

# SOUTH COAST VET CARE

## ARTHRITIS ~ANIMAL MATTERS

Arthritis is the term commonly used to describe degenerative joint disease or osteoarthritis. Arthritis may either be sudden or gradual in onset. A gradually worsening arthritis may become suddenly worse after a long walk, or playing with other dogs for example. One or multiple joints may be affected, and some may be worse than others. There are two major categories of arthritis:

- **Primary Arthritis:** occurs in all dogs and cats, and is the result of normal wear and tear (aging!) of joints, and because joints have only got a limited capacity to repair themselves.
- **Secondary Arthritis:** this results from anything that subjects a joint to abnormal stress or change in range of movement:
  - Joint injury (ie repeated falling down rabbit holes!)
  - Obesity (increased weight on joints)
  - Loose fitting joints (ie ruptured cruciate ligament)
  - Bad fitting joints (ie hip dysplasia)
  - Excessive activity (ie racing greyhounds/working dogs)

### **Stages of arthritis:**

1. Reluctance to perform a particular activity (eg jumping into car)
2. Lameness or stiffness after sustained activity or brief over exertion (eg running after a ball)
3. Stiffness is most pronounced after a period of rest (eg after a night's sleep) the dog appears to improve after 5-10 mins but will become lame again with ongoing activity. The amount of activity required before marked lameness/stiffness is noticed gets less and less. This stage is when joint degeneration has become more severe.

*Often stages 1 and 2 may not be noticed in a dog that is overweight or inactive*

Some dogs show signs of irritability and reclusiveness due to continuous pain and may bite when approached or touched, and this is often directed against children or strangers.

Arthritis can often be diagnosed following a thorough physical examination and the symptoms described by the owner.

Regularly radiographs are required to rule out other causes of joint pain, to determine the type or severity of the disease, or to rule out any small fractures/dislocations or bone cancer. It can also be useful in determining whether surgery is indicated, or if management of the pain with medication will suffice.

## **Treatment:**

Occasionally surgery is indicated, particularly if the joint is damaged, or if there are damaged ligaments. This is because if the joint is left unstable then medication alone may not alleviate the pain and degenerative joint disease will progress faster.

1. **Cartrophen Injections:** This is the treatment of choice for most cases of arthritis. It stimulates production of lubricating joint fluid and cartilage cells to repair damaged joint surfaces. It is also anti-inflammatory, improves the blood circulation to the bone under the joint cartilage and has minimal (if any) side effects. ***Any improvement in your pet's condition is due to an improvement in the joint itself and not just due to a masking of the symptoms*** (ie how a painkiller works). Cartrophen helps, also, by slowing the progression of the degenerative processes in the joints, and should be started as early as possible when the first symptoms of arthritis appear. An initial course of 4 injections a week apart should be given followed up by booster injections every 3 months for life.
2. **NSAID's (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs):** these are as the name suggests, anti-inflammatory pain relieving drugs. They are often used both for acute and long term pain relief and to settle joint inflammation. *Just because a dog isn't limping, doesn't mean they aren't in pain!* Side effects tend to be more apparent in long term use, or in older animals with underlying issues. We regularly will do a blood and/or urine test prior to an animal being in NSAID's long term, and monitor every 6-12 months. There are NSAID's that are more suited to older animals. Examples of NSAIDS are: Carprofen, Meloxicam, Previcox, Trocoxil and Onsior.
3. **Nutriceuticals:** these provide the building blocks for the manufacture or repair of joint cartilage. Results can vary, and tend to work better alongside cartrophen injections. Examples are: fish oil, glucosamine and chondroitin, Sashas Blend, Joint Guard.
4. **Overweight pets should be placed on a weight reduction diet**