

## Arthritis

Arthritis is a complex condition involving inflammation of joints. There are many causes but in general the degree of arthritis is directly related to the age of the animal. Just as with us, the older the dog, the stiffer the joints.

### What causes arthritis?

The condition may be immune mediated and in certain dogs rheumatoid arthritis (RA) factors can be detected with blood tests. Other causes include joint infection, often as the result of bites or injuries or it can follow trauma (damage) to the joint.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an immune mediated, erosive, inflammatory condition. Cartilage and bone are eroded within affected joints and the condition can progress to complete joint fixation, (ankylosis). It may affect single joints or multiple joints may be involved (polyarthritis)

Other types of immune mediated arthritis can be non-erosive, e.g. Systemic Lupus Erythematosus. This is often associated with other signs in addition to the arthritis.

By far the most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis (OA) which is perhaps better described as degenerative joint disease (DJD). This can be **primary**, the cause of which is unknown or **secondary**, following conditions involving joint mobility, e.g. cranial cruciate ligament rupture, hip dysplasia etc.

Infective or septic arthritis can be caused by a variety of micro organisms, e.g. bacteria, viruses and fungi. Usually only a single joint is affected and the condition results in fever, heat and pain in the joint which is frequently very swollen. Before long your pet is likely to go off food and become very depressed.

### How do we treat arthritis?

Obviously treatment will depend on the cause. Immune mediated – rheumatoid types of arthritis are usually treated with high doses of corticosteroids which often lead to a dramatic response. However the maintenance of this improvement often involves long term use of corticosteroids and other drugs such as immunosuppressive or cytotoxic agents.

Septic arthritis involves determining the type of micro organism involved and its antibiotic sensitivity. Antibiotics usually have to be given for a minimum of a month and usually analgesics also are necessary.

Osteoarthritis usually depends for treatment on the use of analgesics. It is important to select these with care since some dogs are more sensitive than others to some of the side effects of the commonly used analgesics. The usual signs are lack of appetite, vomiting and diarrhoea. Therefore if you have any concerns following the administration of the tablets we have prescribed, please discontinue them and contact us without delay.

Nutraceuticals, or dietary supplements are also commonly prescribed for animals with primary osteoarthritis. Glucosamine is an ingredient necessary for the production of glycosaminoglycans, a major component of joint cartilage. There is evidence to suggest that glucosamine supplementation can reduce the pain of arthritis as much

as paracetamol whilst slowing the progress of the disease. There are no known side effects of glucosamine supplementation.

Other commonly used arthritis supplements are cod liver oil (at the appropriate dose!) and Devil's claw extract. There are anecdotal reports that the use of magnetic collars can help ease arthritic signs.