

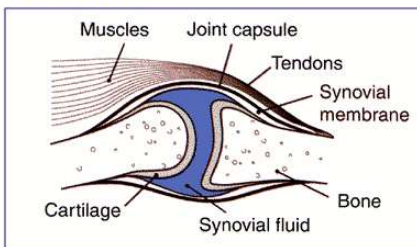


# Arthritis

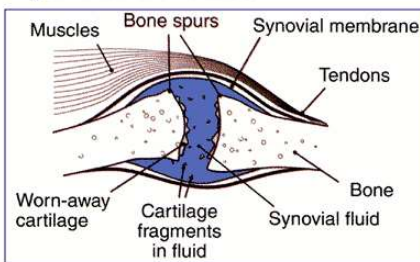
Arthritis is common in our aging pets. All breeds and sizes of dogs are susceptible, but it is more common in larger breeds. Cats can also develop arthritis although they tend to hide the signs better.

## What It Is

A Healthy Joint



A joint with Osteoarthritis



Osteoarthritis (OA), commonly thought of simply as arthritis, is the deterioration of a joint that causes cartilage to wear down and extra bony tissue to develop.

This causes inflammation and pain. The most common cause is many years of

using the joint causing “wear and tear”. However, anything that has damaged the joint can cause arthritis as well. This includes dislocation, fractures, torn ligaments, or joint surgery. The most common areas of arthritis are the hips, knees, elbows, and spine.

## Signs

One of the earliest signs of arthritis is stiffness, especially when getting up from sleeping. They tend to be better when they have walked around. The discomfort is more noticeable in damp or cold weather. They may walk with a stiff gait.

Over time, the arthritis will worsen, and your pet will have more difficulty getting up, using stairs, running, walking, or positioning to defecate or urinate. Limping can occur, especially after exercise. Their activity level will decrease as the arthritis progresses.

Cats will be less likely to jump to high levels. Another subtle sign in cats involves litter box issues. As it becomes difficult for them to crouch into position, they may hang over the edge unintentionally. It may be difficult for them to step into a litter box with tall sides.



## Diagnosis



Diagnosing arthritis requires x-rays to look for signs of joint changes. A physical exam is important as well.

Commonly, a pet with arthritis will have crepitus in the affected joint. Crepitus is a popping sound and feel associated with bone rubbing on bone.

### **Treatment**



We cannot stop the progression of arthritis, but we can slow it down and help keep your pet comfortable.

The first step is nutritional supplements. Chondroitin and glucosamine help slow the joint degeneration and can help rebuild cartilage to some degree. Fish oil and antioxidants help decrease inflammation.

Laser treatments help to decrease pain and improve motion. Exercise is important in keeping the joint moving as well as maintaining a healthy body weight. Overweight pets have more stress on every joint. Pets will not respond as well to other therapies if they are overweight.

Water therapy such as swimming or underwater treadmill allow your pet to move the joint with less pain since water helps support the body's weight. As the signs worsen, your pet may need anti-inflammatory drugs. Eventually we'll prescribe increasingly stronger medications if signs progress.



### **At Home**

Modifications of the home environment can help your arthritic pet get around easier. Ramps help ease the stress on the body and will help your pet reach the car, bed, couch, or stairs.



Rugs on hardwood or tiled floors can help prevent slipping. Thick beds can keep the body warmer and make for more comfortable sleeping. Orthopedic beds are available and heated beds will help.

For cats, provide steps to high areas to make jumping easier. Some arthritic cats can benefit from litter boxes with a low entrance.

### **Summary**

Slowing down and getting stiff aren't just a part of getting old. They are usually signs of a problem and can indicate that that your pet is uncomfortable or in pain. Bring your pet in for an exam to determine the severity of arthritis and to find out how to help your pet.

