce the pain and inflammation of arthritis. Used either short-or long-term, these drugs can improve the quality of life of an arthritic pet significantly. NSAIDS are well-tolerated by most dogs, but, as with any medication, a small number of dogs may be intolerant. When used long term, we recommend biyearly blood testing to ensure your pet's health. Unfortunately, cats are less tolerant of NSAIDS and we have fewer drug choices available for treatment of feline arthritis.

**Why not simply use aspirin for your pet. Studies have shown that unlike the newer NSAIDS that are "chondro-protective", daily aspirin can actually further the cartilage damage seen in arthritic dogs when used long-term.

Other Medications

There are occasions in which a pet may still experience discomfort after trying the above therapies. In these cases, additional medication may be needed. There are several drugs available, such as Tramadol and Amantadine that can be safely used in conjunction with NSAIDS for additional pain relief. Please call us if your pet is experiencing continued pain with the standard therapies.