

Aches and Pains

If you woke up this morning a little stiff, if you have experienced a chronic pain in a joint or if you experience pain after exercise, you may be experiencing a condition which is frequently seen in your pets. We know that nearly 50% of people over 65 years of age are affected and that the incidence of this disease syndrome nearly doubles in dogs after the age of 7.

This syndrome is known as degenerative joint disease (DJD), osteoarthritis or more simply; arthritis.

The longevity of our pets is increasing and many people believe that their pets are getting around slower just because they are experiencing the normal aches and pain that come with aging.. Unfortunately, as many as half of these animals have arthritis and are unnecessarily suffering from pain.

Treating these "aches and pains" is actually often counter-intuitive. The drugs used for people are harmful to our pets, so a great deal of care must be taken when administering over the counter human medication frequently given for pain and inflammatory conditions.

The medical term for arthritis in pets is osteoarthritis, and it is a slowly progressive, dynamic disease which can cause lameness, pain and several kinds of disabilities. X-ray studies have shown that 20% of dogs over 1 year of age have some form of osteoarthritis.

There are several suspected causes of osteoarthritis. The cartilage of the joints may be defective because of faulty physiology, trauma, instability or congenital and development

abnormalities. Inflammatory conditions and overweight are also part of the process. Tick borne diseases like lyme disease contribute to osteoarthritis in dogs of all ages.

The cat has been overlooked until recently, when an x-ray study of 100 cats found evidence of joint disease in 90% of felines over the age of 12.

The most common early symptoms are slight stiffness in the morning, difficulty rising and reluctance to walk. As the disease progresses we see lameness and changes in mobility and posture.

We diagnose osteoarthritis by examining the joints for pain and abnormal articulation. The extent of degenerative changes are confirmed with x-rays. In certain breeds, the hips are more commonly affected, however, any joint can be involved as well as the articulations between the vertebrae.

The treatment for osteoarthritis has improved over the years, and we now have several excellent medications which have been specifically designed and approved for pets. They improve the quality of our pets lives by alleviating pain and slowing the degenerative nature of the disease. In addition to these anti-inflammatory drugs, there are several nutraceutical (natural) supplements available.

In selecting a treatment plan for osteoarthritis, we determine the stage of the disease and the affects of the pain. In the early stages, natural medications can be of great help. In addition, an exercise regimen can be implemented and weight loss can greatly alleviate the discomfort associated with arthritis in cats and dogs.

If your pet shows any of these symptoms, please remember that ibuprofen (Advil), acetaminophen (Tylenol) and aspirin can be harmful and seek the advice of your veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment regimens. For more information about a very disabling form of arthritis called Hip Dysplasia, go to my website at www.manchestervet.com and find Hip Dysplasia in the encyclopedia section.