



## TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR JOINT PAIN IN PETS

Degenerative joint disease (DJD) resulting in arthritis and joint pain is common in older pets; up to 80% of our four legged senior citizens experience some stiffness or have problems with limited mobility due to DJD. Younger pets that have torn ligaments or are born with dysplasia of the hips or elbows will also frequently experience joint pain and stiffness.

While signs of arthritis in pets are sometimes obvious such as limping, trouble rising or an inability to climb stairs, in many cases it is more difficult to discern that there is a problem. Many older pets that “sleep a lot” or “don’t want to go on walks anymore” may actually be suffering silently with joint pain!

Fortunately, there are a number of treatment options for alleviating joint pain in pets. One or more of the following options may help return your pet to a more active and pain free condition. The relative cost of each option is given in dollar signs and varies depending on the size/weight of the pet:

(\$) ~ \$10-\$20 for 1 month of treatment

(\$\$) ~ \$30-\$50 for 1 month of treatment

1) **Weight Loss:** (\$0-\$) For pets that are even slightly overweight, weight loss can make a big difference in mobility. Weight loss can be accomplished through a reduction in the amount of food provided or by feeding a reduced calorie (weight loss/light) food. We recommend *Hills R/D* or *W/D* for consistent and predictable weight loss results. Weight loss should be combined with one or more of the following treatments for maximum improvement.

2) **Fatty Acid supplementation/ joint care diets:** (\$-\$\$) Fish oil acts as an anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving agent if taken orally in sufficient quantities. The dose required for pain relief due to DJD in dogs is so high (50-100mg of EPA per pound) that it is not practical to give over-the-counter fish oil or Omega 3 supplements for this purpose. *Hills JD Diet* is formulated to supply sufficient fatty acids to achieve anti-inflammatory levels and has been effective for many of our patients.

3) **Glucosamine/Chondroitin oral supplements:** (\$-\$\$) These are commonly used to reduce joint pain in pets and people. Although a recent study in people did not document a benefit over placebo, there does appear to be positive effects from supplementation in pets, improving joint fluid and cartilage health. Importantly, there are generally no negative side effects associated with long-term administration. There are significant differences between the sources and bioavailability of the many products available and as “nutricueticals”, no industry regulation over what is actually in each type of supplement. We recommend *Dasuquin* and *Glycoflex*, products that are manufactured consistently and have been effective for approximately 60% of the patients in our practice who try them.



4) **Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs):** (\$-\$\$) These include the old standby aspirin and newer medications such as *Rimadyl*, *Deramaxx*, and *Metacam*. All of the NSAIDs can effectively reduce joint pain with the principle differences between them being the potency and safety for long term use. As a rule, the newer veterinary prescription medications are less likely to cause stomach ulcers with long term use than aspirin. These medications also seem to be more effective in relieving pain for some pets. All of the NSAIDs are capable of causing irritation of the liver and kidney damage when given long term and so simple blood tests are periodically needed to safely give these medications for more than 2 weeks at a time.

5) **Injectable PSGAG:** (\$\$) *Adequan* is an injectable form of polysulfated glycosaminoglycan (PSGAG) chemically similar to natural mucopolysaccharides found in cartilaginous tissues and joint fluid. This agent works in several ways to improve joint function and mobility and reduce pain. It is normally given twice weekly for 3-4 weeks then 1-2 times monthly as maintenance. We have found that Adequan significantly helps approximately 50% -75% of the pets that begin the treatment. Most pets that will benefit from *Adequan* are notably better after 1-3 injections.

6) **Non-narcotic Pain relievers/Cortisone:** (\$-\$\$) These can be used to combat arthritis pain in cases where the treatment options listed above have not been effective or well tolerated. *Tramadol* is a synthetic narcotic-like drug that has potent pain relieving abilities without sedation or the risk of addiction. As a generic drug, Tramadol is also quite reasonably priced. *Cortisone* (Prednisone) can be an effective aid in combating joint pain over the short term. However, undesirable long-term side effects limit its usefulness in combating chronic DJD.

7) **Therapeutic Laser Treatment:** (\$\$) Healing Laser Therapy is another effective option for pain control. It is a safe painless treatment conducted by slowly moving a Class 4 healing laser over the affected area on the pet. Patients undergo an initial series of 6 treatments that are spread over 3 weeks, but may experience positive effects following the first treatment. Some patients may be able to reduce their dependence on other medications with harmful side effects as a result of laser therapy.

8) **Acupuncture:** (\$\$) Acupuncture has long been useful in alleviating joint pain in pets .We are happy to have a certified acupuncture specialist, Dr Susan Kelly, available to provide acupuncture consultations and treatment at our clinic. Please ask at our front desk if you would like more information on acupuncture for your pet.