



Osteoarthritis

What is it?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a degenerative joint disease which is one of the leading causes of chronic pain in our pets. It is characterised by a loss of articular cartilage which covers the joint surfaces and allow bones to move freely over each other. OA also affects the synovial fluid within a joint which affects lubrication. The result of this is inflammation and pain in the joints.

OA is classified into two categories – primary which is associated with aging, chronic loading and wear & tear on the joints. And more commonly secondary which arises due to an underlying cause such as ligament damage (ie. Cruciate disease), developmental conditions (ie. Osteochondrosis), abnormal joint conformation (ie. Hip/Elbow dysplasia), or at fracture sites.

Contributing factors to OA includes genetics, age, and obesity.

Clinical signs your dog may have OA

- Less active/reluctant to exercise
- Lameness (particularly in the morning)
- Stiff after exercise
- Reluctance to jump & climb stairs
- Licking joints
- Aggression/irritability

Clinical signs your cat may have OA

- Reluctance to jump, especially from heights
- Lameness
- Aggression
- Reduced grooming/poor hair coat

Diagnosis of OA

Diagnosis of OA is made using a combination of history, clinical signs, a physical examination and radiology.

Information we might ask you includes – the duration of lameness, progression over time, response to any treatments, history of trauma or surgery, behavioural changes, time of the year/day that signs are worse, exercise tolerance?

During the physical exam we will palpate the joints and assess the range of motion; we look for changes in muscle mass; and do a full gait assessment during movement.



Management of OA

Although OA is a progressive and non-reversible disease, there are various ways we can slow the progression and manage the pain and inflammation associated with OA. Management involves a multimodal approach of medical treatments, lifestyle changes, disease modifying agents and nutraceuticals. We often find what works for one pet may not work for another and thus we management of OA should be individually tailored to your pet.

Lifestyle

Making changes to your pet's lifestyle is an important part of OA management. **Weight loss/control** is essential in reducing the load though your pets joints and alleviating inflammation.

Exercise is also important in OA management to maintain muscle mass and reduce joint instability. However, we recommend changing to low impact, consistent exercise (ie. Leash walks, swimming) rather than bursts of vigorous activity. We also suggest avoiding hard surfaces and jarring movements such as jumping for balls. Swimming and hydrotherapy is an excellent option for dogs with OA.

There are also some adjustments that can be made to the **home environment** to help your pet feel more comfortable. These include providing **padded bedding** to protect sore joints, a **warm place to sleep** and **ramps** instead of stairs.

Medical management

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS) are one of the most common treatments used for OA and can be very effective in alleviating pain & inflammation. Depending on the extend of your pets OA, NSAIDS may be used year-round or intermittently to manage flare-ups. It is important with these drugs that your pet's liver & kidney function is monitored by regular check-ups to the vet.

Adjunctive pain medications such as opioids, corticosteroids, gabapentin, amantadine may also be used in the treatment of OA.

Disease modifying agents (Cartrophen)

These drugs act to stimulate joint healing and repair and improve joint lubrication. They are usually given in a series of injections – one a week for four weeks, with the course repeated every 6-12 months. Maintenance injections can also be given every 4-6 weeks, depending on the pet's needs.



Nutraceuticals/Diet

There are many nutraceutical options available which contain ingredients such as green lipped muscle, glucosamine, chondroitin, fish oils, and shark cartilage etc. These products support joint health and may help to reduce inflammation.

There are also specially formulated prescription diets such as Hills J/D and Royal Canin Mobility that support joint health.

Tumeric (Golden paste) diet supplement

The number one benefit of turmeric for dogs is that they can experience a reduction in inflammation particularly with respect to arthritis and itchy skin.

- Doug English, a North Queensland (Australia) Veterinarian, has been using turmeric for several years on his animal patients and has seen very positive results in his patients for allergic dermatitis, atopy (chronic skin disease), arthritis, irritant bowel disease, and an increased athletic ability and general improvement in health overall. You'll even find your dog's coat can improve and become shinier. To better understand how dogs can benefit substantially from adding turmeric to their daily diet, we suggest you read Why Turmeric for Animals <http://turmericlife.com.au/doug-english-turmeric-for-animals/>

If your dog has a pre-existing condition, is currently on medication, has a planned surgery, or is pregnant, it's advisable to talk to your vet before adding turmeric to its daily diet.

Surgical management

This may be indicated in some severe cases where medical management fails or in patients that are pre-disposed to OA.

Adjunctive therapies

Other treatments such as acupuncture, physiotherapy, massage may also help in the management of OA.

Prognosis

Although osteoarthritis is a progressive disease, there are many options available to help slow the progression of disease and relieve the associated pain & inflammation. Together we will come up with a management plan that is tailored to your pet, so your pet can live a happy and comfortable life.