

What is Arthritis?

Arthritis is a broad term which encompasses many different conditions of the joints. **Osteoarthritis (OA)** is the most common form, and is also known as Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD).

Just like in humans, arthritis causes swelling of the joints, stiffness, lameness, pain and reduced mobility, and ultimately reduces quality of life.

There are many possible causes of OA and often a combination of factors are involved, for example: old injuries (fractures or ligament tears), joint infection, joint dysplasia (poorly formed joint), age, genetics/breed.

Although it is very common, we find that frequently owners perceive reduced activity and stiffness of the legs in their dogs as an inevitable part of "old age", but these could well be signs of arthritis and joint pain. Animals are often very good at hiding pain, they don't always cry out or whine for example, but limping or stiffness is a sign that your pet may be in pain. We often find that it is only after we have tried treatment, and your dog has a new lease on life and much better mobility, that owners realise just how stiff their pet had become.

Signs of OA:

- Lameness/limping
- Stiffness
- Excessive licking of a limb
- Inability to do certain movements, eg jump into car, going up or down stairs
- Change in exercise tolerance/activity level
- Changes in behaviour

What can I do?

The first thing we would recommend if you have noticed any of those signs in your dog is to bring him to your vet for a check up.

The vet will examine your dog thoroughly, and may find other signs that fit with a diagnosis of OA, like swelling of the joints, reduced range of motion, muscle wasting, painful joints and new bone formation.

In some cases, the vet may also need to X-ray your dog's joints. This is usually done under a general anaesthetic, because it can be painful to stretch the joints out in order to get a good X-ray.

Why/When should OA be treated?

Treatment is aimed to relieve pain, reduce inflammation and slow down the deterioration of the condition for as long as possible. We feel that when OA is causing pain resulting in a poorer quality of life—for example not being able to play the ball games they love, or losing sleep due to discomfort—then it should be treated.

Treatment of OA

The main focus of treatment of OA are threefold:

- 1) Pain control
- 2) Exercise control
- 3) Weight control
- 4) Complimentary treatments:
 - Supplements/neutraceuticals, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, acupuncture—please discuss with your vet

Pain control

The most common type of drug used for first line pain relief are called NSAIDs or anti-inflammatories.

Examples of these types of drugs used at Holmer are Metacam, Rimadyl and Previcox. These can be used for both short term “flare ups” or for long term management.

“Cartrophen” is also used here at Holmer. This is an injection of pentosan polysulfate, given by your vet, which helps to treat the arthritis by improving cartilage and joint fluid, as well as treating the pain/lameness. This is usually used as well as NSAIDs, but in some dogs is used instead.

Exercise control

Exercise is important! It helps build muscle strength, reduce weight, limit stiffness and muscle wastage, AND gives your dog mental stimulation which is vital for their wellbeing. As a general rule “little and often” is the key for dogs with OA as well as keeping exercise routines consistent throughout the week. Your vet will be able to advise you what is best for your own dog's condition

Weight Control

Being overweight puts more pressure on joints which are already feeling the strain, therefore diet is important to keep weight under control, especially as dogs with OA may struggle to exercise. Ask the staff about our nurses' free Weight Clinic for more help/advice

Extra Advice

- Supplements containing Omega 3, glucosamine and chondroitin are beneficial eg Yumove Advance
- Get a warm well padded bed for your dog, consider hot water bottles
- Avoid slippery floors/provide floor rugs
- Consider a coat for cold/damp weather
- Try a magnetic collar which can help some dogs
- Massage or gentle stretch exercises can help joints “loosen up” when stiff.