

Arthritis is the inflammation of one or more joints. If you have ever experienced it yourself, you know that it can cause major discomfort, and that there sadly is no cure. In pets, the leading cause for arthritis is chronic joint instability or looseness. This type of arthritis is also sometimes called Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD), or Osteoarthritis (OA), because it progresses over time. This may happen either from a condition that occurs as a dog or cat grows, such as hip or elbow dysplasia, or from an injury such as a torn ligament.

Surgery may be the most important part of managing pain related to some arthritic conditions and can be quite successful. Even after surgery, many pets still may have pain related to arthritis. Fortunately, there are many tools we have to help keep pets with arthritis comfortable.

1. **Weight management**-The more weight your family member is carrying on a painful joint, the more it will hurt. There are many ways to help your pet lose weight. It starts with recognizing whether your pet is at a healthy weight [LINK TO IS MY PET'S WEIGHT OK], and a conversation with your family veterinarian.
2. **Active, low impact lifestyle**- Like us, living an active lifestyle is the best way to keep diseased joints healthy. Better yet, it is fun, and free! Frequent short walks, swimming (if your pet enjoys it), and playing are great ways to manage pain.
3. **Pain medications**- The most effective weapon against joint pain is the prescription drug class known as *Non-Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)*. Examples include *Carprofen* and *Meloxicam*. They can be given regularly, but may have side effects. Therefore, the lowest dose that is helpful should be used. There are human versions of these drugs that are also familiar, although they can be very toxic to pets and should not be used without consulting your veterinarian.
4. **Joint supplements**- Glucosamine/chondroitin and fish oil. Both of these are very safe, but must be given daily to have benefit. In my opinion, any pet with arthritis should take one or both of these daily. If you can only do one, do fish oil. A general guideline is 100mg fish oil/kg of body weight. A 75 pound dog would take about 3000-3500 mg per day. They come in gels or capsules and are 1000-1500mg each.
5. **Physical therapy**- PT is proven to benefit dogs following surgery both in the short term and long term. There are several professional PT services in the Twin Cities. If you are looking for a comprehensive, full-time PT veterinarian, please contact Veterinary Rehab and Conditioning Center [LINK to www.vetrehabcc.com] Located in Inver Grove Heights. Your veterinarian can also make local recommendations.
6. **Acupuncture and Laser therapy**- Acupuncture is a very effective treatment for arthritis. Cold laser has also become a very common effective therapy. These treatments can be done often or as a maintenance therapy. Veterinary Rehab and Conditioning Center [LINK to www.vetrehabcc.com] also performs these treatments, as do others in the area.