



SKILLMAN - (214) 887-1400

1910 Skillman Street
Dallas, TX 75206

OAK CLIFF - (214) 939-1600

1021 Fort Worth Avenue
Dallas, TX 75208

WHITE ROCK - (214) 324-1500

7446 East Grand Avenue
Dallas, TX 75214

ACHY JOINTS IN MY PET? WHAT NOW?

Dr. Cassandra Gail Knapp

Also referred to as osteoarthritis or degenerative joint disease, arthritis just means inflammation of a joint. Any joint can be affected. In most cases, arthritis develops slowly over months to years and worsens over time. Unfortunately, as in people, there is no “silver bullet” treatment for arthritis. It is an ongoing, degenerative condition of one or more joints that results in pain and decreased mobility (movement) over the life-time of the pet. Sadly, once a joint develops arthritis, the disease cannot be stopped or reversed but thankfully, can be slowed and managed.

What does arthritis look like in my pet?

Pets show arthritis most often with lameness (limping), stiffness and pain. Stiffness is often worse after periods of rest and improves as the pet becomes more active. Lameness may be constant or sporadic and may worsen after exercise. Joints may crackle, pop or grate. As the arthritis progresses, the pet may be reluctant to get up and move around. Manual movement of the joint may cause obvious pain. Although it's unusual for pets to yelp or vocally complain with every step (as we humans most certainly would), they will often whimper or cry out if the affected joint is poked or prodded.

What are the treatment options and how do I choose between them?

Depending on the stage and severity of arthritis in your pet and your flexibility with treatment options, your vet will formulate an arthritis management plan. This plan often involves medical management (pain pills), joint health supplements and physical therapy. The goal of therapy is to decrease stress on the joint, improve the health of cartilage and joint surfaces, improve mobility and decrease pain.

- **Medical Therapy:** This is the most commonly used treatment. Common forms of medical management are NSAIDS (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), tramadol (a synthetic opiate derivative), gabapentin (also known as Neurontin) and amantadine (which helps prevent the nervous system's perception of pain) to name a few. Your pet may benefit from 1 or a combination of these depending on pain level and drug tolerance. It is important to know that NSAIDs designed for people are often toxic to animals and should not be used.
- **Joint Health and Protective Cartilage Supplements:** These appear to reduce degenerative processes that occur in arthritis joints and may alleviate some pain. Supplements are available in daily chewable tablets, kibble diets and even injectable form. It is important to know that not all supplements are created equal, nor do they all contain therapeutic levels of ingredients. Your vet can help you determine the cost of feeding your pet each day, with a prescription joint diet. For many people, the diet is the easiest way to supplement their pets without adding in any “extras” to their daily routine. Injectable supplements help promote healthy cartilage within joints. The injection is administered beneath the skin, just like a vaccine, several times over an induction period and then every 2-4 weeks as maintenance.
- **Physical Therapy:** This can be an integral part of a multi-modal approach to managing arthritis pain. Weight loss decreases stress on joints. Consistent, frequent low-impact exercise (like walking or swimming) can help facilitate weight loss, improve joint mobility and increase muscle mass. High-impact activities such as running and jumping should be avoided. Underwater treadmill therapy, acupuncture and cold laser treatment are also available but tend to be more costly treatments. These specialized options often require a referral from your veterinarian. 