

Heathcote Veterinary Clinic

1335b Princes Hwy
Heathcote 2233
Telephone (02) 9520 0655
Fax: (02) 9520 7755



Hospital Hours
Monday to Friday 9.00am – 7.00pm
Saturday from 9.00am
Sunday 9.00am – 12.00pm

Arthritis

What is arthritis?

Arthritis in dogs is a painful condition that can be caused by natural "wear and tear" on the cartilage, previous joint surgery, or an injury to or an infection in the joint.

Does my pet have arthritis?

The clinical signs of arthritis can come on slowly and can come and go. Dogs learn to cope with the soreness without showing any obvious pain. If the problem affects both left and right legs, it is very difficult to limp as both sides hurt! It is often only once the pain has been treated that owners realise how much their pet was suffering. It is often worse in cold or damp weather with the stiffness resolving once the pet gets up and about.

Your dog might have arthritis if he or she:

- Becomes less active
- Gets up slowly
- Walks stiffly or limps
- Has swollen joints
- Yelps when sitting or standing
- Hesitates or refuses to exercise or climb stairs
- Has a fever
- Seems depressed

How does arthritis happen?

This disease can affect all breeds of dogs, but there are certain risk factors that you should be aware of, including being overweight, high activity levels for long periods of time, breed inherited traits (hip dysplasia), joint trauma, previous surgery, large breed and over the age of five. Arthritis is a progressive disease. The goal of treatment is to slow progression and ease the pain.

What steps can I take to make my pet more comfortable?

1. The most important thing you can do to help your dog is to help him to lose weight. Helping your pet to lose weight could make the difference between a few years extra of good quality life or having to decide to euthanize him for uncontrollable pain. This can be done in 2 ways, encouraging exercise and altering your pet's diet.
2. When your dog has flare-ups of joint pain, rest is important to prevent further damage and reduce inflammation. However, to maintain joint mobility, regular controlled exercise should be maintained as soon as possible - very short lead walks to start with, then building slowly to more normal levels. Aim to find a level that your dog can cope with on a regular basis, without causing stiffness afterwards. Two or three short walks a day are usually better than one long one. Swimming is a good non-weight bearing way of building up your dog's muscle tone.

What treatment is available for arthritis?

1. **NSAIDS** (Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)

These are similar to ibuprofen or aspirin (both of which are toxic to your pet) and act to reduce inflammation and are strong painkillers. They are fast acting, make your pet more comfortable, and can often be reduced after a few weeks. As with all drugs, NSAIDs can have side effects, therefore blood tests every 6 months are required to maintain a long term prescription.

2. **Pentosan Polysulphate (Zydax)**

It is given as an injection and will help out damaged joints by stimulating cartilage repair, reducing swelling, reducing joint cartilage destruction, and improves blood flow to joints bringing vital nutrients. It is given as a series of injections every week for 4 weeks. Improvement is usually seen within these first 4 weeks. This course is then repeated every 3 months. Dogs on anti-inflammatories should not be given their medication on the same day as the injection.

3. **Glucosamine/Chondroitin/Mineral Supplements (Osteochews)**

We sell a pet friendly version. These tasty kangaroo chews provide everyday joint care, helping to improve joint function and health in younger dogs and older dogs with early arthritis symptoms. The chews contain glucosamine which provides cartilage nutrition, chondroitin which is a major component of joint cartilage and is required for cartilage and joint health, and a balanced blend of vitamins and minerals that work together to maintain the health of your dog's joints. The best results are seen when taken as directed everyday for the rest of the animals life.

4. **Stem Cells**

Stem cells are the body's repair cells. They have the ability to divide and differentiate into many different types of cells based on where they are needed throughout the body. Adult stem cells can divide and turn into tissues such as skin, fat, muscle, bone, cartilage, and nerve to name a few. They even possess the ability to replicate into organs such as the heart, liver, intestines, pancreas, etc. Thus, treatment using stem cells is termed "regenerative medicine" and has many potential uses for a wide variety of diseases and injuries. Contrary to embryonic stem cells, there are no moral or ethical concerns in harvesting these cells, activating them, and reintroducing them back to the patient in areas where healing and regeneration is needed

The lab we use as our adult stem cell bank offers the use of cells sourced from adipose (fatty) tissue from healthy 'donor' animals. This makes the administration of stem cells a simple outpatient procedure that usually just involves sedation and a needle into the joint.

While we know every animal is different and there are no guarantees, we have seen positive clinical improvement in 95% of the arthritic cases performed nationwide. Some owners have even reported seeing a difference in as little as a week! While quick results are possible, we expect you to begin seeing improvement within the first 90 days following treatment. Really bad arthritis may require multiple injections.

Stem cells are often used as a last resort.