

Factsheet 13 – Arthritis in dogs

What are the changes you should look for in your pet?

Arthritis will cause your dog to suffer discomfort, pain and reduce its quality of life, so it's essential to closely observe your dog's behavior over a couple of weeks for any of the following changes:

- Has it reduced its activity, including a reluctance to walk, play, jump or climb stairs?
- Is it limping, lagging behind on walks or having difficulty rising from rest, particularly in the morning?
- Is your dog more aggressive, irritable or yelping in pain when touched?
- Is your pet licking, chewing or overgrooming a particular joint or joints?

The signs of arthritis are slow in onset and varied, but these are the most prevalent and easily identified by owners. And please remember, the dog's shoulder, elbow, knee and hip joint are most commonly affected.

A few simple changes at home may help.

In mild cases, you can take some simple steps at home to reduce any initial pain or discomfort:

- Your dog should always have a warm, comfortable place to sleep with plenty of bedding to protect sore joints.
- Keep your dog as dry as possible and out of draughty areas.
- Gentle exercise is advisable, as vigorous games will aggravate the disease and discomfort.
- Obesity is also detrimental as the joints are forced to carry extra weight.

Doesn't arthritis only affect older dogs?

Unfortunately dogs of any age may become afflicted; however it is more common in older dogs. Reduced activity and the stiffening up of legs is often attributed to "old age" and thought to be untreatable by many owners. Surprisingly, the dog may not be lame in any one leg, but unbeknown to you, may be suffering pain in all joints. Even different joints may be lame and X-rays often reveal degenerative changes. One in every six adult dogs suffers from arthritis.



How can my dog get relief from arthritis?

In the early stages of arthritis natural products may benefit your dog greatly:

- Cartrophen Vet** is given by injection under the skin once a week for 4 weeks followed by booster shots at a frequency recommended by your veterinarian. Most pets respond within 2-3 weeks with an increase in activity and general well-being. This improvement should last for more than 3 months after the initial course. (see www.arthritis.au.com)
- SF4 or Green-Lipped Mussel Extract** is given in oral tablets on a daily basis. These are produced in New Zealand by for the purpose of maintaining mobility of joints and providing essential amino acids, vitamins and minerals. **Bomazeal Senior** is another product which contains the same amount of green-lipped mussel extract along with Shark Cartilage, Enzogenol (an anti-oxidant), and Deer Velvet.
- Flex-Canine** and **Sasha's Blend** are two products which are given orally and contain Glycosaminoglycans with other additives to improve the health of the cartilage in the joints.

In more advanced arthritis it is often necessary to use drugs which are strong pain killers and anti-inflammatories to provide a good quality of life.

□ **Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID)** are the most effective way of controlling pain and inflammation from moderate to severe arthritis. The two drugs we use most frequently of this type are:

1. **Metacam** - an oral liquid given once daily with food.
2. **Rimadyl** - given orally either as small tablets or in a chewable form.

If you notice any of the symptoms described above then it is recommended that you seek veterinary advice.