

Arthritis

in dogs & cats



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What is Arthritis?

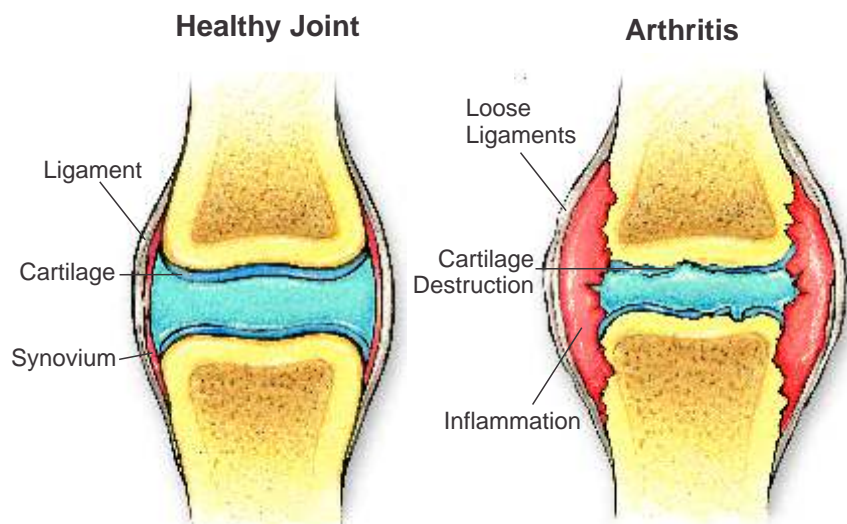
Degenerative joint disease or arthritis is a common problem in dogs and cats as they age. In fact, arthritis affects one in five adult dogs. It is more prevalent in older dogs or medium to large breeds but pets of any age and size can be affected, including cats.

There can be various causes that will initiate the changes within the joint and start the arthritic process. These can include;

- Conformation or developmental problems with younger animals
- Injuries such as accidents and trauma
- Bone infections
- Cancers
- General wear and tear in athletic animals

The images below show the damage which has been done to the joint on the right (arthritis).

Compare the healthy joint to the joint with arthritis. You can see the destruction of cartilage, the ligaments are a lot looser and there is a lot of inflammation.





Clinical Signs

Most pets are presented to the vet surgery for a certain lameness or change in their ability to be able to walk around or get up and down.

When we examine these patients it is often not easy for the owners to find out where the pet is sore, so we need to do a thorough examination of each leg as well as the spine.

Some animals will have pain, while others have a lack of sensation of where their limbs are and so cannot stand well balanced.

A summary of clinical signs –

- Slow to get up or walk
- Circling many times before lying down
- Unwilling to continue a long walk
- Lameness or limping
- Dragging of hind legs
- Unwilling to jump up or down anymore
- Crying or whining when moving
- Getting old, slowing down type look
- Swelling of joints
- Enlarged and hard joints
- Restricted range of motion of joints

General signs can occur in addition such as going off their food, not playing, staying in bed all day, losing control of bladder and bowels and weight loss.

How is arthritis diagnosed?

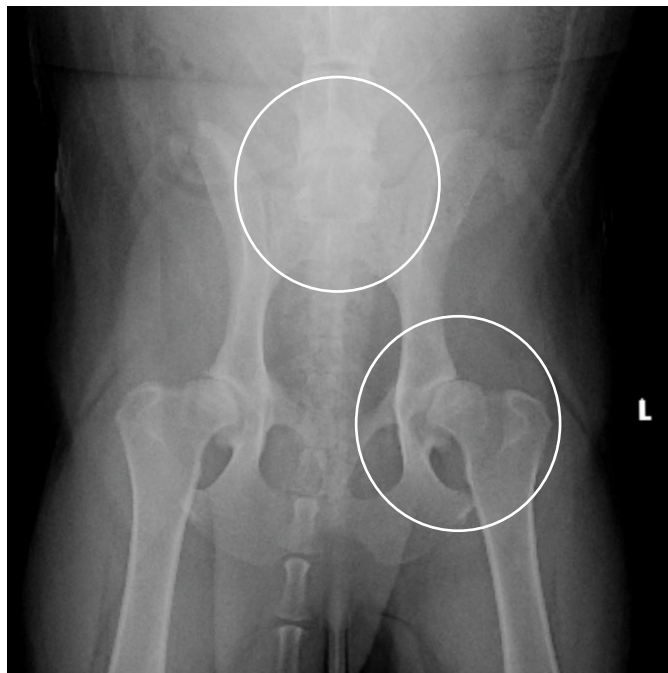
Clinical Examination

The clinical examination by the vet is the first step. In the examination we can palpate all of the joints and spine, looking for asymmetry, irregularity and pain. A lack of sensation can also be apparent in some spinal arthritis.

Radiographs (X-rays)

Once we can isolate the area of concern, a complete diagnosis can involve x-rays of the area. The x-rays are our way to visualise the current level of arthritis and be able to give a prognosis for response to medical or surgery therapy.

In the x-rays below you can see that this dog's hip joint has severe hip dysplasia or arthritis. The spine also has multiple areas where the individual vertebrae are joining up together – often termed spondylosis or in this particular area of the lumbar – sacral vertebrae we call it cauda equina disease.





How is arthritis treated?

Medication

Any arthritic change can induce pain and change the way the pet walks. To help alleviate the pain and to stop the continual degenerative changes, we can use various medications.

Nutraceuticals are natural products that can help form the building blocks of joint repair. These products can include glucosamine, green lipped mussel extract, shark cartilage and chondroitin. They are similar to the human type products but have been made in a formulation that allows them to be digested properly and thus made useful in our pets systems.

Some premium foods contain ingredients for mobility support. Feeding a diet containing glucosamine, chondroitin or green lipped mussel will help support your pets joints as they eat their regular meal! We will help you choose the right diet for your pet.

Medical therapy can also involve the use of Disease Modifying Osteo Arthritic Drugs (DMOAD) for dogs. This drug comes as an injection given under the skin once a week for 4 weeks then repeated every 3 months. It is only useful for conditions that involve the joints and will not help out with muscle pain. The NSAIDS or non steroidal drugs are a

once a day oral medication similar to Nurofen but made specifically for animal systems (you should never use human medications in animals). These products can be used daily or just when the animal shows pain. NSAIDS will work in joints and also on muscle and ligament pain and inflammation.

Occasionally cortisone is used in arthritic conditions. Inflammation of the spinal nerves that are exiting between vertebrae may respond to cortisone if they are being pinched or inflamed. Dogs with the cauda equine disease process sometimes respond better to cortisone than NSAIDS.

All of these medications may have potential side effects and so need to be used under strict veterinary guidance.

Surgery

Surgery for some of these conditions can help reduce pain and allow for easier movement.

Hip dysplasia surgery can involve a total hip replacement in extreme conditions though it is very costly. Salvage procedures such as an excision arthroplasty (hip joint removal) are beneficial for dogs where the budget is limited or the patient too old for replacement surgery.



Prevention

Arthritic change is commonplace but should not be overlooked. There are things we can do to improve the quality of life for our pets.

If we can help prevent arthritis our pets can live a longer and happier life. These strategies may assist:

- Do not over exercise young dogs – on lead walk until 12 months old – do not run
- Reduce jumping up or down from the car, couches, beds
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Do some daily exercise to maintain muscle mass
- Consider the use of a nutraceutical from 7 years of age
- Feed a premium diet specifically formulated to help support the joints