



# Arthritis Pain & Your Pet

## What is arthritis?

Arthritis, also known as degenerative joint disease (DJD), is a breakdown of the protective cartilage and bone surrounding joints. The process begins with excessive motion in a joint that eventually leads to a wearing-down of cartilage. As a result, inflammation develops within the joint, and movement becomes painful. These changes generally appear later in life, but if mechanical or hereditary defects are severe, signs can appear in younger pets.

## How do I know if my dog or cat has arthritis?

Symptoms of arthritis may include joint pain, stiffness, or tenderness at the site, a subtle or severe limp, and sometimes swelling, which can indicate fluid buildup. Your veterinarian can discuss ways to assess the degree of arthritis, which may include careful palpation of the joints, lameness evaluation, or radiographs (x-rays).

## What can be done to treat my pet's arthritis?

Talk to your veterinarian to learn which of the following treatment options may be best for your pet:

- **Anti-inflammatory medications.** These range from drugs with minimal adverse effects to those that need careful monitoring.
- **Exercise.** Avoid the “weekend warrior syndrome;” regular healthy exercise can keep your pet fit and feeling good.
- **Injections directly into the joint.** These newer treatments range from steroid to stem cell injections.
- **Low-level laser therapy & acupuncture.** These alternative therapeutic options are not yet proven, but they show promise.
- **Nutritional supplements.** Supplements, such as omega fatty acids, glucosamine, chondroitin sulfates, and methylsulfonylmethane (MSM), have become popular treatments for arthritis pain in pets.
- **Pain medication.** Treating arthritis pain is important. The less pain in a joint, the more mobility there will be.
- **Physical therapy.** Available to humans for many years, physical therapy is becoming more common in veterinary medicine.
- **Surgery.** In certain cases, surgery can be of great benefit.
- **Therapeutic foods.** Some newer diets available from your veterinarian contain supplements to treat arthritis.
- **Weight management.** Keeping your pet's body weight in a healthy range lessens the strain on joints.