

Arthritis

Most people are familiar with arthritis and understand that it is caused by an inflammation of the joints. This is a disease that is more common in our dogs than in cats. Larger breed dogs or dogs that are overweight are at a higher risk for developing arthritis. There are multiple forms of arthritis including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and infective or septic arthritis. We will briefly discuss these forms and inform you on what you can do to help prevent or control arthritis in your pet.

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of this disease. It occurs most frequently in the hips, knees, shoulders, elbows or vertebral column and can be classified as either primary with no known cause or secondary to another condition. Secondary osteoarthritis can develop in pets that have hip dysplasia, a ligament rupture or other trauma to their bones and joints. Rheumatoid arthritis is initiated by your pet's immune system. This can be a very debilitating form of arthritis that causes severe cartilage and bone deterioration. Blood tests for rheumatoid arthritis have been successful in some breeds of dog. Infective or septic related arthritis is caused by the invasion of a bacteria, fungi or virus to the affected joint. This form of the disease typically affects only a single joint.

Several symptoms can indicate that our pet may be experiencing the effects of arthritis. If your pet develops lameness, an unwillingness to walk or exercise or has difficulty rising from a resting position, this may be indicative of arthritis. Loss of appetite, lethargy and other symptoms may also be noticed. It is important that you notify your veterinarian if any of these symptoms develop. Before diagnosing arthritis, your veterinarian will likely eliminate other conditions, such as ligament tears, nerve damage, disc disease and others. X-Rays are often necessary when ruling out other conditions.

Fortunately, there are several forms of treatment for arthritis. Osteoarthritis is typically treated with analgesic drugs. Prior to being placed on these drugs, your dog may need a blood test to establish baseline results for his liver and kidney functions. Your veterinarian will likely perform a follow-up blood test every six to twelve months that your dog remains on these drugs. Rheumatoid and other immune mediated arthritis are often successfully treated with corticosteroids. Infective or septic arthritis are normally treated with specific antibiotics.

There are many steps that you can take as a pet owner to help avoid the development of arthritis in your dog. Obesity is the leading cause of arthritis in our pets and can be prevented with regular exercise and a well balanced diet as recommended by your veterinarian. Dietary supplements that promote joint health, such as glucosamine chondroitin, can be added to your pet's food. Ask your veterinarian if this supplement is right for your dog. These preventive measures can even help pets that have already developed arthritis. Obese dogs with arthritis that lose weight and are moderately exercised may improve or at least control the symptoms of their arthritis.