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Managing Your Pet's Arthritis



Arthritis will afflict most dogs and cats as they age, especially now that pets are living longer than ever.

However, the subtle signs of joint pain can be tricky for pet owners to detect, and it doesn't help that and pets tend to hide their soreness and discomfort too. In many cases, the arthritic changes in joints aren't detected by pet parents or veterinarians until they have become severe.

If there are calcium deposits, instances of scar tissue, areas with missing or torn cartilage, or changes to the bones at the joint surface, these abnormalities will remain present and will continue to affect your pet.

Regardless, there are several ways you can make life a little easier for your arthritic pet.

How to Support Treatment of Arthritis in Dogs

It's difficult to remodel an arthritic joint without surgical intervention, but you can attempt to reduce joint inflammation and pain. This will make your dog more comfortable even if the underlying arthritic changes remain.

Here are some of the most common ways to manage arthritis pain in pets.

Disclaimer: Many of the medications discussed below can have significant side effects when used improperly or in especially sensitive individuals. Never give your pet any prescription or over-the-counter medication or supplement without first consulting your veterinarian.

Prescription Medications for Arthritis Pain in Dogs

For certain pets, prescription medication may be needed to help successfully manage the pain of arthritic joints.

Here are a few of the options your veterinarian might consider.

Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs can have noticeable, beneficial effects for pets

with joint pain. However, NSAIDs that are intended for human use have a high incidence of potentially serious side effects in pets.

NSAIDs

like Etogesic, Rimadyl, Metacam and Deramaxx have been designed specifically for dogs and are much safer than drugs like ibuprofen or aspirin.

However, these "doggy" NSAIDs can still cause gastrointestinal upset, and in rare cases, liver or kidney dysfunction.

Galliprant is a newer NSAID that is considered to be safer on the kidneys in older dogs and is being used much more frequently by veterinarians.

NSAID use in dogs should always be supervised by a veterinarian.

Other Prescription Pain Relievers

Other pain-relieving medications like tramadol, amantadine and gabapentin may be prescribed by veterinarians, particularly if a dog's arthritis is severe or does not respond to other forms of treatment.

Corticosteroids

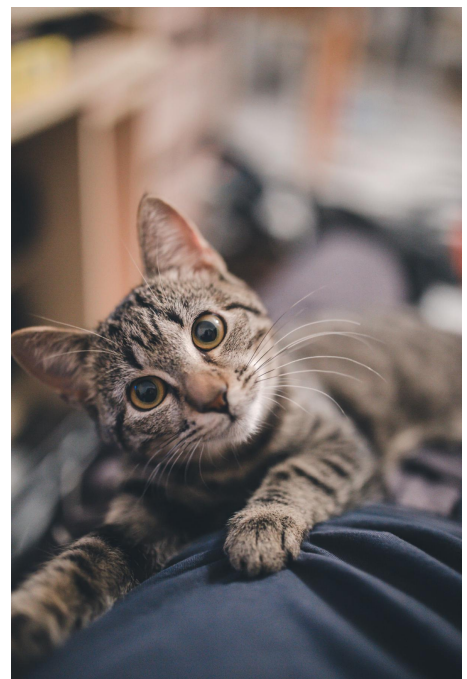
Prednisone, dexamethasone and other corticosteroids will markedly reduce swelling and inflammation in arthritic joints. However, there is a downside to the use of steroids for long-term palliation of arthritis, which is why veterinarians don't prescribe corticosteroids for arthritis in dogs as often as they used to in the past.

These medications can actually contribute to additional joint damage and breakdown and have other, unwanted side effects. Also, corticosteroids can interact badly with other medications that are commonly used in the treatment of arthritis.

Recognizing the Signs of Arthritis in Cats

Cats often develop arthritis in their hips and elbows, Marrinan says. Other commonly affected joints include the lower back and knees.

The first step is to detect the arthritis—and the earlier the better, Marrinan says. Signs of arthritis may include behavioral changes, limping, difficulty moving, and changes in grooming habits. "A cat likely will reveal his painful or stiff joints in how he approaches his usual activities," Lund explains. For example, he might stop jumping on the bed, or he might sit and look at the bed as if he wants to jump but never does. "If you see them staring at where they want to go as if trying to psych themselves up to make the leap, that is a sign," she says. Accidents outside of the litterbox, which are worsened if it is in a hard to reach location or has high sides, are another often overlooked symptom of arthritis.



Because cats are sensitive to changes in weather, cold and damp days might cause arthritis symptoms to flare up, Lund notes.

