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Independent, Kind and Honest Veterinary Care in the Heart of Ryedale

Management of Arthritis Dogs

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a very common problem in older dogs. The disease can occur in any moving joint in the body but is more commonly seen in the **hips, elbows** and **knee** joints. Normal healthy joints are made up of the ends of two (or more) bones (e.g. in the hip it is the thigh bone and the pelvic bone). These are both covered by a smooth protective layer of cartilage. To aid a gliding movement between these two surfaces there is a small amount of fluid within the joint, which acts as a lubricant. Arthritis causes an inflammation of the joint, the lubricant fluid can become irritant, and the cartilage becomes cracked and worn. In severe cases no cartilage will be left and the joint will consist of bone grinding against bone which is extremely painful. The joint and bones involved will react to this trauma and grow new bone outside the joint, this results in spurs of new bone restricting the overall movement of the joint and causing further pain. The disease arises for a variety of reasons – previous trauma, developmental conditions such as hip dysplasia, overload of joints because of obesity or age related ‘wear and tear’. The dog may be lame on the affected leg or may be stiff after rest and find it difficult to stand up. Typically the stiffness improves once the animal has walked a short distance. Arthritis varies from day to day and will be worse in cold damp weather. Arthritis will result in a reduced range of movement for the joint and pain on manipulation of the joint. Often x-rays will be needed to confirm that arthritic changes are present. Unfortunately this disease has no cure but we have a number of ways of managing it.

Management

- 1. Weight control** - obesity increases the severity of arthritis and the need for drugs to control the pain. If your dog is overweight it will help enormously if some of the excess weight is lost, thus reducing the pressure on the joint.
- 2. Exercise** – little and often is best. We recommend around three twenty-minute gentle walks a day. Exercise can vary from this but should not be excessive and the dog should not be rested unless in severe discomfort. Swimming is a good form of exercise as it helps build up muscle around the joints. Hydrotherapy in a specially designed pool is an excellent form of exercise for arthritic dogs (Please ask for details of the local hydrotherapy units). We also have a physiotherapist visit the practice, who gives practice advice and techniques for owners to use at home.
- 3. Anti-inflammatory drugs** – These are a useful way of controlling the pain and inflammation associated with arthritis. There are two main drugs that we use in dogs, Metacam or Loxicom (Meloxicam) and Previcox (Firocoxib). They work by inhibiting cyclo-oxygenase enzymes, which cause inflammation in damaged tissues such as joints. These drugs should be given with food as they can irritate the stomach lining. Side effects are rare in dogs but all dogs may react differently with some suffering from sickness or diarrhoea. If this happens stop your treatment and contact the practice for further advice. Rarer side effects include gastric ulceration, liver and kidney dysfunction. The drugs are given initially at a high dose but the long-term aim is to reduce the dose to the minimum effective amount. Doses of the anti-inflammatories can be increased again during flare-ups of arthritis.
- 4. Cartrophen injections** (Pentosan polysulphate) – this is one of the same drugs that humans may receive when suffering from osteoarthritis. It inhibits the specific enzymes that cause cartilage



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breakdown as well as binding to cracks already present in the cartilage and stimulating new growth to fill these gaps. It also has some anti-inflammatory and pain killing effects too. In humans it is given straight into the joint affected but in dogs it is given as an injection under the skin (just like their booster vaccinations) every week for 4 weeks. It can then be repeated after one month or at longer intervals. Cartrophen has good success rates, but may not be effective in all cases. Dogs who respond well to cartrophen may not need painkillers until the disease is much more advanced.

5. Glucosamine and Chondroitin Supplements – these are chondroprotectant food supplements (similar to green lipped muscle extract that is available in human preparations). This is given to dogs at initially a high dose, and later lowered. It supplements the body's own amino sugars, the key joint building blocks. These help to maintain joint condition. There are no side effects associated with these supplements. It is important to buy a good quality product. We have different preparations at the surgery all licensed for the use in dogs and cats. They are also available for use in puppies who are prone to developmental joint problems due to breed or size. Ask your vet or veterinary nurse for more details.

6. Acupuncture - Our vet Katie Longmire runs acupuncture clinics on most weekday afternoons. These are primarily aimed at animals which are in musculo-skeletal pain, like dogs suffering from chronic arthritis. An initial 4 weeks treatment course and regular follow up treatments, depending on response, can help to alleviate pain and increase mobility in a very high percentage of cases. Regular patients often improve to the extent that they can be managed without the need for pain-killing medication. The treatment is very safe and has only minimal possible side effects, like mild sedation during or following the sessions.

7. Herbal Tinctures – Katie Longmire is currently studying for her Certificate as a herbal practitioner and can offer another method of combating OA and chronic pain. The use of herbal extracts of plants such as Devils Claw, Turmeric and Boswellia (to name a few) can be used alongside conventional treatment or on their own. These are naturally occurring anti-inflammatories. There is scientific proof of the compounds found within the plants to have effects on inflammatory pathways. Please contact the surgery for more information.

8. Essential fatty Acid supplementation - The use of Fish oils, Evening primrose oil and other EFA supplements can help support joint health. The product we use is called **Coatex**. If using high street bought products please ensure no added ingredients such as Vitamin C etc are present. Also bear in mind oils can act as laxatives!

9. Complementary therapies – Many clients here have reported to us that the use of magnetic collars have made a large difference to older dogs with arthritis. Although there is no scientific proof, there are no known side effects; however they must not be used by owners fitted with pacemakers.