



Help for Painful Joints

Is your dog or cat getting old and stiff? Showing a little limp from time to time? Getting up slower to greet you at the end of a day, or are they showing reluctance to start theirs in the morning? Are they having difficulty lowering their head to the food bowl, are they quicker to lie down, keeping the food bowl between their feet?

As we all age, so do our bones, our cartilage, ligaments and other soft tissue structures. With pain from osteoarthritis (degenerative joint disease; DJD) comes tightness of muscles, muscle atrophy from disuse, over-compensation stress on other joints and a diminishing desire to do the things we once enjoyed. This is true for our canine and feline companions as well.

Diagnosing DJD can be done through physical exam, history taking and x-rays. More advanced tests include arthrocentesis and imaging such as CT (for boney structural changes) or MRI (especially for the back- softer tissue structure changes).

There are MANY treatment modalities within veterinary medicine and here at Douds Veterinary Hospital. For direct pain relief we can use oral medications (analgesics), therapies such as K-laser, acupuncture, and hydrotherapy or consider surgical options. For joint support we can use oral supplements, injections of disease-modifying osteoarthritic agents and physical therapy. For overall care we can use dietary support and exercise to keep any extra weight off. Below I'll outline specific examples of each of these options.

The use of oral analgesics requires a thorough physical exam, often including bloodwork, and a discussion to determine which medications are best for each pet. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) include Rimadyl (generic = carprofen), Metacam (generic = meloxicam), Previcox, and Onsior (for cats). These drugs reduce pain, inflammation and fever. Another class includes Tramadol (an opioid derivative). This drug blocks the pain pathway but does not reduce inflammation. There are also gabapentin and amantadine to consider. These are for neuropathic pain. Bloodwork and a physical exam help us to determine if a pet is able to take these medications for an extended period of time. NSAIDs in particular can put stress on both the kidneys and the liver as well as causing stomach irritation and in some cases, ulceration. Some of these medications are dosed just once daily while others may be given up to four times a day, as needed.

Laser therapy is a newer treatment modality that we offer. Originating within chiropractic medicine, this option is now available for our pets. Our technicians are trained in how to use the K-laser device and once you get started, they'll be your go-to for the tapering treatments (generally three treatments the first week, two treatments the second week, then once a week as needed for maintenance).

For acupuncture or hydrotherapy we do offer referrals and have seen some great success stories.

Surgical options will vary depending on which joints are affected. Ex. For hip DJD either hip replacement or femoral head osteotomy may be preferred. Referrals and in-house care are available, depending on which procedure may be best for your pet.

Joint support can be started at any age. Oral supplements include glucosamine with chondroitin and methylsulfonylmethane (MSM) as well as omega-3 fatty acids (DHA and EPA). Some product names are Cosequin, Dasaquin and Welactin as well as Vetoquinol AllerG-3 and Omega, Synovi Chews G4 and Flexicose Plus. These should be given by mouth once to twice daily. Injectable polysulfated glycosaminoglycan (Adequan) is given subcutaneously (under the skin) on a tapering basis to decrease joint pain as well. Generally once a week for four weeks, then every other week for two more doses and then once monthly for maintenance. Bloodwork is not needed to start these. Finding the most palatable option leads to the most success long term.

Owner controlled treatments and support include dietary control, keeping your pet as trim as possible. This may require weight loss diets or keeping track of the calories your pet gets throughout the day and reducing it by 5-10%. Looking for lower calorie treats (apples, carrots, peas, cheerios) helps. Another thing owners can do is passive range of motion maneuvers and gentle massage of tight muscles.

There are many options for pets with aging joints. Ranging from surgery to diet, we have a lot of control in treating our pet's pain and underlying conditions. Please ask us about what options may be best for you and your pet at the next wellness appointment.