



# Osteoarthritis in Dogs & Cats



## OSTEOARTHRITIS

It is estimated that 25 percent of dogs are diagnosed with osteoarthritis (arthritis) in their life time, and as many as 60 percent of dogs have radiographic evidence of it. Degenerative joint disorders are also common in cats but are less likely to be associated with obvious signs. Affected animals often appear stiff and slow, and commonly have difficulty rising, or there may be an obvious lameness. Diagnosis is normally based on clinical signs and x-rays of the affected joints.

In a normal joint, cartilage covers the ends of the long bones, and in conjunction with synovial fluid, provides an almost frictionless, weight-bearing surface. In arthritis, the cartilage becomes eroded and fissured, and the synovial fluid that normally lubricates the joint becomes thin, resulting in loss of mobility. The envelope which surrounds the joint to contain the synovial fluid (joint capsule) becomes swollen and inflamed and this produces further restriction of mobility and most importantly, pain.

There are a few measures you can take at home to help relieve your arthritic pet. These include management of weight, environment and exercise control.

Most animals with arthritis will need medication from time to time to relieve their discomfort. There are a variety of nutraceutical and pharmaceutical medications, diets and rehabilitation options available to help treat osteoarthritis. Unfortunately, the nature of the disease means some things work exceptionally well in some patients and are unsuccessful in others.

On examination the veterinarian may recommend the following:

### 1. **Weight reduction:**

Singularly the most common exacerbating factor of all. It is just amazing how much effect losing 10% of bodyweight has on those over-worked joints! We have weight reducing programs and specific diets which really do work.

### 2. **Exercise management:**

Regular, low impact, gentle exercise is essential to keep those old joints working and remaining supple. Activities such as ball retrieval and frisbee catching should be avoided to reduce excess strain on joints.

### 3. **Environmental management:**

Ensure your pet has a dry, warm, padded sleeping location, off the floor and away from damp or drafty areas. Help in and out of the car is important, or consider a ramp for larger dogs. On hard floors, methods of providing non-slip flooring should be considered.

After considering all these external and environmental factors we then look at treatments we can provide as veterinarians.



#### 4. Cartrophen injections:

Cartrophen (Sodium Pentosan Polysulfate) is an injectable medication, which is usually very safe and well tolerated. It possesses strong anti-inflammatory activity, but also increases production of joint fluid, decreases cartilage breakdown, and improves circulation to joint tissues. This means that it treats the underlying disease process rather than just relieving the symptoms. This is a series of four injections, given weekly. Booster injections are recommended every 1, 3, 6, or 12 months (depending on the patient) to maintain the effect. Most animals will show a quick response to the initial course, however it is also beneficial to prevent further arthritis. Benefits include increased activity and general well-being, and success rates have been reported of 70-80%.

#### 5. Joint Supplements:

Joint supplements are usually very safe and well tolerated with minimal side effects. They are useful for mild-moderate arthritis, and as preventatives. There are many products available and they are often chosen on a case-by-case basis. These are some of the common supplements we use:

- **4Cyte Epitalis Forte (gel):** Contains **Epitalis** which is a plant seed extract derived from *Biota Orientalis* (the Chinese “Healing Tree”). It has been shown to stimulate healthy cartilage production, repair damaged joints and suppress anti-inflammatory chemicals responsible for poor joint function and pain.
- **4Cyte (granules):** Contains **Epitalis & Green Lipped Mussel**.
- **Antinol (capsules):** Contains **Green Lipped Mussel**. Mussels contain a high amount of **omega 3 fatty acids** which have strong anti-inflammatory properties, and Chondroitin.
- **Osteosupport (capsules):** Contains **Green Lipped Mussel** and **Chondroitin**.
- **Osteocare (chews or powder):** Contains **Glucosamine** and **Chondroitin**, which reduce the rate of cartilage loss in joints. Useful for dogs with a predisposition to joint problems.
- **Fish oils:** Contain **omega 3 fatty acids**, which have strong anti-inflammatory properties. Available as capsules or a liquid.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin:** These naturally occur in the body, and are used for building components of joints, and so may reduce the rate of cartilage loss and pain.



## 7. Diet:

There are a variety of diets that we can feed dogs that have ingredients to help support joint health. **Hills Metabolic Mobility** is particularly useful as a weight reduction diet if your dog is also overweight. Otherwise, **Hills J/D**, **Royal Canin Mobility** or **Delicate Care Mobility** are all available. Please check with your vet before making dietary changes.

## 8. Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatories:

Non-steroidal medications such as **Carprofen**, **Meloxicam** or **Previcox** are used regularly to treat the pain associated with osteoarthritis. These are a great form of pain relief. It is important to carry out regular blood tests to check liver and kidney function when animals are on these long term.

## 9. Additional pain medications:

Other secondary pain medications may be added to a treatment regime for pain control in the later stages of arthritis. These may include medications such as Gabapentin, Amantadine or Opioids.

## 10. Rehabilitation & Physiotherapy:

There are now a variety of pet Rehabilitation options available in Perth. These options are great to get the joints moving correctly.

- **Active Pet Rehab** operate out of Mosman Park Veterinary Clinic and offer physio-like rehab and the use of an aqua treadmill which allows patients to walk under water, reducing pressure on joints.
- **Paws To Play Rehab**, run by Dr Susan Hill, offers physio-like rehab in the comfort of your own home or at our practice.

## 11. Acupuncture:

**Dr Monica Lin** practices acupuncture at our Swanbourne practice. Acupuncture is one of the oldest practices in the world. It is a Chinese medicine based on the concept of qi (energy) along meridians (energy pathways) in the body.

Very fine needles are inserted in specific locations with the aim of restoring qi flow, improving blood circulation, enhancing organ function and reducing pain & inflammation.

This is a worthwhile and relatively non-invasive technique.



## 12. Surgery

In severe cases of arthritis surgery may be indicated. This may include arthroscopy, reconstructive surgery or salvage surgical procedures.

**Please feel free to ask us about any of these suggestions when considering a program to manage arthritis in your “best friend”.**