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ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is a condition resulting in painful joints. It is extremely common in older pets, especially the larger breeds of dogs. Any joint can be affected with arthritis. The most commonly affected joints include the hips, knees, shoulders, elbows, and vertebral column (back). It is estimated that arthritis affects one in five adult dogs or more than 8 million in the US.

Arthritis may be a result of an injury or may develop for unknown reasons. Frequently it is progressive (worsens with time). It may develop slowly or quickly. Often it begins with occasional sore days, frequently associated with weather changes or strenuous exercise. Clinical signs in most pets are usually worse when they first get up and start to move. Overweight pets are most susceptible.

Many clinical signs may be a result of arthritis and the related pain it causes. Signs may include lack of appetite (unless your pet is a Labrador Retriever), reluctance to walk, climb stairs, or play, limping, lagging behind on walks, difficulty in rising from a resting position, personality changes, or even crying aloud when the pain is severe. Animals don't moan or whimper until the pain becomes very severe.

Other diseases must be ruled out before a diagnosis of osteoarthritis can be made. Potential rule-outs include disc disease, ligament tears, bone infections, and nerve damage. X-rays are often necessary to obtain the correct diagnosis.

There is no need to let your pet suffer the intensive pain that can be attributed to arthritis. Strategies for treatment of arthritis may be either proactive or reactive. Proactive involves therapy, which increases the body's ability to cope with the problem. Such things as drugs to improve and strengthen body mass and drugs to increase the joint fluid (lubrication) within the affected joints are available. Reactive treatment includes such things as drugs designed to minimize pain. Pets do not tolerate human non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (Nsaids) such as ibuprofen and Tylenol™ as well as people. Recent advancements in drugs for treating arthritis in pets have greatly enhanced our ability to control the pain of osteoarthritis. We keep several of these newer anti-inflammatory drugs, Rimadyl™, Metacam™, Previcox™, and Deramaxx™ are just a few of these pain killers designed specifically for dogs. Glucosamine/ chondroitin sulfate products work either with the anti-inflammatory drugs or by themselves to slow the progression of the disease and to make the affected joints more comfortable..

It is important to work closely with your veterinarian to minimize side effects of these drugs. Periodic comprehensive physical examinations and laboratory screening is necessary to monitor the body's response to any long-term medication.

Regular, moderate exercise is very important to keep joints working properly. Over-exertion can make the condition worse. Swimming is great exercise for arthritic pets. Exercise also helps keep your dogs weight at an acceptable level. Those arthritic joints are happiest carrying around less excess weight.