

Arthritis in Older Dogs

Arthritis is a degenerative condition of the joints, which involves the production of new bone under the tendons and ligaments, as well as under the edges of the joint capsule. Pressure on these little spicules of new bone produces pain. Another feature of arthritis in older animals is degradation of the cartilage (the slippery soft coating of the ends of bones) and thinning of the joint fluid so it is less like a thick jelly and more like a thin watery substance.

Usually the first signs that your dog is getting arthritis are an unwillingness to go up stairs, or jump into the car. Those motions put a dog's entire body weight on its back legs, and since the hips are usually the first joints affected, this is what gives owners their first clue.

Arthritis usually occurs in dogs with normal hips at the age of 7-9 years of age, however, if a hip is dysplastic or malformed, arthritis can occur much earlier. It is possible for other joints in the body to get arthritis as well, including the elbows, knees and shoulders. Even certain bones in the back can develop arthritis and lead to intense pain.

Fortunately we have a number of different options for controlling the pain and slowing the course of the disease.



Initial Diagnosis

Often, in an older dog, arthritis can be diagnosed through a physical examination, and a simple history. On occasion we decide that X-rays will be helpful in confirming our diagnosis, and ruling out any other causes for joint pain. X-rays are also very helpful for diagnosing arthritis of the spine and also the neck as well.

We are also discovering that Lyme disease has become very common in this area. So we now will also run a Lyme disease test (which can be done quickly and in house) to make sure the germ is not a contributing factor.

Treatment Options

Often our first drug of choice is Aspirin. We use a buffered or enteric-coated aspirin (like **Bufferin** or **Ascriptin**) because dogs have stomachs, which can be sensitive to the medication. We do NOT use Tylenol, Advil or Ibuprofen on dogs. They all can be extremely toxic to your pet's internal organs. Aspirin alone is usually sufficient for the first year or two after the diagnosis. When aspirin alone does not work anymore we usually try a prescription medication called **Deramax**.

Deramax, Previcox, Metacam and Rimadyl are related to Advil chemically, but without the dangerous side effects to the kidney. These prescription drugs are only for dogs, and are only available through veterinarians. When we use one of these COX-2 drugs, we run a couple of simple blood tests first to make sure your pet's kidney and liver are functioning properly. After we start the drugs we check those blood tests every six months or so.

In addition to a Cox-2 drug as the primary pain medication, we can also add a different pain medication to aid in relief. **Gabapentin, Tramadol**, and even **Codeine** have been used in conjunction with these medications and can provide additional relief.

At any time while we use these drugs, we can also add a nutritional supplement to the mix. These nutritional supplements provide the building blocks for healthy cartilage and thicker joint fluid. Some of them also have additional anti-inflammatory medications in them to help boost the effects of the aspirin or the **Cox-2** drugs. At this time our favorite of these supplements is a pill called **Synovi G3 Treats**, although other supplements exist.

Fortunately by using any one or even a combination of the drugs listed above, we can keep your dog comfortable. Since the advent of these newer anti-arthritis medications, most dogs can go years without significant problems with hip or leg pain.



We can also add additional supplements that contain extra Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids that can help decrease the inflammation of arthritis. These Omega acids are also available in a special food called **J/D Prescription Diet** which is a food that contains Omega fatty acids and also glucosamine. A lot of foods may claim to have glucosamine in them, however to have a clinically effective dose of this supplement, at 30 pound bag of dog food would cost at least 50-60 dollars.

In extreme cases we also have available an injectable joint fluid supplement called **Adequan**. Adequan is a fast acting drug that will generate new joint fluid in days (versus weeks for the oral supplements) The dog receives 3-5 injections over a 2 ½ week period of time then periodic injections in the future to maintain the joint fluid levels.

Aspirin Dosage

One extra strength aspirin (500 mg) is equal to 1 ½ regular strength aspirin (325 mg) We prefer using **Ascriptin** which is a human product that combines Aspirin with bufferin and Maalox. We also carry **Ascriptin** here for your convenience (Although it has been on backorder recently).

For smaller dogs, baby aspirin (Or Heart Health aspirin 81 mg) can be used. One baby aspirin equals ¼ of a regular strength aspirin.

<u>Dog's weight</u>	<u>Regular strength</u>	<u>Extra Strength</u>
20 pounds	½ once or twice daily	¼ twice daily
40 pounds	1 once or twice daily	½ 2-3 times daily
60 pounds	1 twice daily	½ three times daily
80 pounds	1 ½ tablets twice daily	1 tablet twice daily

Often if we believe a dog had arthritis, but the signs are subtle we have you try two weeks of aspirin, and then have you compare your dogs attitude, activity level and general level of comfort to the two weeks before starting. Most owners are pleasantly surprised in the improvement of their older dogs on aspirin.

When starting aspirin, or any of the Cox-2 type drugs, make sure that your dog continues to eat and drink normally, and have normal looking stool. If your pet starts having bloody stool or very black stool, or is refusing to eat, contact our office immediately.

Do not use Aspirin in cats! These doses are for dogs only!

Glucosamine Dosage

Glucosamine is the most important ingredient in **COSEQUIN, PHYCOX and Synovi G3 soft chews**, it repairs damaged cartilage and also makes for thicker joint fluid. After your dog has been on this medication for awhile you can try to cut down the dose.

<u>Dog's weight</u>	<u>Initial Dose</u>	<u>Dose after 4-5 Weeks</u>
Under 30 pounds	600 mg daily	300-400 mg daily
30 – 60 pounds	1200 mg daily	600 mg daily
60-100 pounds	1800 mg daily	900 mg daily
Over 100 pounds	2400 mg daily	1800 mg daily

We recommend trying the **Synovi G3 Treats** first. Our clients have had the most luck with that medication.