



# Arthritis in Dogs

Your pet has been diagnosed with arthritis, a joint disease that causes mild to severe pain and decreased mobility. Dogs typically develop what is termed “Osteoarthritis” rather than the well-known human “Rheumatoid Arthritis”. Osteoarthritis (also known as “degenerative joint disease” or DJD) is caused by routine wear and tear on joints, or may be secondary to an injury (such as a torn ligament) or congenital malformation (such as hip dysplasia). There is no cure for arthritis, and it is a progressive disease that can become life-limiting in severe cases. Thankfully, there are ways to slow the joint degeneration and improve your pet’s comfort level.

There are four main components of arthritis treatment:

- 1. Weight management** – Weight-loss in overweight pets with arthritis is a critical part of decreasing arthritis pain and increasing mobility! If your pet is overweight, we recommend a medically-guided weight loss program using a special, low-calorie food -- “**Metabolic Diet**” is recommended to ensure that adequate protein and micronutrients are maintained at lower-calorie levels.
- 2. Exercise** – Regular, daily exercise is another important aspect of arthritis treatment. This helps reduce excess weight, and also maintains muscle, stabilizes joints, and keeps joints flexible. Moderate, controlled, exercise is best (such as leash walking) two-three times daily. Activities that cause your dog to become significantly stiff or sore afterward should be avoided.
- 3. Inflammation and Pain Control** – Reducing joint inflammation reduces pain and increases mobility.
  - **Veterinary-specific Non-Steroid Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs), such as Carprofen or Meloxicidyl**, are usually the most rapid and effective way to control joint pain and inflammation in arthritic animals. NSAIDs can be used occasionally (after a big hike), but most arthritic animals benefit from once-twice daily administration to relieve discomfort. Never use human NSAIDs without discussing them with your veterinarian as most human NSAIDs have a high incidence of causing intestinal ulceration. Serious side effects from veterinary NSAIDs are very rare, but possible. Simple blood tests performed at the start of treatment, 3-4 weeks later, then every 6-months help to ensure safety. NSAIDs should be discontinued and you should call us if your pet experiences vomiting, appetite loss, or depression.
  - **Laser Therapy** or other alternative treatments such as acupuncture or chiropractic adjustments provide great benefit to some animals
  - **Omega-3, Fish-Oil fatty acids**, in high-doses, have also been shown to reduce joint inflammation in dogs. We recommend and carry “**Welactin**” for its purity and potency.

- **Additional pain medications** such as **“Tramadol”** (a low-grade narcotic) and **“Gabapentin”** (a medication that reduces pain transmission along the spinal cord) can be added when needed.

**4. Cartilage Protection – Joint Supplements** – Animals with early to moderate arthritis often benefit from oral Glucosamine/Chondroitin supplements. The quality, purity and potency of oral supplements can vary greatly - We recommend and carry **“Dasuquin”** as the best available product. Even better, home-administered injections of the cartilage-protectant **“Adequan”** help many animals even if oral products are insufficient.

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### **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUR PATIENTS**

**All Pets with Arthritis:** Weight-Management and Regular, Controlled Exercise are crucial for all arthritic pets.

**Mild Arthritis:**

- **Give Dasuquin or Adequan** for cartilage protection
- **Supplement with Omega-3 Fatty Acids** (Welactin or Hill’s j/d food) to help control inflammation.
  - All Fish-Oil products should be dosed based on their combined dose of the two main Omega-3 Fatty Acids, EPA and DHA
    - Dogs less than 30 lbs: 75mg PER POUND of combined EPA and DHA daily
    - Dogs 31-60 lbs: 60mg PER POUND of combined EPA and DHA daily
    - Dogs > 60 lbs: 50mg PER POUND of combined EPA and DHA daily.
  - Please work up to these doses gradually over about 2-weeks to allow your dog’s digestive tract to adjust.
- **Add Inflammation and Pain-Control medications if needed.**

**Moderate to Severe Arthritis:**

- **Start with with a 3-week trial of Carprofen** to assess benefit. Repeat blood tests near end of treatment course to ensure is it safe to continue medication. Continue long-term, intermittently or every day, if beneficial. (Repeat blood tests are needed every 6-months).
- **Continue Dasuquin/Adequan; Also continue Welactin or j/d diet.**
- **Consider Complementary Treatments** (Acupuncture, Chiropractic, Therapeutic Laser)
- **Add Tramadol and/or Gabapentin as needed** for additional pain control.