



Osteoarthritis (OA) in Dogs

What is OA + How is it Diagnosed?

Osteoarthritis is a condition involving the inflammation and degeneration of one or more joints. Approximately, 25% of dogs across all ages are diagnosed with OA, the majority of dogs being geriatric.

Diagnosis consists of a physical examination, in which the veterinarian will palpate, or feel the joints and test their range of motion. Arthritic joints tend to be swollen and lack full mobility. Joints with severe arthritis may be painful upon palpation. Once arthritis is suspected, your veterinarian may want to take x-rays to confirm a diagnosis.

This condition is irreversible, but the symptoms can be managed, ensuring a more comfortable life for your dog.

What are the Symptoms of OA?

Dogs can exhibit a variety of symptoms of osteoarthritis, ranging from mild to severe. They may exhibit multiple signs, and they may not exhibit the same signs all of the time. The most common symptoms are:

- Difficulty getting up/down
- Reluctant/refuse to jump on furniture that they used to, or in/out of the car
- Stiff gait when walking
- Lameness/limping on one or more limbs
- Reluctant to use the stairs
- Painful when touched on some parts of the body

- Including unexpected aggression when touched
- Loss of stamina, walking slower, wanting to go on shorter walks

What are the Causes of OA?

There are many different factors that cause osteoarthritis in dogs. Many times dogs are affected by a combination of these factors, resulting in the condition.

- Body conformation (how a dog is built)
- Body condition/weight; obesity is a leading cause of early arthritis
- Abnormal joint development - hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, luxating patellas
- Past injuries - fractures, ligament damage, muscle injuries, joint infections
- Poor nutrition

How Can We Ensure Our Dogs Stay Comfortable and Moving?

There are many things that owners can do, with the help of their veterinarian, to manage the symptoms of OA and keep their pets comfortable. The most important thing an owner can do is to keep their pet in a healthy body condition. Maintaining a healthy weight and a good exercise routine (within your dog's limits) will ease stress on the joints. This will help them move more comfortably, for longer.

Sometimes, medical management is needed to provide more comfort. Your veterinarian will most likely start with a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) medication, that is specifically for dogs. Some of the most common are Meloxicam, Carprofen, Deramaxx, and Galliprant. Some dogs find great relief once starting one of these medications, others may need additional medication, such as Gabapentin. Gabapentin addresses chronic pain differently than NSAIDs, and when added to an NSAID, they work well together to provide greater relief. If a medication is found to be effective, your veterinarian will require blood work to check liver and kidney values to make sure they are healthy enough for long term medication. If the lab work comes back normal, your dog will be required to get additional blood work every 6-12 months to make sure the liver and kidneys are staying healthy.

There are other services provided by specialty centers that may offer additional relief. There are some animal rehab facilities that offer practices that are similar to human medicine, such as hydrotherapy; the dog walks on a treadmill that is underwater. The water takes pressure off of the joints and allows the pet to exercise more comfortably. They may also offer laser therapy, physical therapy, and joint mobilization.

At home, some changes may need to be made to make your pet a little more comfortable, and help them navigate the house a little easier:

- Provide soft, padded bedding
- Raise food and water dishes (elbow height recommended)
- Place area rugs/non-skid mats on slippery floors for more traction
- Use ramps/stairs to get onto furniture and into vehicles