

ADDING PEP TO THEIR STEP 🐾 *Managing Canine Arthritis*

By Dr. Dawn Burke, YGRR Board of Directors

Arthritis is a common disease condition, especially in the older dog. Simply put, arthritis is inflammation of the joint. It can affect any joint but is most common in the hip, stifle (knee), elbow, shoulder, hock (ankle), carpus (wrist), and spine. Arthritis can develop as a result of long-term stress on a joint (e.g. obesity), injury, poor conformation, genetic predisposition (e.g. hip and elbow dysplasia), immune-mediated disorders (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis), or a combination of these factors.

Signs of arthritis include stiffness, limping, abnormal gait, and difficulty climbing stairs, getting in and out of the car, jumping on furniture, or getting up from lying down. Acting withdrawn (spending less time playing and interacting with the family) and increased aggression (due to pain) can also be signs.

While arthritis cannot be cured, things can be done to help your dog be more comfortable and live a happier life. Ideally, treatment for arthritis uses a multimodal approach, meaning several therapies combined achieve better results than any single treatment. In overweight dogs, weight reduction is an important part of a treatment plan. Many dogs feel much better after taking off those extra pounds, and weight loss results in less stress on the joints helping to slow down progression of the disease. If your dog is overweight, discuss an appropriate diet and weight reduction program with your veterinarian.

Regular exercise is also important for the arthritic dog. Walking and swimming are very good low impact exercises. Exercise helps to strengthen the muscles and improve flexibility of the joints, as well as aiding in weight reduction. Physical therapy is also an excellent way to help your dog. Speak with your veterinarian about the availability of physical therapy services in your area.

Nutraceuticals – nutritional supplements that have medicinal properties – are often used in the treatment of arthritis. Examples include glucosamine, chondroitin sulfate, MSM, fish oil and omega-3 fatty acids. Some nutraceuticals help to supply the building blocks to repair cartilage while others aid in controlling inflammation. Most nutraceuticals can take weeks to months of use before you notice beneficial effects. Since these products are considered nutritional supplements, they do not have to undergo the rigorous testing for effectiveness and safety that prescription drugs have to go through. It is best to consult your veterinarian about which nutraceuticals may be helpful for your dog.

When a dog is already showing signs of discomfort from arthritis more potent medications are needed. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are the mainstay of arthritis treatment. These drugs provide fast-acting relief by suppressing inflammation. While occasionally aspirin can be used in

dogs, never give any human medication, over-the-counter or prescription, to your dog without consulting your veterinarian, as many human NSAIDs (e.g. ibuprofen) are toxic to dogs. The newer NSAIDs developed for use in dogs (e.g. carprofen, deracoxib, meloxicam, firocoxib, tepoxalin) have fewer side effects on the gastrointestinal tract, liver and kidneys. None of them can safely be combined with one another. Because NSAIDs are broken down by the liver and kidneys and have some potential for side effects on these organs, your veterinarian may want to perform a blood test to evaluate your dog's liver and kidney function prior to starting treatment. Dogs that are on long term NSAIDs should have periodic blood tests to monitor their liver and kidney values. Discuss with your veterinarian how often your dog should have these blood tests done. Always give the medication as directed and never change the dosage without first talking to your veterinarian. If your dog shows side effects like vomiting, diarrhea, or poor appetite, stop the medication and contact your veterinarian.

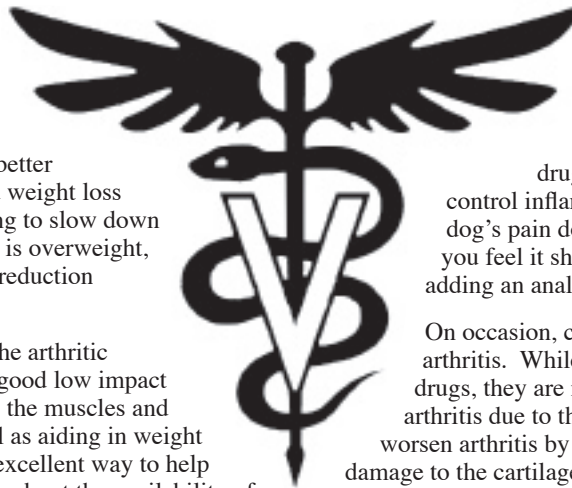
Analgesics can sometimes be used in combination with nutraceuticals and NSAIDs to help treat arthritis. These drugs (e.g. tramadol and gabapentin) do not control inflammation but help to control pain. If your dog's pain does not seem to be as well controlled as you feel it should be, talk with your veterinarian about adding an analgesic.

On occasion, corticosteroids may be used to treat arthritis. While they are potent anti-inflammatory drugs, they are not recommended for treatment of arthritis due to their side effects. Long term use can also worsen arthritis by causing muscle atrophy (wasting) and damage to the cartilage surfaces. The exception to the use of corticosteroids is in cases of immune-mediated arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Alternative medicine treatments like acupuncture and herbal remedies may be beneficial to the arthritic dog. It is best to consult a veterinarian who specializes and has advanced training in this field if you are interested in trying alternative therapies.

Although surgical replacement of multiple arthritic joints is a routine procedure in human medicine, only hip replacement is commonly performed in veterinary medicine today. For dogs with severe hip arthritis whose pain can no longer be managed through medical and physical therapy, hip replacement offers an excellent chance for return to pain-free function.

As you can see, there are many options for treatment of the arthritic dog. Early and proper diagnosis is important. Exercise and weight management are equally as important as drug therapy. If you suspect your dog has arthritis, talk with your veterinarian about what treatment options are best suited for your dog.



***Senior Food Supplements Used at Riverview**

It is not uncommon for dogs admitted to YGRR to be on many different medications. We have found that the most widely palatable joint support supplement with the greatest effectiveness for our rescue dogs is Joint Health by the Springtime Company. Also, a non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory called Duralactin (a milk protein) is beneficial. Both products are essentially food additives and not require prescription.

It is always a good idea to inform your vet of any food supplements you give to your dog.

(*This protocol is also followed for younger dogs with orthopedic issues.)