



Always consult with a veterinarian that you feel comfortable with before diagnosing or treating any disease on your own. This information is for reference only.

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Osteoarthritis

Issue Description

Arthritis is common amongst dogs and is one of the main causes of chronic pain in canines. Arthritis can be a very debilitating disease, greatly detracting from a dog's quality of life and ability to enjoy even the most basic of daily activities. None of us like to see our pets suffer and the sooner your dog's condition is identified, the sooner it can be treated and controlled. Your dog will be extremely grateful if you can provide him or her with relief from the crippling aches and pains of canine arthritis, so be sure to keep an eye out for any of the common warning signs of this condition so that diagnosis and treatment can occur as early on as possible.

Other Names

Degenerative Arthritis

Causes

Different forms of dog arthritis can be caused by different factors and conditions. Osteoarthritis is a form of degenerative joint disease that results from cartilage destruction. This damage to the cartilage can occur for several reasons. Sometimes, abnormal joints are at the root of the problem. For example, hip dysplasia is a condition involving the malformation of hip joints. When a dog suffers from hip dysplasia, its hip joints are unable to withstand normal amounts of stress, leading to damage and arthritis. Traumatic injuries, constant jumping, or strenuous exercise can also cause degenerative joint disease, by placing abnormal stress on the dog's joints. Therefore, normal levels of stress can lead to arthritis when joints are abnormal, and abnormal levels of stress can lead to arthritis when a dog's joints are normal.

Since degenerative joint disease can result from wear and tear and increased stress on the joints, there are certain factors that can contribute to a dog's likelihood of developing osteoarthritis. For example, larger dogs tend to be more prone to developing osteoarthritis, probably due to the increased weight and stress placed on the joints. For similar reasons, overweight dogs are at a higher risk for developing this condition. Senior dogs, working dogs, and those with certain conditions like diabetes also tend to be more likely to end up with osteoarthritis. Inflammatory forms of joint disease include septic arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. These types of arthritis are much less common in dogs than osteoarthritis, especially rheumatoid arthritis, but they can occur. Septic arthritis can be caused by an infection, including bacterial infections, fungal infections, and tick-borne diseases.

Rheumatoid arthritis, on the other hand, is caused by an underlying immune-mediated disease. This involves a weakness in the dog's immune system that causes the animal's body to attack its own joints. Often this underlying condition will be hereditary.

Symptoms

One common symptom of dog arthritis is limping or favoring one or more limbs. This lameness may have a gradual onset and may be most noticeable when your pet first gets up. Reluctance to rise from a resting position, or difficulty with doing so, is another behavior frequently displayed by arthritic dogs. A dog with this disease may also have difficulty sitting or standing, and often experiences general stiffness that is worse in the morning and gradually improves throughout the day. Also, due to pain and stiffness, your pet may begin to lag behind on walks and lose interest in regular activities such as running, jumping, playing, and climbing stairs.

Other telltale signs to watch out for include decreased alertness and more time spent sleeping. An arthritic dog's joints may appear swollen and will often be painful when touched. Some dogs with this disease don't like to be touched or petted, and may yelp or show other signs of pain when touched. Weight gain may also occur, and some arthritic dogs experience a reduced appetite. If these symptoms and behaviors seem to describe what your dog is going through, canine arthritis could be the culprit. However, it's important to keep in mind that these symptoms can also be caused by other conditions and arthritis itself comes in more than one form. So be sure to contact your

veterinarian as soon as possible so that your dog can be examined, diagnosed, and treated appropriately.

Diagnosis

When a dog is being evaluated for arthritis, the veterinarian will go over the canine patient's medical history and conduct a physical examination. The practitioner will want to know about your pet's lifestyle as well as the symptoms and behaviors you have observed at home. During the physical exam, the veterinary doctor will identify and evaluate clinical signs and also palpate the dog's joints. In the early stages of arthritis, only soft tissues are affected and, thus, the disease may very well not be evident on an x-ray. However, the dog's joints will be swollen and sore, and the veterinarian will be able to detect this through the physical examination.

If the arthritis has progressed far enough that bone changes have begun to occur, x-rays can be very helpful with identifying the arthritis and assessing the degree of joint damage. Other diagnostic methods may also be employed in order to identify the specific form of arthritis present and to evaluate the stage and progression of the disease. For example, blood tests and joint fluid analysis can be used to diagnose certain types of arthritis. When infectious or septic arthritis is affecting a dog, the fluid surrounding the joints (synovial fluid) will contain white blood cells and bacteria. With a case of rheumatoid arthritis, blood tests will indicate that the dog's system is attacking its own joints. Furthermore, a number of other tests, including an antinuclear antibody test, can be used to confirm a diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis in a canine patient.

Treatments

While there is no cure for canine arthritis, there are several treatments available that can effectively reduce pain and inflammation, vastly improving your dog's comfort and happiness. There are also certain steps that you, as a pet owner, can take to reduce the likelihood of your pet developing arthritis. These preventative strategies include ensuring that your dog stays fit and exercises regularly, while also making sure that exercise and activities are not overly strenuous. A healthy diet is also important, as is maintaining a healthy weight. All of these strategies together can lower your dog's risk of arthritis as well as increasing your pet's overall health.

If your dog already has arthritis, there are a number of effective treatments available that can help with the pain and swelling caused by joint disease. For obese pets, carefully monitored weight loss can significantly reduce pain by relieving some of the stress on the dog's joints. There are also certain anti-inflammatory, analgesic medications available that can help to relieve symptoms of arthritis. Supplements can also be very beneficial, including glucosamine, chondroitin, and fatty acids.

Homeopathic remedies are also very effective for many arthritic dogs. These remedies contain natural ingredients with a variety of properties that help to relieve the painful and troubling symptoms of canine arthritis. For example, natural substances such as guggul and ginger are powerful anti-inflammatories that very effectively reduce chronic and acute swelling. In addition, milk vetch and ginseng stimulate and boost the immune system, while cayenne combats irritation and provides pain relief. With so many natural ingredients having such varied and beneficial properties, homeopathic remedies can go a long way toward increasing an arthritic dog's comfort and quality of life.

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