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Conservative Management of Arthritis

1) Weight control

Maintaining a healthy weight may be the most important element in assuring the best possible quality of life for a dog with osteoarthritis. Body weight not only increases the load on all joints, but inflammatory proteins produced by fat cells can cause the symptoms of arthritis to worsen. The goal for your pet is to have a slight “waist” when viewed from above, a “tummy tuck” when viewed from the side. You should be able to easily feel your dog’s ribs, without seeing them. To monitor your dog’s weight, please have him/her weighed periodically. A simple way to start a weight control program is to eliminate high calorie treats (you may replace them with raw vegetables such as carrots and green beans) and decrease the volume of food in each meal to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the amount currently fed.

2) Low impact activity

A low impact exercise regimen is also an important factor in preventing severe clinical signs associated with osteoarthritis. The goal of regular low impact physical activity is to maintain good muscle mass and prevent muscle atrophy while protecting the articular cartilage of the joints. The two best low impact activities include daily leash walks at a slow pace and swimming. Remember the three “R’s” when planning your dog’s exercise regimen:

Be Reasonable -- Start with small leash walks, no long hikes nor jogging.

Be Rate-conscious -- Start your dog off slowly and increase exercise time gradually.

Be Regular -- Make exercise a routine.

3) Joint Supplements / Nutraceuticals

Cartilage protection involves modifying the process of arthritis to encourage repair vs. breakdown. Some chondroprotective (joint cartilage protective) agents are classified as “nutraceuticals” and include glucosamine, chondroitin, glycosaminoglycans, omega fatty acids, plus many others. The concern with nutraceuticals is that they are somewhere between a nutritional supplement and a pharmaceutical agent. They are not regulated or tested by any agency, in addition, their safety and efficacy does not need to be documented prior to marketing. Despite this, many people and animals alike do seem to experience relief when taking nutraceuticals, and side effects are extremely rare. *It is important to realize that you truly get what you pay for when purchasing nutraceuticals, please ask your veterinarian which brands can be trusted.*

4) Joint Specific Diets

Specific “joint protective” canine diet formulations are available. These diets have a favorable ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids which may decrease inflammation in joints. Hills Science Diet J/D is one of the foods that can be beneficial in promoting joint health. If you decide to use one of these, gradually introduce your dog to this new food over 1-2 weeks, by slowly adding the joint specific diet while decreasing the amount of normal food.

5) Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDS)

Some dogs may require prescription NSAIDS to improve their level of comfort. Examples of these medications include Rimadyl (carprofen), Metacam (meloxicam), Previcox (firocoxib), or Deramaxx (deracoxib). Not all dogs with osteoarthritis need to be on NSAIDS all the time. We will recommend the appropriate dosing schedule for your pet to keep him/her comfortable.