

ARTHRITIS IN OLDER DOGS



IS AGE CREEPING UP ON YOUR DOG?

As you know, dogs are naturally athletic and energetic animals especially when they are young. However, this activity can eventually take its toll. It could mean that your dog is now suffering from wear and tear on his/her joints as a consequence. In fact many older dogs suffer from arthritis. (Vets consider all dogs over the age of seven to be older). Just as in Humans, arthritis is a condition where joints degenerate over time, often impairing mobility and causing pain. But unlike humans it is often more difficult to detect because dogs are much more stoical than we are and seldom complain. So what should you look out for?

Canine Arthritis

Although arthritis is usually associated with pain and stiffness in the joints, it is often only after the pain has been relieved, and your dog has renewed mobility, that you may come to realise just how stiff he/she had become. Lameness in one leg is usually fairly obvious, but if lameness affects more than one leg it may be much more difficult to recognise. Similarly, generalised stiffness, or stiffness when getting out of the basket in the morning or after exercise, may not be immediately obvious. Some dogs may not seem lame at all, showing only a mildly odd gait or lack of desire to go for walks.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR.

TWO FACES OF CHRONIC PAIN IN DOGS

Here are two simple questions that have been designed to help you recognise subtle changes in your dog's behaviour that could indicate pain.

1. Have you noticed a reduction in your dog's mobility?

- 🐾 Difficulty in Jumping into car/chair or climbing stairs
- 🐾 Limping or stiffness.
- 🐾 Difficulty in getting up

2. Have you noticed a reduction in your dog's activity?

- 🐾 Reluctance to walk or play
- 🐾 Sleeping/resting more, especially in one place .
- 🐾 Lethargy

If you answer 'Yes' to any of the questions above you should consult your veterinary practice for advice and consider arranging a check-up for dog.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO BE YOUR DOG'S BEST FRIEND

🐾 **Control weight.**

Being overweight can put extra strain on your dog's joints so keeping his/her weight down is helpful. If your dog is overweight ask the practice for help in planning a weight reduction programme. Bear in mind that if your dog has poor joints you may not succeed in getting your dog to 'walk off' any excess food intake, so a reduction in food is usually necessary. The practice holds weight clinics at various surgeries.

🐾 **Provide the right kind of exercise**

Regular, GENTLE exercise is a real help as it helps prevent the joints from stiffening up and maintains mobility so your dog can remain active. Dogs with poor joints should avoid very energetic exercise such as chasing a ball in the park. The practice can help you workout the most suitable exercise schedule for your particular dog.

🐾 **Consult the practice**

If your dog does have painful arthritis the practice may recommend treatment with an NSAID (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug).
e.g. Metacam. NSAIDs are effective at reducing the pain and stiffness that your dog may suffer from and will greatly improve his/her quality of life.

🐾 **Consider joint support supplements** e.g. Seraquin .or Glucosamine

If your dog does have arthritis then the practice may suggest you use a joint supplement. This nutritional support can help maintain normal function in joints and tendons. Bioflow magnetic collars can also help

🐾 **Consider alternative therapies**

Hydrotherapy is becoming more common for exercising dogs with arthritis. This involves purpose built pools that allow safe, carefully controlled swimming. Swimming helps to build up muscle mass, which is useful for supporting joints. It is a low impact form of exercise so it won't aggravate your dog's joint pain.