

# OSTEOARTHRITIS

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## PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT & CONTROL



### LIVING WITH A DEGENERATIVE JOINT DISEASE

#### ANWELL VETERINARY REHAB & CONDITIONING CENTER

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## Healthy Joint vs. Diseased

Healthy joint function depends on physical and chemical components within the joint working together to enhance stability during normal activity. It is when unusual stress factors are added to this equation that the joint integrity may fail, causing deterioration and weakening. Unfortunately, along with the avoidable factors, are also predisposing factors such as congenital deformities (hip dysplasia), accidental injuries (ligament tear) and acquired diseases (Lyme Disease) that may also compromise joint health and integrity.

### Clinical Signs

Since early diagnosis is critical in your pet's comfort and quality of life, your observations will be instrumental in determining treatment necessary to preserve joint health and function.

Early signs can be obscured and include:

*Morning stiffness*

*Reluctance to get up (or jump up)*

*Reduced range of motion in joint*

*Looseness or "crunching" within joint*

Progressive signs become more apparent:

*Noticeable lameness*

*Pain*

*Exercise intolerance/muscle loss*

*Lethargy and/ or depression*

Millis, Levine, Taylor Canine Rehabilitation & Physical Therapy, Missouri: Saunders 2004

Birchard, Sherding, Saunders Manual of Small Animal Practice 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Philadelphia, Pa; W.B. Saunders Co. 2000

Nelson, Couto, Small Animal Internal Medicine 3<sup>rd</sup>. Ed. Missouri; Mosby Inc. 2003

Fossum, Small Animal Surgery 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Missouri; Mosby Inc. 2003

Dr Sharon C Kerwin, DVM, MS, Dipl ACVS "Treatment of Chronic Pain: Osteoarthritis"

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***Osteoarthritis (OA) is defined as a non-inflammatory, degenerative joint disease that acts both physically and chemically to breakdown the articular joint(s) ex:(hips, knees, wrist) thereby causing irreversible damage to the internal integrity of these joint(s).***

It is one of the most common joint diseases of dogs, (of any age) and possibly of cats, and can have many variables causing the affliction, some preventable however some inevitable but manageable.

Of critical importance to your pet will be to recognize underlying stress factors that will predispose him or her to this painful joint disease and get a head start on a lifestyle that will provide the necessary protective tools for your pet to successfully maintain a healthier, pain-free life.

Obesity and/or lack of conditioning as well as excessive joint “force” activity for large breed dogs, aging pets or compromised animals would all be considered avoidable stress factors.

**Early intervention by both you and your veterinary team will be critical for prevention and optimal control of this disease.**

## Diagnosis

Whether or not clinical signs are apparent, diagnosis of OA by your veterinarian can be determined by four factors: *First*, a complete history of your pet is necessary to determine any underlying injury, disease or deformity as well as determining any predisposing factors that would contribute to joint breakdown. *Second*, a complete physical is necessary to determine degree of functional loss, joint swelling, muscle loss and/or apparent pain. *Third*, x-rays can determine the degree of developing joint abnormalities. *Lastly*, joint fluid analysis can help to determine diagnosis but is usually not necessary.

## Treatment & Control

Treatment options will be customized to fit your pet’s current stage of osteoarthritis and clinical signs will be an invaluable tool used when determining course of action. Any underlying causes provoking the degeneration must be addressed first but realize that this will not reverse existing damage to the affected joint(s).

Treatment should first include medication for existing pain and be incorporated as needed for your pet. Various options can be discussed and recommended by your veterinarian that will best suit your pet’s profile. Remember follow up blood screening may be necessary for long-term use and management.

Weight reduction if necessary and physical conditioning is critical to improve and

maintain both muscle mass and joint function for your pet. Low impact exercise, such as swimming and slow leash walks, will minimize excess pressure placed on already compromised joint(s). Physical therapy is the cornerstone for both prevention and treatment and needs to become a lifestyle not a quick fix.

Close control of your pet’s environment is necessary to minimize external irritants that can contribute to their discomfort. For example, avoid dampness and enhance warmth in their immediate environment. You can also make sure to have adequate cushioned surfaces for sleeping and plenty of “traction” surfaces for “paws” to maneuver on.

Finally, nutritional supplements, such as glucosamine chondroitin and antioxidant vitamins, are recommended by your veterinarian and considered vital in both enhancing internal joint health as well as inhibiting further degenerative damage.

## Prevention

Prevention may or may not be possible depending on the onset of osteoarthritis in your pet but early intervention is the answer to halting progression. Instituting an early life-style of balanced nutrition (to avoid obesity), low impact conditioning (to enhance both muscle and joint health) and dietary supplements (to prevent premature breakdown) will help to discourage degenerative changes occurring in your pet. Hopefully allowing for a long, enjoyable, pain-free life together.