

## CONSERVATIVE MANAGEMENT OF CANINE ARTHRITIS

Arthritis in dogs is a common condition. It can arise from many causes, such as congenital joint malformation (eg hip dysplasia), injury (eg anterior cruciate ligament damage, fracture, dislocation) and ageing. Pain from arthritis is usually low-grade but constant. It can manifest in different ways ranging from limping and vocalizing to more subtle signs like increased sleeping, less playing, licking of affected joints and not wanting to go as far on walks. Sadly the process of arthritis cannot be reversed, but it can be slowed.

For many dogs, significant pain relief can be given through the use of 'conservative management'. Conservative management typically consists of medical and physical therapy. These are discussed below.



### Weight management

Keeping dogs as lean as possible will reduce the weight bearing load on arthritic joints and minimize discomfort. Overweight dogs with arthritis benefit greatly from weight loss.

## PHYSICAL THERAPY

### Walking

Walking and gentle exercise plays an important role in the management of arthritis. Dogs with arthritis benefit from maintaining muscle strength, to help support the joints. The best way to achieve this without undue stress on the joints is through slow steady walking, on lead. Walks should be on flat surfaces or gentle inclines, and can be up to 40mins in length (or longer if in early arthritis). Frequency of walks is a big factor, with short regular walks (eg a 5min walk twice daily) being much better than isolated long walks (eg one 40min walk once weekly).

### Playing

Dogs with arthritis often still want to play. The type of play should be controlled, to avoid the 'morning after' scenario. Types of play that make dogs particularly sore the following morning include chasing, fetching and most uncontrolled off-lead exercise. Types of play that are well tolerated include tug-of-war and mental challenges (eg. Kongs, iceblocks containing fruit or dog food).

### Swimming

Swimming is a fantastic activity for arthritic dogs. It is a low/no-impact exercise that is good at strengthening muscles and can improve joint mobility. Dogs that have not done a lot of swimming should be introduced gradually, starting at 5-10min swims and working up to 15-20mins over several weeks. Be sure to check water conditions (eg algal blooms, currents) if swimming in the natural water bodies – if its not safe for people then its not safe for dogs!



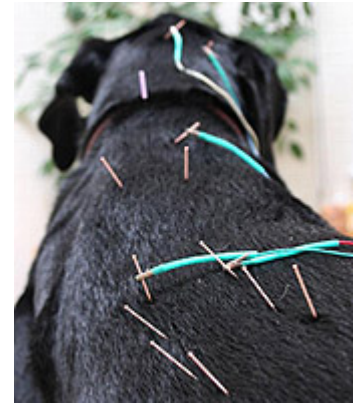
### Physiotherapy and Massage.

A very common side-effect of painful joints is the seizing up of muscles due to overcompensation. Massage and physiotherapy can be used to relieve the secondary muscular signs, as well as improving joint mobility. There is an animal physiotherapy service in Canberra, to which we can provide referral.



## **Acupuncture**

Acupuncture has been shown to work in up to 85% of all mild/early cases of arthritis. Treatments are performed weekly, and typically take 3-8 treatments before a response is seen. There are several qualified veterinary acupuncturists available in Canberra, to whom we can provide referral.



## **MEDICAL THERAPY**

### **Neutraceuticals (eg Flex, Jointgard, Cosequin, Sasha's Blend, 4Cyte, fish oils)**

Neutraceuticals include glucosamine, chondroitin sulphate/phosphate, 4Cyte methylsulphonylmethane (MSM) and omega 3 fatty acids found in fish oils. These nutrients may be helpful, particularly in the early stages of disease. They may help maintain normal joint fluid and therefore the health of the entire joint, and aid in reducing the inflammation associated with arthritis. Currently, scientific evidence supports omega 3 fatty acids as effective natural anti-inflammatories.

### **Prescription diets (Hills j/d, Royal Canin Mobility Support)**

Prescription diets can be a great way to manage arthritis. They contain many ingredients that improve joint health, often to the point that other medications are not required. They include high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, carnitine, glucosamines, chondroitin and MSMs.

### **Pentosan polysulphate (eg Cartrophen)**

Pentosan polysulphate is an injection that is given under the skin once weekly for 4 doses. It acts to slow down cartilage damage, increases new cartilage production and improves circulation to the entire joint. Courses of cartrophen can be repeated as regularly as every three months.

### **NSAIDs (eg Previcox, Metacam, Rimadyl, Onsior)**

NSAIDs are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. They provide good pain relief and reduce inflammation, however they do nothing to slow the course of arthritis. NSAIDs are generally used once pain is no longer responsive to other management strategies. Occasionally, NSAIDs can have side effects (eg vomiting and diarrhoea). They can be detrimental in the face of liver and/or kidney disease. For this reason, blood and urine monitoring is recommended prior to and throughout longterm use.

### **Supplementary pain killers (eg Tramadol, gabapentin)**

Supplementary pain killers are used to augment NSAIDs. They may be used to help reduce the dose of NSAIDs, or used in addition when the pain is no longer controlled by NSAIDs alone.

### **Cortisone (eg prednisolone)**

Cortisone is a powerful anti-inflammatory drug, but has poor pain relieving properties. In veterinary medicine it is rarely useful for arthritis, and will often

actually worsen the situation. Animal rarely suffer from immune-mediated arthritis, which is seen more commonly in people and is extremely responsive to cortisone therapy.