

ORAH Info:

Treatment options for arthritis



Arthritis (more formally osteoarthritis) is a condition resulting in painful joints. It is common in older pets, especially the larger breeds of dogs. Any joint can be affected with arthritis, but the most commonly affected joints include the hips, knees, shoulders, elbows, and vertebrae (the back).

Nutritional supplements: The best of these, Dasuquin, is a combination product containing glucosamine, chondroitin, MSM and other beneficial ingredients. It provides a small to moderate degree of pain relief, is anti-inflammatory, and can help maintain healthy joint cartilage. In addition, Omega-3 fatty acid supplements (often derived from fish oil; dogs can also use the Omega-3s found in flax oil) provide mild anti-inflammatory effects within the body, including the joints. Supplements are extremely safe. They are best used in patients with early arthritis, or in combination with other therapies in more advanced arthritis.

Special diets: Hills j/d and Purina's JM are foods specially designed for arthritic dogs. They contain some of the nutritional supplements discussed above. Studies have shown joint pain can be reduced after 4 to 6 weeks of eating these foods. This treatment option is very safe, but likely not effective alone for advanced arthritis. Sometimes we recommend the more-concentrated ingredients found in separate supplements.

Adequan injections can reduce joint pain and inflammation, and can slow the progression of arthritis. Adequan is chemically similar to glucosamine, but is better absorbed. It is injected into muscle or under the skin twice a week for 2-4 weeks, and then less often as needed. Most dogs end up at a level of one injection every 1-3 months. Adequan is generally very safe, and most effective for early arthritis, or for advanced arthritis when used in combination with other therapies.

NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) are the mainstay of arthritis treatment in pets, especially in dogs. NSAIDs include Rimadyl, Deramaxx, Metacam, aspirin, and others. A small percentage of pets (perhaps, 0.03%) can have serious, even life threatening complications with these medications. Bloodwork prior to and after starting the medications is recommended to help us identify these animals. Always consult your veterinarian before using these drugs, especially in cats. *Never give Tylenol to your pet-- it is toxic to cats, and studies have shown that it does not relieve pain in dogs.*

Tramadol helps to control pain by binding to the same pain receptors as morphine would. Some pets respond more reliably to Tramadol than others. It is a relatively safe drug with a wide dose range. Sedation may be seen at higher doses. Tramadol can be given in combination with other pain medications for added relief.

Gabapentin is another medication that we often use alone or in combination with other pain relievers. Potential side effects (sedation and hind end weakness) are temporary and will go away on their own after 1-2 weeks. Because Gabapentin is very safe, we can readily increase the dose if needed. This medication takes 1-2 weeks to reach steady levels within the bloodstream, so it is given consistently, rather than on an "as needed" basis.

Steroids relieve pain and reduce inflammation. Due to the potential for side effects such as muscle wasting, increased susceptibility to infections, increased thirst and urination, or the small risk of diabetes in cats, we often try other medications first.

Physical Therapy: Techniques and exercises that have been used for people are now being used in dogs and cats, allowing us to lower doses of medications and supplements while reducing pain and improving mobility. Dr. Katie Cross, a veterinarian certified in physical therapy and rehabilitation for pets, provides these services locally in Williston. If you are interested in referral, just ask!

Acupuncture has also been helpful for some animals with arthritis. We can give you a referral for this service as well.

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