

Arthritis in Dogs

Is Your Dog Slow to Get Up & Get Going?

Dogs experience many of the same problems as their owners as they begin to age. One problem that can have a profound effect on their quality of life is arthritis. Remember, they have four legs that can hurt when trying to move around. Is your dog suffering from arthritis? Here are the most common telltale signs:

- *Struggling to stand up**
- *Reluctance to walk up steps that used to be no problem**
- *Trouble getting in and out of a vehicle**
- *Unable to jump up and greet their owners**
- *Difficulty trying to sit or lie down**
- *Issues with squatting to urinate or defecate**
- *Limping and slow to move when first standing and trying to walk**
- *Gaining weight.**

You may also notice a change of attitude and demeanor of your dog. He or she may no longer be as joyful and happy. Your pet may have lost his or her love of running and playing.

What Dog Owners Can Do

Fortunately there are ways to relieve the pain of arthritis and slow down its progression. I have had many

clients tell me that their dogs are acting like puppies again, running and playing and obviously very happy to be interacting with their families on the very first day of starting proper medical therapy. A medication to control the pain of arthritis gives the most visible and heartwarming results. A class of medicines called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (known as NSAIDs) can make all the difference in the world for a dog, just like they do for people with arthritic pain. *It is important to note that many medications do not work the same in dogs and people, so please do not give your dog any medicine that was prescribed for a person.*

Always consult your veterinarian before giving your dog any drug, including over-the-counter (OTC) medications, to your dog. For instance, Tylenol, which is an OTC NSAID, can damage a dog's liver. Advil, another OTC, can be harmful to a dog's kidneys. The common OTC NSAID is aspirin, and it can cause bleeding and even perforating ulcers in a dog's stomach. Occasionally, a veterinarian may recommend that you try a buffered aspirin to control arthritic pain in your dog, but only at a specific dosage and with instructions to look for certain complications. The prescription NSAIDs give the most benefit and can produce dramatic results in dogs, just as in people. They also may have certain adverse reactions. You may remember the news articles some years ago about an NSAID for people called Celebrex that caused a number of deaths! Luckily, your veterinarian has NSAIDs made specifically for dogs and will monitor your dog to make sure they are not only effective, but also safe to use.

Many people are aware of - and even take- glucosamine to help with arthritis. However, there are a few misconceptions that should be cleared up about this

product. First, it is important to know that glucosamine does not really help with the pain of arthritis. It slows down the progression of arthritis by providing nutrients to help heal some of the damaged cartilage. It can take up to six weeks to start having any effect and, even then, it is more about slowing down the arthritis, not curing it or stopping any pain. The second fact that you need to know about glucosamine is that it is a supplement and, as such, it is not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). That means that much of what is sold to the public does not really contain what the label says.

In two studies conducted by the FDA of the many different glucosamine products on the market in the United States, only one product contained 100 percent of what the label claimed and the rest varied from a low 13 percent to a high of 95 percent. For this reason, I urge you to consult your veterinarian and follow his or her recommendation regarding which product to use. Our four-legged family members depend on us, and it is comfortable to know that we can maintain the quality of their lives and keep them pain-free when old age and arthritis starts to affect them. With pets living longer and becoming more bonded with us as an important part of our families, that is very good news indeed!