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DEGENERATIVE JOINT DISEASE / OSTEOARTHRITIS

What is Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD)?

Degenerative joint disease (DJD), radiographically referred to as osteoarthritis (OA), is the degeneration of articular cartilage, irregular bone formation around joints, and fibrosis (thickened scar tissue formation) of the joint capsule. Dogs generally develop DJD after a primary joint problem occurs such as hip dysplasia, osteochondritis dissecans (OCD), fragmented medial coronoid process (FMCP), cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) rupture, or traumatic injuries involving a joint. Essentially, arthritic change is one of the body's methods of stabilizing an unstable joint. Depending on the underlying disease process, surgical stabilization of an unstable joint plus medication may be necessary to reduce or eliminate the cause of lameness and potential source of DJD. Once DJD has been initiated, it is almost always progressive regardless of treatment. However, many treatments can greatly slow its rate of progression increasing a patient's long-term quality of life. Degenerative joint disease can happen in any breed.

Dogs show evidence of pain from DJD by limping on the limb. Lameness may occur suddenly or gradually over time and may be persistent or intermittent depending on the underlying disease process. In most cases dogs show lameness on one limb. If both hind limbs are simultaneously affected however, the pet may not show lameness because he/she does not have a good leg to hop on. This can sometimes delay diagnosis as pets simply aren't as active as before but not overtly "lame."

The diagnosis of DJD is based on X-ray and CT scan changes (osteoarthritis) or by direct visualization within the joint using arthroscopy. Treatment options are recommended based on clinical signs and the underlying condition.

Treatment

1. Medical Management

- Body Weight. A slim, muscled body will tolerate DJD much better. Please ask us and your family veterinarian to suggest an ideal weight for your pet.
- Activity. Consistent (every day) low-impact (walking and swimming) is best. Our goal is to build and/or maintain muscle without stressing the joints. Running, jumping, turning & dodging are all hard on joints.
- NSAIDS. Non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medications. Consult about the best option for your pet. The goal is to help your pet get through periods of joint soreness and still use the leg.
- Other oral therapies. Many alternatives are available. Please ask us about this.
- Joint Injections. Hylartin is a joint lubricant prepared for intra-articular injections. PRP is a joint enhancer prepared from your pet's own blood.

2. Surgical Management

Arthroscopic care, osteotomies, arthrodesis and joint replacement could be a part of your pet's management. Let's discuss this further.