



Managing arthritis in dogs

The first step in managing arthritis is to schedule an appointment with Wagga Wagga Veterinary Hospital for a thorough clinical examination. In order to accurately diagnose your pet's condition, a general anaesthetic and X-Rays may be required to determine exactly what is happening in your pet's joints. A multi-targeted plan can then be put together for their individual situation.

To help your dog be happy and enjoy life again, there are 4 important areas that we will focus on:

1. Weight management

This is the most important aspect of managing any animal with arthritis. Overweight animals will place proportionally more weight on their joints and therefore cause more localised inflammation and irritation to the joints, which in turn can hasten the progression of arthritis. Please ask us about our free weight loss program for your pet if necessary.

2. Exercise management

Exercise is a very important part of managing arthritis. Regular controlled exercise (leash walking, swimming) is extremely beneficial for keeping the joints mobile and the muscles working well. Uncontrolled exercise (chasing after tennis balls, racing up and down stairs) can place undue pressure on ligaments and result in permanent damage to the joints – unfortunately the tennis ball may have to be retired.

3. Home comforts/ environment changes

In mild cases, some simple steps taken at home will help to reduce their level of pain and discomfort. Ensure that your pet has a warm, comfortable place to sleep that is away from drafts. Plenty of bedding will help protect any sore joints (a trampoline bed with extra padding is ideal). Provide a ramp in the garden, as an alternative to stairs and provide assistance when getting in and out of cars.

4. Veterinary treatments

Various veterinary treatments are available to manage osteoarthritis in pets. The best option will depend on a number of different factors involving your dog: such as age, severity of signs, progression of the disease process and whether they have any other health problems. Importantly all arthritis patients should be accurately diagnosed before starting a treatment plan.

The different treatments that can be offered include:

- *Disease modifying osteoarthritis drugs (Pentosan polysulfate):* These medications are given as a series of injections: one injection a week for four weeks and the course of 4 injections usually needs to be repeated every 1-3 months. They act to stabilise joint membranes, help joint cartilage repair and

improve joint lubrication. They provide significant improvement in a high percentage of arthritis patients with minimal (if any) side effects.

- *Non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID's)*: These medications are specifically formulated for use in dogs and should only be prescribed by a veterinarian. They work by reducing the inflammation around the joints and by providing significant pain relief. With regular check-ups with your veterinarian to monitor your dog's liver and kidney function, assess the most appropriate NSAID and dose rate to administer, most patients respond very well to their use.
- *Neutraceuticals/ Prescription diets*: Eg: Sasha's Blend, JointGard, Glyde, Royal Canin Mobility diet, Hills J/D. These are dietary supplements or prescriptions diets that contain ingredients such as Glucosamine, Chondroitin sulphate, Fish Oils and/ or Green Lipped mussel. These agents work together to aid the protection of joints and can be given on a long term basis to help reduce inflammation over time.
- *Surgery*: There are a number of surgical procedures available for pets with, or who will be predisposed to osteoarthritis including total hip replacements. The surgical options depend on the patient, and the nature of the joint disease present. This can be discussed on an individual basis during the consultation process.
- *Physical therapy*: Physical therapy involves specific activities designed to improve strength and mobility without causing additional stress on a joint. It is also a useful adjunct to helping a pet lose weight and assisting rehabilitation following joint surgery. Please note: It is not the same as going to the beach and walking on sand/ running in and out of the surf. There are a number of potential benefits of physical therapy in arthritic pets:
 - Management after orthopaedic surgery: While rest is important after surgery, the recognition of the importance of early mobilisation and rapid return to weight bearing has revolutionised the post operative management of animals undergoing surgery. Evidence is mounting that the consumption of NSAIDs and opioids (such as morphine) decreases when a well constructed physical therapy program is instituted.
 - Maintenance / restoration of range of movement by active and passive stretching, specific exercises, and trigger point therapy to release muscles. When performing stretching exercises it is important to gently manoeuvre the limb through a range of motion that is well tolerated.
 - Strengthening exercises to provide resistance so that muscles work a little harder. Eg Leash walking in calm water at waist height. This can be done at the beach if the conditions are right or by using a hydrotherapy treadmill.
 - Pain relief through heat / cold, acupuncture, massage, TENS.

Principals:

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- Stimulation of proprioception through specific balancing exercises.

If you feel that your dog may have any of the symptoms mentioned above or are concerned that your dog may be suffering from arthritis, please speak to the staff at Wagga Wagga Veterinary Hospital.

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