Osteoarthritis and its Management

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a degenerative joint disease defined as progressive and permanent deterioration of cartilage around the joints of the body. This degenerative ultimately leads to pain, making movement very difficult. It has been estimated that up to half of all dogs and cats will be affected by osteoarthritis at some point in their lives.

Signs that indicate your pet could have arthritis include:

- Stiffness or lameness
- Reluctance to play
- Difficulty getting up, climbing stairs, or jumping
- Repeatedly licking at a joint
- Yelping in pain when touched
- Restlessness or aggressive behavior

Although osteoarthritis cannot be reversed there are ways we can control and slow its progression. These include weight control and exercise, nutraceuticals, medications, and alternative therapies.

Weight Control + Exercise

- Weight control is by far the most crucial aspect for osteoarthritis management! Increased body weight puts greater strain on the joints than they are designed for.
- Is my pet an ideal body weight? In an ideal body condition, you should be able to:
    - 1) FEEL the ribs easily but not see them
    - 2) See a TUCKED up belly when viewed from the side
    - 3) HOURGLASS shape when viewed from above
        - Unsure if your dog/cat is ideal weight? We can help you with that!
- High impact exercise like running and jumping should be limited as they can cause pain. LOW impact activities like controlled leash walking and swimming can help maintain muscle without putting excessive strain on the joints.

Nutraceuticals

- The exact mechanism of how joint supplements may help alleviate OA pain is not well understood. Chondroitin sulfate, glucosamine sulfate, omega-3-fatty-acid supplementation are the most commonly recommended joint supplements and does not have severe adverse effects.
    - Oral product – Antinol, glucosamine, chondroitin
    - Precription diet: Mobility +/- Metabolic diets
    - Injectable – Synovan

Medications

- Anti-inflammatories (Meloxicam, Previcox, Carprofen etc) are the most commonly used medications for osteoarthritis pain control.
- In patients that cannot tolerate these medications adjunctive pain relief is used. This includes tramadol, codeine, corticosteroids and nerve relaxants like gabapentin and amitriptyline.
- Do not give human anti-inflammatories to your dog unless directed by your veterinarian, these can have serious (and sometimes fatal) side effects.

Alternative Therapies

- Rehabilitation such as hydrotherapy and range of motion exercises can help improve maintenance of muscle mass and joint mobility.
- Dry needling, acupuncture, Laser and other rehab modalities are recommended although research is limited to their benefit.

TLC !

- Pets suffering from osteoarthritis need some extra TLC (tender loving and care). Make sure they have a padded bad to cushion the joints and keep them in a warm bed protected from the winter cold and rain.

To determine whether your pet has OA, it is recommended to make an appointment with your vet for a full physical examination and assessment. This is important to ensure a proper diagnosis is made, as other conditions can mimic this condition. Your vet will be able to discuss and create a treatment plan best suited for your pet.

Dr Ashley