



MANAGING DEGENERATIVE JOINT DISEASE IN DOGS

Key Points on DJD

- Thousands of older animals suffer from DJD.
- A physical exam, and occasionally x-rays, are necessary to confirm a diagnosis of DJD.
- Surgery can be an option for some joints affected by DJD.
- Several anti-inflammatory drugs are options for managing DJD. Among them are OTC drugs such as aspirin, and prescription-strength drugs such as Rimadyl®, Metacam®, and Etodolac.
- Joint supplements can also be helpful in providing pain relief.
- Exercise is crucial in maintaining strong muscles to decrease the load that sore joints have to bear.
- Massage and physical therapy can also be of tremendous benefit to improve activity and reduce discomfort.

Degenerative joint disease (DJD, often times generically referred to as arthritis) is one of the most common ailments in older dogs. Symptoms in dogs are very similar to that in people: stiff gait, difficulty getting up, using stairs, and lethargy. Fortunately, there are a number of options today for managing DJD and helping your pet function without pain.

Diagnosing DJD

Diagnosis of DJD involves a thorough physical examination and often times x-rays of your dog. Frequently, on a physical a veterinarian can determine which joints are causing the greatest amount of pain. This is important because sometimes there are surgical options which can provide more benefit than medical management.

X-rays can be useful to determine the severity of DJD and can help predict how effective medical management might be.

Managing DJD Medically

There are several drugs that can help manage DJD. The most common one is simple

aspirin. Given twice a day with food, it can help alleviate pain from uncomfortable joints in animals with mild to moderate DJD.

More effective than aspirin are prescription-strength anti-inflammatories. Drugs such as Rimadyl®, Etogesic®, and Metacam® are similar to the human arthritis drug, Vioxx®. These drugs have more expense but are stronger than aspirin and safer on the stomach. Blood work is often needed to monitor dogs on these drugs long-term.

Another effective drug used for DJD is a joint supplement called glucosamine. This supplement is a major building block in the molecules that add viscosity to an orthopedic joint. Supplementing glucosamine helps lubricate the joints better, thus decreasing some of the

discomfort caused by bone spurs created in DJD. The most effective product on the market is called Cosequin®.

Lastly, exercise is crucial in managing DJD. Strong muscles help take weight-bearing load off of aching joints. Dogs with DJD need to be on a consistent, controlled exercise regimen to keep their muscles strong. Massage and physical therapy (discussed below) can be helpful in keeping dogs feel good enough to exercise.



The hip on the left is normal, while the one on the right suffers from chronic degenerative joint disease.



MASSAGE AND PHYSICAL THERAPY FOR DJD

Massage therapy can be one of the most effective means of keeping an arthritic dog feeling good. Improving blood supply to the muscles and stimulation leads to healthy, stronger muscles, which reduces the load that the dog's sore joints need to bear.

In order to consider massage therapy, x-rays need to be taken to confirm the exact joints affected, which allows the therapist to focus on those muscle groups that will benefit the dog best. These films can be performed after a complete physical.

Fortunately, at GAVC we are lucky enough to have several veterinary technicians certified in massage therapy. Our staff has had advanced training in this area and can provide these services, helping your dog be more comfortable and more active.