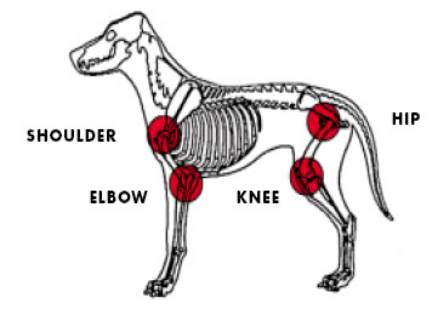
Osteoarthritis



Clinical signs of osteoarthritis (OA) can vary from subtle behavior changes (increasingly lazy, lethargic) to dramatic disabilities that cause major lifestyle changes. At the beginning, no abnormalities are noted except a mild discomfort at the orthopedic exam. Radiography helps determine the degree of severity of the osteoarthritis. All dogs 7 years and older for the small breeds and 5 years and older for the large breeds should have an orthopedic evaluation with radiographs. Dogs suffering from osteoarthritis are encouraged to exercise with low-impact activity such as walking and swimming, and to avoid high-impact exercise such as running and playing.

Our ultimate goal is to assure a good quality life for Fido. The treatment plan revolves around relieving the pain and the inflammation and slowing down the development of osteoarthritis.

1. The first step is to look at the body condition of the dog. ***Weight loss*** is the primary nutritional component to managing osteoarthritis. A weight loss program can be established by your veterinarian. This program includes a special diet with specific goals of weight achievement, and exercises including physical therapy.

2. A supplement of ***N-3 fatty acids*** helps decrease the inflammation caused by osteoarthritis.

3. ***Nonsteroidal Antiinflammatory Drugs*** (NSAIDs) can be prescribed for pain control and anti-inflammatory purposes in advanced cases of OA. It is important to do a preliminary complete bloodwork panel to rule out any emerging kidney and liver problems. Though prescription NSAIDs are much safer than aspirin, they still have potential secondary effects. A course of 2 weeks of oral NSAIDs may be prescribed, then, they will be titrated to the lowest dose that controls the chronic pain. To keep the dose of NSAIDs to a minimum, a synthetic opioid, Tramadol, may be added. Bloodwork should be done every 6 months to check vital organ function.

4. ***Nutraceutical*** products are recommended because of their effectiveness and their low risk of adverse effects. ***Glucosamine*** helps to improve the quality of the synovial fluid in the joints. ***MSM*** (methylsulfonylmethane) reduces the inflammation in the joints, ***Chondroitin sulfate*** and ***Perna canaliculus*** help to prevent more deterioration at the extremities of the bones and may even heal some lesions.

5. Creatinine should be used with caution. A preliminary kidney function is important. Creatinine is used temporarily when there is muscle mass loss, especially in the rear legs. To be effective, a creatinine supplement has to be used with an exercise program. When the muscle mass is reestablished, creatinine should be discontinued while the exercise program must continue to maintain the established muscle mass.

In summary, help for the Osteoarthritis patient could include:

Weight management: diet + exercise	Glucosamine supplements
N 3 Fatty Acids supplement	MSM supplements
NSAIDs and Tramadol	Chondroitin sulfate or Perna canaliculus suppements
Physical therapy; low impact exercises	Creatinine supplements

Osteoarthritis is a common source of discomfort for older pets and can affect their quality of life. With a multimodal approach and continuous monitoring, dramatic and lasting results can be seen.

Ref. Chronic Osteoarthritis Steven Budsberg, DVM, MS, Diplomate ACVS, University of Georgia: NAVC Clinician's brief; September 2006, volume 4 number 9.