



Degenerative Joint Disease (Arthritis)

Degenerative joint disease (**DJD**) is also known as chronic arthritis or osteoarthritis. This **PAINFUL** condition is marked by a gradual and irreversible deterioration of joint surfaces, especially of the limbs, but which can also involve the spine. Over time with wear and tear, the cartilage which lines the joints erodes away, allowing bone to grind against bone with joint motion. There can be a number of predisposing factors and while we cannot cure osteoarthritis, we can offer numerous treatment options to help keep pets comfortable.

Hill's j/d is a prescription diet designed to turn off the genes that cause cartilage damage by using **VERY** high levels of omega-3 fatty acids (specifically EPA). It was designed to **PREVENT** arthritis in dogs although we have found it to be an effective component to treating existing arthritis as well. It has been shown that over-the-counter foods that market themselves for joint health are just not effective.

Adequan is an **FDA approved** joint lubricant which also inhibits the progression of osteoarthritis. This is an injected medication (which many owners do at home) for both DJD prevention and treatment.

Cosequin joint protectant is commonly recommended although we have had very good success with **Glycoflex** as well. These are long-term nutritional supplements that include glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate as main ingredients. Glucosamine is cheap to manufacture while chondroitin is expensive and it is the chondroitin that makes the biggest difference. **Substituting an over-the-counter human joint supplement can be done but you need to be aware that these supplements are NOT regulated by the Food and Drug Administration.** Thus, it is a "buyers beware" market for these over-the-counter substitutes and labels on the bottle are rarely representative of actual ingredient concentrations.

Acupuncture is an excellent treatment for early and advanced arthritis and a way to avoid or minimize the use of medications. Dr. Carol Vavra is a veterinarian certified in veterinary acupuncture. She has years of acupuncture experience and is at our hospital routinely for scheduled appointments. **Massage Therapy** can also be very beneficial to pets with arthritis. Sarah Ochal is a human and certified animal massage therapist that also sees patients by appointment at our hospital.

NSAIDs: Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are very effective long-term or intermittent arthritis pain medications. This class of drugs includes aspirin, carprofen (**Rimadyl**), etodolac (**Etogesic**), tepoxalin (**Zubrin**), deracoxib (**Deramaxx**), meloxicam (**Metacam**), and firocoxib (**Previcox**).

NSAID's to AVOID – Can be highly TOXIC in Cats and Dogs

Acetaminophen (**Tylenol**); Ibuprofen (**Advil**); Naproxen sodium (**Aleve**)

While most NSAIDs can be toxic to cats, aspirin, meloxicam, and carprofen are carefully being used. The main side effects seen in dogs are gastrointestinal, i.e. vomiting, diarrhea, and poor appetite. These are usually quickly reversible by stopping the medication. As always, discuss dosing with your veterinarian before you start any over-the-counter medication including aspirin. Note that since aspirin is 10 times more likely to cause stomach ulcers in pets than in humans, it should not be used more than occasionally unless otherwise directed by your veterinarian. NSAIDs made specifically for pets are more effective and safer than NSAIDs made for humans. For any dog beginning long-term NSAID therapy, we recommend initial blood work followed by baseline blood parameters at one month and every 6 months thereafter.

Complementary medications include **tramadol** (a synthetic opioid that is longer acting and less sedating than true opioids), **amantadine**, **gabapentin**, **amitriptyline**, and **buprenorphine**.

Arthritis is PAINFUL

**Most frequently, pets with arthritis pain “suffer in silence”.
Just because they will quietly tolerate pain, doesn’t mean they should have to.**

How can I tell if my dog has arthritis?

Arthritis strikes millions of humans and pets each year, and each individual feels the discomfort and pain differently. In fact, dogs and cats age up to seven times faster than humans and so it is important to distinguish between normal aging and warning signs of a health problem like arthritis.

Signs of arthritis:

- **Stiffness in the morning** — This is one of the earliest signs your pet is in pain, especially if the dog or cat tends to bounce back and regain energy as the day progresses.
- **Hesitation to exercise or decreased stamina** — As arthritis affects the joints, pets in pain are less likely to be active and will lie around the house.
- **Reluctance to go up or down stairs** — Dogs and cats suffering from arthritic pain may seem stubborn about going up or down stairs.
- **Reluctance to jump in the car** — Dogs typically jump at the first sound of jingling keys; if your best friend resists a ride in the car, he could be in pain. For cats, look for reluctance to jump on furniture.
- **Decreased appetite** — Pain from arthritis can cause a dog or cat to stop eating, causing nutritional harm to the pet and distress for the pet owner.
- **Defiant behavior** — The dog that used to beg to go outside may suddenly need a push.

And, although your dog or cat can’t tell you about his/her arthritis aches and pains, you can adhere to some simple guidelines that will manage their pain level so he/she can maintain a healthy, active lifestyle:

- **Visit your veterinarian for an accurate diagnosis** — If you observe your pet with pain or stiffness for more than two weeks, it is time to see the veterinarian. When appropriate, veterinarians may prescribe an exercise regimen, a specific diet, or pain management through supplements or medications (see reverse side of this page).
- **Get an early start** — Don’t delay! The earlier an accurate arthritis diagnosis is made — for you or your pet — the better. Early treatment may mean less joint damage and decreased pain.
- **Make your move** — According to the Arthritis Foundation, ample, controlled exercise and physical activity increase range of movement and reduce fatigue. Lace up your sneakers, grab the leash, and take your dog for a daily walk ... even a few minutes is better than none!
- **Treat your muscles right** — Massage can help decrease arthritic pain and increase circulation, energy, and flexibility. Ask us for a massage therapist recommendation, as cats and dogs can benefit from a good massage.
- **Dive in!** — Swimming and water exercise, for canines and humans, can help build up diminished strength and enhance range of motion. Let your dog take a dip in the lake or pool to exercise his joints and legs.

The above information was taken (and modified) from the Pfizer Animal Health website www.rimadyl.com.