

OSTEOARTHRITIS

Canine osteoarthritis is a progressive joint disease characterised by chronic breakdown of the protective cartilage that covers the bones where they form joints. The erosion of the protective cartilage due to wear and tear of the affected joint, results in pain, inflammation and restricted movement.^{1,2}

Canine osteoarthritis is one of the most common sources of chronic pain seen by Australian veterinarians, with osteoarthritis affecting at least one in five adult dogs.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CANINE OSTEOARTHRITIS?

Symptoms of osteoarthritis may include:²

- ▶ Lameness, limping or favouring certain limbs
- ▶ Difficulty sitting or standing, with a loss of flexibility in joints
- ▶ Reluctance to jump, run or climb stairs
- ▶ Sensitivity to touch
- ▶ Stiff, swollen or sore joints
- ▶ Behaviour or character changes
- ▶ Weight gain and loss of muscle tone
- ▶ Fatigue

WHAT CAUSES CANINE OSTEOARTHRITIS?

A number of factors contribute to the progression of canine osteoarthritis, including:³

- ▶ Trauma (dislocations, fractures or other injuries to ligaments, tendons or muscles)
- ▶ Joint infections
- ▶ Hereditary conditions such as hip dysplasia
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Poor pain management, which can increase pain sensitisation

Some breeds of dogs are at greater risk of developing osteoarthritis than others.² Medium to large breeds, such as Great Danes, Labradors, Golden Retrievers and Kelpies carry additional weight and therefore have extra pressure on their joints. Because of this, they are more prone to the condition.²

Most of us tend to think that the behaviour associated with osteoarthritis is just due to "old age" rather than a chronic disease condition. While osteoarthritis is more common in older dogs, it is important to recognise that it is not merely part of the "natural" aging process and that there are treatment options available to effectively manage the painful condition.

- ▶ More over...



HOW IS OSTEOARTHRITIS DIAGNOSED?

If your dog is suspected of having osteoarthritis, your vet will discuss your pet's medical history, including information such as past injuries or ailments.² Your vet will also consider your dog's age and breed to determine any inherited conditions.²

A physical examination will be conducted to identify signs of inflammation or pain on and around your dog's joints.² Additionally, x-rays and other diagnostic tests may reveal bone changes or cartilage breakdown.²

WHAT TREATMENTS ARE AVAILABLE?

Although there are no treatments that can cure osteoarthritis, there are a range of pain management options as well as dietary supplements which can help maintain your dog's quality of life.²

Medications are available to help manage the symptoms of osteoarthritis. Some of these medications include those that manage the chronic pain associated with osteoarthritis.²

Many of us find daily dosing with medication inconvenient and difficult to remember. The first once-a-month nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) in Australia is now available to dog owners. This new monthly dosing option provides assured pain relief which can help slow the progression of the disease thereby providing a better quality of life for your pet. Speak to your local vet for more information on the best treatment options for your dog.

Feeding your dog a balanced diet and maintaining a healthy weight is also important for managing osteoarthritis. At your next visit, ask your vet about the recommended weight and diet for your dog and their advice for maintaining or reaching this target weight.

Regular, low impact physical activity can slow the progression of osteoarthritis in dogs and improve mobility.² As the condition worsens, you may notice decrease in the range of movement of your dog's limbs, so it is essential to be perceptive and exercise them within their capabilities.

Being able to manage your dog's pain is the first step in getting them to become more mobile, which helps improve muscle tone and thus joint stability. A more active dog allows for easier weight management, which helps put less stress on joints. All this leads to a better quality of life for your dog.

¹ Dogs NSW (2011) Joint Effort – Treatment options for canine osteoarthritis. Accessed 4 August 2011. Available online at: <http://www.dogsnsw.org.au/resources/dogs-nsw-magazine/articles/health/258-joint-efforts-treatment-options-for-canine-osteoarthritis.html>

² ASPCA (2011) Arthritis. Accessed 4 August 2011. Available online at: <http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/dog-care/dog-care-arthritis.aspx>

³ J. F. Innes, J. Clayton and B. D. X. Lascelles 'Review of the safety and efficacy of long-term NSAID use in the treatment of canine osteoarthritis', *Veterinary Record* 2010; 166:226-230