

ARTHRITIS IN PETS



What are the causes of arthritis?

Arthritis is a progressive deterioration of the cartilage within the joints. Simply put, cartilage creates a slippery layer that allows the bones in a joint to move smoothly over one another. As arthritis progresses, changes in the cartilage mean that the joint doesn't move as smoothly as it used to, and this causes pain and inflammation.

Cats, young and old dogs can all suffer from arthritis. In younger dogs, it is often associated with inherited conditions, such as hip dysplasia or Osteochondritis Dissecans (OCD). In older pets it can form purely due to age, but can it also be because of obesity or an old trauma.

Signs your pet could be suffering from arthritis can include:

- Reluctance to walk or play
- Difficulty climbing stairs
- Difficulty jumping
- Limping
- Lagging behind on walks
- Difficulty rising from a resting position
- Yelping when touched
- Change in personality
- Licking joints



Xray showing abnormal bone growth caused by arthritic changes



Xray showing hereditary hip dysplasia

What do we do to diagnose this disease?

Often, the Veterinarian can make a diagnosis just by performing a physical examination on your pet. In some cases, we may recommend x-rays to confirm diagnosis and rule out any other causes of your pets' discomfort.

What can you do to help your pet?

It is important to realise that there is no cure for arthritis but there are numerous things that can help to alleviate your pet's symptoms. This includes:

Environment – make sure your pet has a cozy area, especially in winter, away from draughts. A padded bed is best. There are many 'orthopedic beds' available on the market.

Try to reduce the number of stairs or slopes your pet has to climb. Allowing your elderly pet to sleep inside at night can help to alleviate arthritis symptoms as well.

Exercise – little and often is the key; although it is vital to keep those muscles strong to

support the joints, doing a very long walk puts excessive strain on the joints. Swimming is fantastic as it exercises the muscles without the excess pressure. Avoid 'high impact' games such as 'fetch'. The sudden stop and turn, causes increased pressure on the joints. Look into more mentally stimulating games to keep them occupied. This could include hide and seek with toys, use of treat balls/cubes/kongs, etc, just watch their calorie intake if using food-based toys or use food from their daily allocation. Snuffle mats are available commercially, or you can make your own (as pictured). Drop their dry food or treats onto the mat and they need to 'snuffle' to retrieve them. This keeps their mind stimulated with little exercise required. Make them 'work' for their food rather than just putting it into a bowl.



Material pieces tied onto a door mat to make a 'snuffle mat'

Joint Supplements – These provide the body the building blocks to try to reform cartilage. There are different forms available. They can be used together or individually and can lengthen the time until pain relief is needed or reduce the amount required. We stock the following products:



Hills Prescription J/D Diet – this is a complete balanced diet available for dogs and cats. It contains omega-3 fatty acid to maintain joint health and soothe tissue around the joint, EPA to block the effect of cartilage-destroying enzymes and has a calorie-controlled content to prevent weight gain.

For dogs that are overweight, Hills have now released Hills j/d + Metabolic, the best of two worlds combined. Not only is Hills Metabolic specifically designed to kick start your pets' metabolism to aid in weight loss, it also contains all the added extras needed for joint support that are found in Hills j/d!

Please note that if you elect to use j/d to assist in the long-term care of your pet, other supplements will not be required as most of these ingredients are already included in the food.

This food is only available in Veterinary Clinics. Book in with one of our nurses for a free nutritional consultation to discuss feeding the j/d diet to your pet.



Cartrophen injections – this is an initial course of 4 injections over a month. From here the frequency of the injections will depend on the severity of your pet's condition. Cartrophen has multiple actions on joints, including inhibiting cartilage destroying enzymes, stimulation of lubrication and more cartilage within joints and improvement of blood circulation to the joints. An appointment will be required with the Veterinarian to begin the cartrophen course.

4Cyte – this advanced joint support is added to your pet's food daily. It is the only product on the market to include 'Epiitalis', a patented plant extract that contains a range of essential fatty acids that stimulate the cells in the cartilage.

4cyte also contains Green Lipped Muscle, Abalone and Marine cartilage, which all work better in combination than on their own. The aim of 4cyte is to support the natural mechanism to maintain the health of the cartilage and joints, assist to maintain normal joint function, promote healthy joints, has the potential to assist with recovery time after excessive exercise and reduce symptoms of aches and pains.



4cyte does not require a script and can be purchased over the counter.

Weight control – an overweight pet puts more weight on its joints which increases the progression of arthritis and causes more pain. Speak to one of our nurses to organize your free Nurse Healthy Weight Consultation. During this consultation the nurse can work out your pets 'ideal' weight and a program to help your pet to reach this goal.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories — These are 'prescription only' drugs that provide direct pain relief and anti-inflammatory effects to assist in the healing process and the comfort of your pet. They can only be prescribed by a Veterinarian once they have examined your pet. There are many products on the market and we will help you choose the best one for your pet and your budget. Depending on the age of your pet and any underlying medical issues, our Veterinarian may recommend a blood test be performed *prior* to starting treatment. For ongoing prescriptions, revisits for repeat medications are required by law every 6 months. Repeat blood testing is recommended once a year for pets that require frequent dosing with these medications. This blood test can be performed in house. It is called a NSAID Profile and specifically checks liver and kidney function, both of which can be damaged from long-term medication administration. This test is usually performed at the medication recheck appointment.

Arthritis can be a debilitating disease, but with the right treatment protocol put in place, your pet can live a longer a happier life free from pain.