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Arthritis and your Pet

Osteoarthritis or Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD) is a painful, debilitating condition affecting 1 in 5 adult dogs and many elderly cats. Developmental abnormalities such as hip dysplasia, traumatic incidents such as torn knee ligaments, obesity, and large body size can all predispose animals to arthritis later in life. Generally, a good physical exam and x-rays are all that is needed to confirm the diagnosis. Typically, this occurs when an animal is presented to the veterinarian for limping or lameness that may worsen after exercise. Sometimes the owner notices that their pet seems very stiff in the morning or has trouble jumping on the bed, going up stairs, or getting into the car. While DJD is a chronic condition that worsens with time, the good news is that we now have many therapeutic options to help keep arthritic pets comfortable and active.

The goal of treatment is to improve our pet's quality of life and this is best done through a multi-modal approach:

- Weight loss
- Exercise
- Glucosamine
- Acupuncture
- Medications

Numerous medications are available to control the pain and swelling caused by arthritis. The most commonly prescribed are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSIADS). Used properly, these drugs can greatly improve the quality of an arthritic pet's life. Most are well tolerated, but occasionally side effects such as vomiting and diarrhea are seen. Rarely, liver and kidney damage can occur. Your veterinarian may perform blood and urine tests prior to initiating NSAID therapy and may repeat these tests during treatment to assure safety. Many over the counter pain relievers such as Ibuprofen and Tylenol are extremely toxic to animals. Never give these drugs to your pet without contacting your veterinarian for advice.

Options for arthritis therapy will vary depending on the general health of the patient, risks, and benefits of individual medications, and costs of treatments and products. Talk to your vet about which therapies are best for your pet.