



Arthritis in Dogs

Arthritis can be a painful and debilitating condition caused by inflammation of one or multiple joints.

Dogs can develop arthritis in any joint, at any time, although elderly and overweight animals are most at risk.

Some young large breed dogs may develop inflamed joints following trauma, inappropriate exercise or as a result of cartilage abnormalities.

What are the signs of arthritis?

Signs may vary but most commonly include chronic intermittent lameness, muscle loss and stiffness after resting. Some dogs may lick and chew painful joints, struggle jumping in and out of the car, or be reluctant to run when on walks.

How do we diagnose arthritis?

As with humans, an X-ray is the best way to diagnose arthritis. This is important because some tendon and ligament injuries may present with the same signs, but require different management. Most dogs will require a sedative or general anaesthetic to allow good quality X-rays to be taken from particular angles.

Depending on the X-ray results, some dogs may require further tests such as analysis of fluid within the joint, muscle scans and arthroscopy (keyhole surgery to insert a small camera in the joint to look for cartilage damage).

How can we prevent arthritis?

The most important factor in preventing arthritis is weight control. Overweight pets put more force on their joints, causing them to age more rapidly. Weight control relies both on exercise and dietary management. If you think your dog may be overweight, please contact your local branch to arrange a free weight check.

Young dogs, particularly large breeds such as Labradors, German Shepherd Dogs and Great Danes should have moderately restricted exercise until they are fully grown to prevent trauma to the developing joints.

How can we treat arthritis?

Weight control – as above, keeping your dog at their optimum weight will reduce unnecessary force on their painful joints.

Exercise – regular exercise little and often helps maintain muscle tone and reduce stiffness.

Joint Supplements – These help joint cartilage to regenerate, usually taking 4-6 weeks to reach peak effect. Numerous joint supplements are available, most commonly containing glucosamine and chondroitin. We recommend the use of Veterinary formulations which have undergone rigorous testing to prove they are both safe and effective. Most are available in sprinkle capsules or tablets to suit each individual.

Diet – both Royal Canin and Hills Pet Foods have developed diets containing joint supplements. These have been proven to reduce requirement for pain killers, and are available in reduced calorie versions to also aid weight loss.

Pain relief and Cartilage Regeneration – Cartrophen is an injectable medication that helps reduce inflammation and aid cartilage regeneration. Four injections are required, given weekly by your Vet.

Anti-inflammatories – A range of medications are available to help reduce inflammation, therefore relieving pain. Many animals receive anti-inflammatories at some point in their lives; often a short course following an injury or operation. Occasionally, anti-inflammatories are used to help arthritic animals, given daily in liquid or tablet form. These medications are highly effective and often significantly improve mobility and quality of life; however there is a small risk of side effects such as stomach irritation. Care must be taken if your pet suffers from liver or kidney disease, therefore screening blood tests are recommended periodically for all pets on long term treatment.

Physiotherapy – We offer physiotherapy sessions with Polly Hutson, a Chartered Animal Physiotherapist based at Drove Hospital. Treatments include massages to relieve muscle spasms, and specially designed exercises to help increase mobility.

Hydrotherapy – Swimming can be of huge benefit to arthritic dogs, as well as post-operatively following joint surgery. Specialist establishments with trained staff offer rehabilitation courses to help exercise your pet without impacting on the painful joints. Hydrotherapy is also useful to help maintain strong muscles and prevent obesity.

Acupuncture – this ancient technique, offered at Drove Hospital, has been used successfully in a range of patients. Please see our Acupuncture leaflet for more details.

01793 522483 – 24 hour Emergency Pet service

