

Treating Chronic Pain

The number one cause of chronic pain in older pets is osteoarthritis. In our practice, it is very common and it is important to treat it as a disease. Consideration must be given to the mode of the treatment because there are important factors that must be determined in designing a treatment that is effective and causes the least amount of side effects.

The best way to treat arthritis in the older pet is through a multi-module approach. This simply means considering a way to treat the pet that requires the minimum amount of pharmaceutical drugs.

The first part of this approach is weight control. Excess weight contributes to a shorter life span and causes additional stress on the joints. Weight loss and management is accomplished through a reduction in calories and exercise. Obese dogs have more osteoarthritis and require more medication to control the pain that is associated with arthritis.

The second part of my approach to treating chronic pain due to arthritis is eliminating other causes of weight gain and making certain that the drugs used for pain relief will not be harmful. The first test that is employed is for hypothyroidism. We know that dogs that have thyroid disease gain weight. Once that is established, we test for liver and kidney function and rule out diseases like diabetes.

The next part of the module is nutritional support. The dog is unique in the way that certain essential fatty acids are stored in the cells that make up the tissues in the joints. This is a variation from the process in cats and even humans. Studies have proven that the supplementation of omega 3 fatty acids actually slows down the degradation process in the joints of dogs. When we add essential fatty acids to the diet we not only slow down the degradation process, but we also know that these essential fatty acids actually act as anti-inflammatory agents and may let us use a lower dose of the drugs that reduce the pain of arthritis.

There are several ways to provide this nutritional support. Essential fatty acids can be given in liquid or capsule form. There

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is a prescription diet available that combines this supplement with Glucosamine and other nutraceuticals that has proven to be very effective. The level of essential fatty acids is excellent and makes this an economical and convenient choice.

Exercise is another important consideration. The correct ratio of exercise to rest is important in arthritic patients. Exercise must not be excessive as this places additional stress on the joints. At the same time, we must make certain that the muscles that support the joints do not degenerate.

The next part of the multi-module approach is through the use of drugs called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory pharmaceuticals. (NSAIDS). You are familiar with ibuprofen (Advil) and a host of other drugs used in human medicine. Unfortunately, many of these are responsible for unacceptable side effects in dogs. The good news is that there are several drugs which have been developed for use in pets that are very effective. It is important to remember two facts when administering these drugs. First, different drugs work differently on individual patients, so a trial can be helpful. Second, the amount used can usually be reduced by nutritional supplementation.

The older patient with arthritis can have an enhanced quality of life through the use of a multi-module approach of weight control, exercise, nutritional supplementation and the appropriate use of NSAIDS. Consult with your veterinarian to learn how your older pet can live a longer and happier life.