

ARTHRITIS IN DOGS AND CATS

PET CARE SHEET

Arthritis - which is the term for inflammation of joints - is the most common cause of restricted movement in dogs and occurs less frequently in cats.

Arthritis is always associated with PAIN, which may be severe – animals do not limp unless they are uncomfortable, but many animals do not show obvious signs of pain to their owners, so the key is to look for changes in your pet's behavior

The most common signs of arthritis are:

- * Reluctance to walk or play
- * Trouble getting up.
- * Difficulty with stairs.
- * Difficulty jumping into the car or onto a chair.
- * Limping or stiffness.
- * Licking or chewing a joint or joint
- * Change in character or aggression (due to pain) – sometimes manifested as yelping for no apparent reason or pain when touched on the lower back or legs.

Arthritis is associated with inflammation of one or more joints this may be due to the wear and tear of age or be related to an injury or existing condition e.g. hip dysplasia. The cartilage lining the joint becomes damaged and the fluid, which lubricates the joint is reduced in quantity and is less effective.

Diagnosis can often be made on examination but sometimes an x-ray is required to determine the degree of joint damage.

Since it is usually not possible to reverse the changes of arthritis fully treatment is usually required for the rest of the animal's life.

Large breed dogs eg Labradors, German Shepherds and Rottweilers – especially if overweight are more prone due to the increased stresses on the joints

TREATMENT

Keep the pet warm and dry

Weight control is essential – because extra weight places unnecessary strain on the already damaged joints. A calorie controlled diet may be needed, high calorie treats should be avoided.

Exercise should be controlled to allow enough movement to maintain joint mobility without further strain – this may involve exercise on the lead only for dogs – at least initially. Controlled swimming may be useful as flexibility of the joints, and muscle strength can be maintained without weight bearing. Gentle exercise is best. After flare ups complete rest may be required.

Non Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDS) e.g. Rimadyl, Previcox and Metacam are designed to reduce the pain and inflammation of arthritis – they may be given for life and after an initial loading dose a lower maintenance dose is usually all that is required.

Cartilage protective drugs e.g. Vet Vits Flexi joint and Cosequin capsules and Cartrophren injection act by reducing cartilage breakdown in the joint and although they are only effective after several weeks medication can in some cases provide pain relief alone without the use of anti inflammatory products.

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