

6 ways to manage osteoarthritis & degenerative joint disease

Osteoarthritis, or arthritis, is a complex condition involving inflammation of the joints. There are many causes of arthritis in pets and, in most cases the degree of arthritis is related to the age and weight of the pet. The most common type of arthritis is also known as degenerative joint disease (DJD). This can be primary or secondary (following conditions involving joint instability leading to damage of the bone that lines the joints). Some common causes include cranial cruciate ligament rupture (known as ACL tears in humans) and hip dysplasia.

There are a few steps we can take to manage osteoarthritis. They are:

1. **Maintain proper weight.** Overweight and obese pets place much more stress on all of their joints. If you have an overweight dog or cat, ask about how we can help shed those extra pounds. It may be as simple as reducing calories while increasing activity or, can be as complex as a hormonal imbalance that we can help diagnose and treat!
2. **Minimize high impact activity** (running & jumping), while maximizing range-of-motion exercises (swimming & stretching).
3. **Nutritional Supplements.** A glucosamine & chondroitin supplement can be used daily for life. Our recommended brand is Dasuquin Advanced or its equivalent. There are many similar brands available over-the-counter, but be aware that the FDA or USDA has no regulations over quality control of these products. Therefore, you should only use a reputable brand to ensure potency and consistency. Dasuquin Advanced is based on the company's prior formulation, Cosequin but with the addition of avocado & soybean unsaponifiables, tea polyphenols and MSM. Cosequin was the only brand shown to be safe, effective, and bioavailable in peer-reviewed, published, controlled, U.S. veterinary studies. It was also the only brand containing the bioactive chondroitin sulfate used in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) GAIT trial. Omega-3 fatty acids, such as those found in Welactin, have been shown to act synergistically with glucosamine & chondroitin. Therefore, we may recommend both nutritional supplements together. If needed, there are veterinary pet food diets, like Hill's Prescription Metabolic + Mobility that can be extremely useful as well!
4. **Pharmaceuticals.** We may recommend the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) either for temporary or long-term use. Our drugs of choice at this hospital are Deramaxx (deracoxib), Metacam (meloxicam), and Galliprant (grapiprant) but other options do exist. PLEASE DO NOT USE ASPIRIN, IBUPROFEN, OR TYLENOL! There are 16,500 human deaths per year related to aspirin use alone!
5. **Acupuncture** can be an excellent adjunctive (and sometimes primary) treatment for joint disease and pain. Please ask to be put in contact with Drs. Malik or Donato, our certified veterinary acupuncturists, if you are interested in this treatment modality.
6. **Alternatives** that are extremely useful in managing arthritis are **Adequan injections** (polysulfated glycosaminoglycan or PSGAG) and **therapeutic laser treatments**.

Adequan is a prescription, water-based, intramuscular injection that helps prevent the cartilage in your pet's joint from wearing away. It helps keep the cartilage healthy and intact, so that the bone in the joint cannot touch other bones. No other drug for arthritis can do that, and unlike NSAIDs, Adequan treats the underlying causes of arthritis, rather than just the symptoms. You should see signs of improvement within three to four weeks - sometimes sooner. After the initial loading-dose (twice a week for four weeks), most dogs will need follow-up injections monthly, but some can go up to six to eight weeks between treatments. In my experience, some of my patients have been successfully treated with Adequan to an interval of re-injection only every 3-4 months!

Therapeutic laser treatments are painless and non-invasive sessions that manage pain and inflammation while accelerating tissue regeneration at the microscopic level. Laser energy can increase circulation while drawing water, oxygen, and nutrients to the damaged area(s). This creates an optimal healing environment that reduces inflammation, swelling, muscle spasms, stiffness, and pain. Therapeutic laser treatments can be done with regularity similar to the Adequan injection timetable.

