

Osteoarthritis In Dogs

Osteoarthritis is a common problem in dogs, particularly in seniors and large breeds. Although there is no cure for this progressive condition, identifying the problem early and initiating appropriate management can help keep your dog active and improve quality of life.

What Is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis, also referred to as Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD), is a progressively worsening inflammation of the joint caused by the deterioration of cartilage. In a healthy joint, cartilage acts as a cushion to allow the joint to move smoothly through its full range of motion. In cases of osteoarthritis, this cartilage cushion begins to break down because of factors such as age, injury, repetitive stress, or disease. The loss of this protective cushion results in pain, inflammation, decreased range of motion, and the development of bone spurs. While any joint in the body can develop osteoarthritis, the condition most commonly affects the limbs and lower spine.

Risk Factors for Osteoarthritis in Dogs

Any dog can develop osteoarthritis, particularly as they age. But there are some factors that can predispose your dog to this condition, such as:

- Large or giant breeds, such as [German Shepherd Dogs](#), [Labrador Retrievers](#), and [Golden Retrievers](#)
- Obesity
- Age, particularly middle-age to senior dogs
- Repetitive stress from athletic activities such as [agility](#), [flyball](#), or [diving](#)
- Injuries such as fractures or ligament tears
- Prior diagnosis of [hip or elbow dysplasia](#)
- Poor conformation
- Genetics

If your dog is predisposed to developing osteoarthritis, it is especially important to stay up-to-date with regular wellness visits to HIGHlands Veterinary Hospital.

We can help ensure your dog maintains a healthy weight and active lifestyle, and can often catch signs of osteoarthritis early before the problem becomes serious.

Signs of Osteoarthritis in Dogs

Osteoarthritis can be difficult to detect in its early stages, and often the symptoms do not become apparent until the affected joint is badly damaged. Some dogs can also be very stoic and will hide their pain until it becomes severe. Thus, it is important to monitor [middle-aged to senior dogs](#) and those predisposed to osteoarthritis for early signs of joint disease. These signs include:

- Stiffness, lameness, [limping](#), or difficulty getting up

- Lethargy
- Reluctance to run, jump, or play
- Weight gain
- Irritability or changes in behaviour
- Pain when petted or touched
- Difficulty posturing to urinate or defecate, or having accidents in the house
- Loss of muscle mass over the limbs and spine

Treatment of Osteoarthritis

Unfortunately, osteoarthritis is a progressive disease and there is no known cure.

Preventing the development of osteoarthritis through diet, the use of bi-annual Zydax, regular exercise, and the use of protective [joint supplements](#) is the best way to keep your dog's joints healthy.

When osteoarthritis develops, treatment is typically focused on controlling pain, decreasing inflammation, improving quality of life, and slowing the development of the disease.

Treatment of osteoarthritis is usually multimodal, meaning that several different therapies are used simultaneously in order to achieve the best outcome.

These therapies include;

- Disease modifying agents
- Diets
- Joint supplements
- Anti-inflammatory medications
- Alternative therapies (acupuncture, Chinese herbs)
- Laser, physiotherapy, chiropractic, massage, Reiki, etc.
- Weight management
- Other modalities not listed here

Disease modifying agents

These 'agents', as their name implies, modifies or SLOWS DOWN the progression of the arthritis.

In our opinion, Zydax is THE best of these products.

It works excellently, often for many, many years and has no side effects.

Mobility Diets

There are many mobility type diets around.

Like all things, there are some that work and many that do not.

We recommend the Delicate Care Mobility Diet which is excellent. And then as tier two diets, the ones made by Hills and Royal Canin.

Joint Supplements

These are often prescribed to improve function, reduce inflammation, and slow the progression of joint damage. [Glucosamine](#) and chondroitin are two common joint supplement ingredients that are used in both humans and dogs.

These supplements work by reducing inflammation, promoting healing, and increasing water retention in the cartilage, which provides more cushioning for the joint. Green-lipped mussel (GLM) is another proven joint supplement ingredient for both humans and dogs and contains beneficial nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, glycosaminoglycans, and antioxidants. GLM is a powerful anti-inflammatory that can help decrease pain and preserve joint function. Joint supplements are often used as an early intervention and throughout the progression of osteoarthritis because they are safe for long-term use in most patients.

Paw Osteo-Advanced

Paw Osteo-Advanced is the product that we find works better than most.

BE CAREFUL – there are many ‘inferior’ joint supplements around with similar sounding names.

NSAIDs (‘Anti-Inflammatories’)

In addition to the use of joint supplements, pain control is a mainstay of osteoarthritis treatment.

The most commonly used pain control medications for more severe osteoarthritis are Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs can not only reduce pain, but also decrease inflammation in the joints.

However, NSAIDs have significant side effects with continued use, particularly in patients with poor liver or kidney function. Your veterinarian will discuss the risks and benefits of NSAID therapy for your dog, and may recommend regular blood work in order to monitor your dog’s health during NSAID therapy.

Additional Treatments

We may also recommend other treatment modalities such as physiotherapy, acupuncture, cold laser, and changes in diet.

Other supplements that you may hear about include; Antilol, 4-Cyte, celery seeds, Rose Hip Vital, Turmeric as well as many others.

They all have their place in the management of OA (osteo-arthritis)

Weight Management

No matter what your dog's joint health looks like, it is important to maintain a healthy weight and active lifestyle.

In dogs with osteoarthritis, carrying excess weight on damaged joints is not only painful but can also speed up the process of cartilage breakdown. In healthy dogs, obesity can predispose them to earlier development of osteoarthritis, as well as many other diseases.

If your dog is overweight or obese, HIGHlands Veterinary Hospital is your best resource to help you begin a diet and exercise plan to improve your dog's health.

Osteoarthritis is a painful condition, but fortunately, it can be managed.

Maintaining your dog at a healthy weight and identifying signs of joint pain early are the first steps to maintaining your dog's mobility. Joint supplements may also help manage inflammation and pain, as well as slow the progression of the disease.