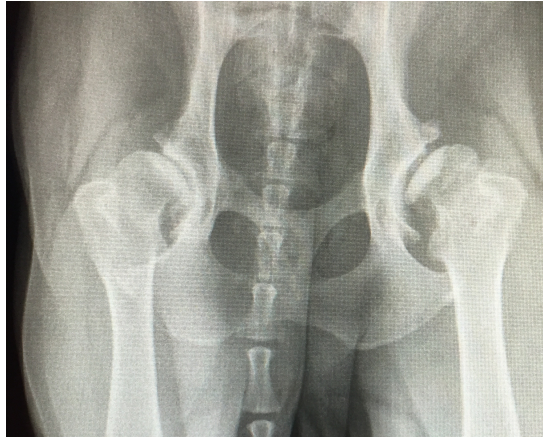




West Toronto Veterinary Surgery
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Osteoarthritis

What is Osteoarthritis?



Osteoarthritis is a chronic degenerative joint disease that affects both soft tissues and bones in a joint. It is characterized by loss of the smooth cartilage that covers and protects the ends of the bones in movable (called the synovial) joints. Cartilage has no nerves, so when it touches cartilage in another bone, no pain occurs. But when the cartilage wears away the bone is exposed. Bone does have nerves, so when two bone ends touch, pain and inflammation occur. Osteoarthritis is a progressive condition, meaning that it will continue to get worse over time.

Osteoarthritis can affect any joint in the body, but most commonly affected are the:

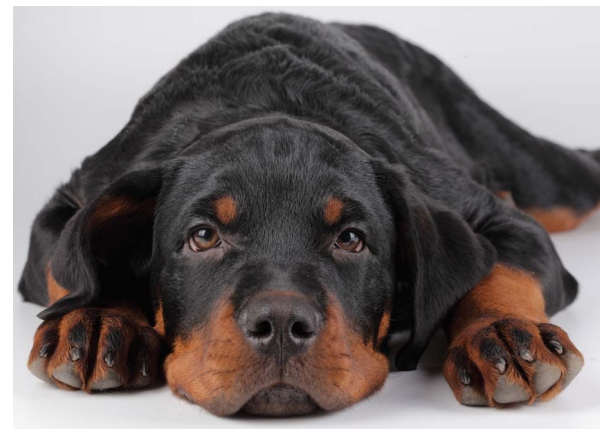
- Hip
- Elbow
- Shoulder
- Stifle (equivalent to your knee)
- Carpus (equivalent to your wrist)
- Hock (equivalent to your ankle)
- Intervertebral joints (joints between individual bones, or vertebrae, of the spine)

What Causes Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis develops from wear and tear or abnormal stress on a normal joint due to injury, being overweight, or engaging in activities that require constant twisting and turning, such as Frisbee playing. Osteoarthritis can also result from normal stress on an abnormal joint, such as normal activities in a dog that is predisposed to developing hip or elbow problems (e.g., hip or elbow dysplasia).

Which Pets are At Risk?

Large breed dogs (e.g., Rottweiler), dogs with certain body shapes (e.g., Dachshund), and dogs with very active “jobs” (e.g., hunting, search and rescue, drug detection) are at greater risk. Also, some breeds are prone to develop degenerative joint disease at a very young age— as young as 6 to 8 months— so ask your veterinarian if your dog fits into that category. Finally, if your dog or cat injures or fractures a joint or ruptures an anterior cruciate ligament, there is a greater chance that osteoarthritis will develop.





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What are the Clinical Signs?

The signs can vary according to your pet's age, which joints are involved, and how severely they are affected. Some signs are very subtle, including a slight change in the amount of activity your dog or cat normally endures:

- Reluctance to walk, run, climb stairs, jump, or play
- Abnormal stance (leaning forward) or gait
- Stiffness
- Limping
- Decreased activity
- Difficulty rising from a resting position
- Soreness when touched
- Yelping or whimpering in pain (cats may hide)
- Acting aggressive or withdrawn
- Incessant licking of a painful joint
- Flattening ears when an affected area is touched

How Can Osteoarthritis Be Managed?

Management involves a treatment program designed to improve your pet's physical and mental health. You need to work as a team with your veterinarian and veterinary support staff to ensure that your pet has a good quality of life. Young or old, all pets can improve by following the veterinary team's recommendations:

- **Weight reduction**—Modifying your pet's diet, eliminating treats, and following a weight-loss program recommended by your veterinarian can put less stress on joints.
- **Controlled exercise**—For dogs, leash walking, jogging, swimming, and low-impact exercise should be initiated and all strenuous exercise stopped.
- **Pain Control**—For dogs, there are many non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents (NSAIDs) that can manage pain and decrease inflammation. For cats, there are medications available in the opioid (morphine) family that can provide some relief from osteoarthritis pain. NSAIDs should only be used in cats under the strict guidance of a veterinarian.
- **Nutraceuticals**—Use of non-regulated supplements (glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate) may be beneficial in dogs and cats for alleviating signs of joint pain, as long as the purity of the product is verified and the source of the product is reputable.

Physical therapy centres are an excellent option to maintain muscle strength and mobility.





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Monday to Friday

8:00am to 6:00pm

Emergencies are welcome!

