



HELPING OLD DOGS WITH ARTHRITIS and JOINT PAIN

One of the hardest things as a dog owner is watching an old, arthritic dog struggling to get up and get moving after lying down for a while. And worse, the ritual of getting up slowly and painfully is played over and over several times each day, making it even harder for us to bear.

Arthritis results as the cartilage surface of joints (knees, hips, etc) gets thinner and the cartilage cells die. These dying cells release enzymes that cause inflammation of the joint, which causes pain. As the cartilage thins, the bone that lies beneath the cartilage may deteriorate. And in some cases, the formation of small deposits of bone in the joints can add significantly to pain and discomfort. By this point, limping and / or continuous pain and discomfort are a way of life for these poor pets. Fortunately, we have a variety of ways to help your pet, and usually a combination of practices can offer great benefit to them.

Just as with people, we have very effective pain relievers for pets. The most commonly prescribed medications for pets (and people, too) are called NSAIDs ~Non-Steroid Anti-Inflammatory Drugs. While they can be very helpful, be aware that most come with certain precautions ... both in pets and people.

There are a variety of **NSAIDs** for both dogs and cats, but all are by prescription only. Because we are not full-service, we do not prescribe any of these medications at Carolina Value Pet Care since their use must be monitored with periodic blood tests to make sure they are not causing liver or kidney problems. Still, these NSAIDs have helped millions of dogs lead more comfortable lives. You may recognize some of these medications: **Rimadyl** (Carprofen ~ available as Novox in generic forms), **Deramaxx** (Deracoxib), **Previcox** (Firocoxib), **Metacam** (Meloxicam ~ available for Cats, too), and **EtoGesic** (Etodolac). Most recently, a new medication **Galliprant** (Grapiprant) was introduced and it is a welcome addition since it is considered to be safer than other NSAIDs as it is much less likely to cause intestinal, liver or kidney problems., and it doesn't require blood tests to monitor.

An injectable medication **Adequan** has proven to be extremely valuable with very few side-effects. To achieve desired results, it requires 6 injections over the first 3 weeks, then injections about once a month or so. It is truly a great product, but it may be a little pricey for some pet owners.

Prescription pain medications such as **Tramadol**, **Gabapentin** and **Amantadine** may not relieve inflammation, but they can certainly help with pain management.

Besides prescriptions medications, there are a number of other ways to help an arthritic pet.

One of my favorite recommendations is **Glucosamine Chondroitin with MSM**, which provides nutritional support to protect the cartilage and also slows down the enzymes that break down the cartilage. As a pet product, it usually comes as a tasty, chewable tablet. Since Glucosamine is considered a dietary supplement, it is not regulated by the FDA. Therefore, there is no guarantee of quality control in the manufacturing of many people or pet products. While you can try human Glucosamine w/MSM from any pharmacy (with no guarantee of quality), I personally recommend **Cosequin with MSM** as the best of the pet products as it offers the most reliable results for your pet (as well as assurance of quality) and provides other 'healing' ingredients. **Dasuquin Advanced** is a good choice as well.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids in the form of **Fish oils** can be helpful when given at appropriate doses. The ideal dose is 60mg to 75mg per pound of body weight ... given daily. To properly dose, look at the label on the bottle and combine (add) the mg of EPA+DHA. Ex: A 50 lb dog would need ~3000-4000mg of combined EPA + DHA each day.

I am willing to try Buffered **Aspirin**, if used sparingly. The recommendation is 1 Baby Aspirin (81mg) for each 15 lbs of body weight, given every other day as needed. An Adult Buffered Aspirin (325mg) is good for a 60 lb dog.

If your pet is overweight, please read my handout entitled "How To Help Your Dog and Cat Lose Weight" for my thoughts, ideas and simple strategies for **shedding unwanted pounds** from your pet. Losing extra weight can take an enormous burden off the painful, creaky joints of older pets, or those dogs that have had joint injuries.

Physical therapy can be extremely beneficial. There are veterinarians who offer physical therapy / re-hab for those patients that have had bone and joint surgery, as well as for older, arthritic pets. Some pet owners have found good results with **acupuncture** and / or **massage therapy** for their pets. It can definitely be worth trying to find veterinarians or individuals certified in these practices to perform these services.

A very simple and practical measure is to provide your arthritic pet with a **well-padded bed**. And **heated pet beds** can be even more helpful and comfortable, especially in the winter months. Since slick floors and surfaces can be a real challenge for arthritic pets, use non-skid rugs and carpets. Stairs can be really tricky as well, so building a ramp (if practical), or putting carpet on the stairs, or even carrying your old friend up and down steps can help considerably.

With the advances of medicine nowadays, even **laser therapy** for arthritis is available for dogs ... also with good success. The biggest challenge is finding a vet clinic that offers it.

There are so-called 'natural' (whatever that means ... so please don't be fooled by this marketing buzzword !) pain relief medications on the market, but I have no experience with them. I suggest that you do your own homework before trying them on your pet. And if you're relying on the internet ('Dr Google') for answers, make sure you know the difference between scientific proof and somebody simply spouting their opinion or promoting their product.

I hope you now realize you have lots of choices to consider. And I believe it's always a good idea to combine strategies for even better results. Give your old dog the help she / he deserves !

- Dr Bob Parrish / www.CarolinaValuePetCare.com