Treating and Managing Arthritis in Cats

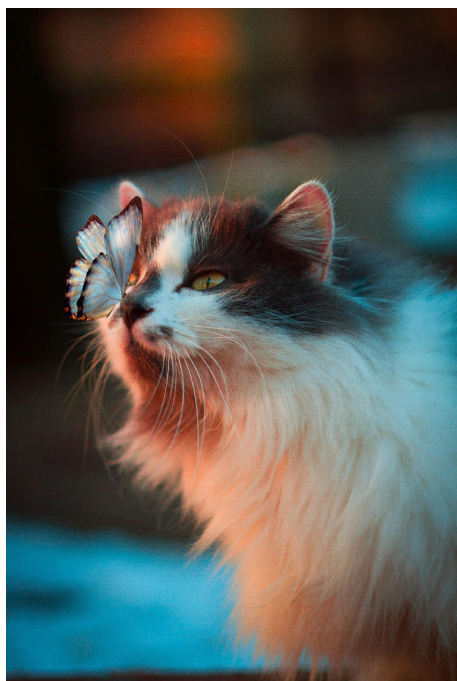
Treating arthritis in cats when it is mild can delay the need to use prescription painkillers, which can have harmful side effects.

Dietary supplements, such as glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate, can be an effective option, Lund says. These over-the-counter products—available as treats, sprinkles, and liquids—can help protect and repair cartilage and improve the quality of joint fluid, effectively lubricating the joints and easing pain. Some prescription cat diets also include joint supplements. In general, be sure your cat is eating a quality food that is high in protein. You can also add fish oil, considered an anti-inflammatory, to your cat's food, Lund says.

Cat parents also can ask their vet about injections with a substance called Adequan to treat joint inflammation, or noninvasive cold laser therapy, which also eases inflammation, Lund suggests. Anecdotal reports show benefits from acupuncture and massage. "There is no reason you can't use more than one modality," she says.

Changes to your cat's environment can help as well. For example, you can position pet stairs, stools, and other pieces of furniture in key places so your cat can use them to get where he wants to go. Regular movement also helps keep joints and bones healthy, Marrinan says. "Use it or lose it is a good approach. Put food bowls in multiple places," he suggests, and make sure you place low-sided litterboxes in several easy to access spots around your house.

Heated cat beds also might get your cat purring contentedly. "Older cats love them. I think it really does make a difference in these guys," Lund says.



Prescription Medications for Cats with Arthritis

"Cats are extremely sensitive to common drugs, so a feline-friendly painkiller must come from your cat's veterinarian and be managed closely", says Dr. Cathy Lund, proprietor of City Kitty, a feline-only veterinary practice in Providence, Rhode Island.

Cats should never be given painkillers intended for people, dogs, or other pets, our vet experts warn. Acetaminophen, for example, damages the liver and is lethal to cats, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can damage kidneys. "Never give a drug to a cat without consulting your vet," Marrinan stresses.

If your vet prescribes pain medication for cats, he or she may need to monitor blood and urine regularly to ensure your pet's kidneys and liver are functioning properly.

Painkillers also can irritate the stomach, so cat parents should pay attention to changes in eating habits, Lund says.

Surgery is usually only indicated if there is another medical issue with the arthritic joint, Lund says, such as a torn ligament, hip dysplasia, or a dislocated kneecap.

Whatever treatment you and your vet choose, pay attention to see if the method is working,

and consider another course if it is not. When arthritis is well controlled, "the cat will likely be eating better, be happier, and moving around more," Lund says.

Nutritional Supplements for Joint Support in Dogs

It's important to note that no nutritional supplement will correct structural damage to a dog's joints (this is true in humans as well).

By their nature, nutritional supplements (also called nutraceuticals) are substances that are consumed orally as an addition to a normal diet.

Today, the most commonly used ingredients in pet joint health supplements are glucosamine, chondroitin sulfate, green lipped mussels, omega-3 fatty acids and methylsulfonylmethane (MSM).

Side effects are almost unheard of as long as they are used in reasonable amounts. Stomach upset is possible, particularly at higher doses, but generally resolves as a dog's digestive system adjusts.

With traditional drugs, pets typically demonstrate improved comfort almost immediately. Conversely, dog joint supplements may take several weeks to months of administration before there's a noticeable improvement in mobility and attitude.

And while high-quality supplements are very safe, they tend to work best in combination with other forms of arthritis treatment.

Additional Arthritis Treatment Options for Dogs

Prescription medications and nutritional supplements aren't the only forms of treatment available for arthritis in dogs.

Physical therapy, weight management, acupuncture, cold laser treatments, surgery and other options can also improve a pet's comfort and mobility.

Recently, there has been a surge of interest in the use of CBD products to help ease arthritis symptoms in dogs. The research is still in its early stages, but many veterinarians are eager to see if CBD can be a useful tool in battling joint pain in dogs.

Talk to your veterinarian at Adobe Animal Hospital about how your dog might benefit from different arthritis treatment options.



References:

https://www.petmd.com/dog/general-health/evr_dg_remedies_for_arthritis_in_dogs
<https://www.petmd.com/cat/general-health/arthritis-treatment-cats>

Please make an appointment to discuss your pet's health:



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