

## ARTHRITIS TREATMENT OPTIONS

There are several newer treatments for arthritis. The following is a list of some of these products. Most of the treatments listed below are compatible with each other, so you can try any or all of them if you like. The goal with arthritis treatment and prevention is to keep the patient comfortable and active as long as we can. These new medications can help a great many dogs and cats stay happier longer.

1) **Glucosamine:** brands include Arthroflex, Cosequin, Glycoflex and many others.

These nutritional supplements are recommended for any dog or cat that is a senior, already has arthritis or has had a joint injury or joint surgery. These products supply glycosaminoglycans such as glucosamine and chondroitin. Glycosaminoglycans, or GAGs, decrease inflammation in the joints (and elsewhere). They are also what the body uses to make joint fluid, so giving extra helps keep the joints better lubricated. They have been proven to slow the progression of arthritis. Pets started on these products early (even before symptoms develop) will have less degenerative changes in their joints as they age. Most pets that already have arthritis will have less pain and stiffness on these supplements.

Some brands of glucosamine also contain other nutritional ingredients that help the joints, such as MSM, Vitamin C (which improves absorption of glucosamine from the intestinal tract) and creatine. The more severe the symptoms of arthritis the more likely we are to add these additional ingredients. It usually takes two to four weeks to see improvement when beginning treatment if signs of pain are already present.

GAGs come in capsules, chewable tablets, liquids and granules to sprinkle on the food. Most dogs like the taste but it may take some trial and error to find one that a cat will like. The cost varies from about \$20 to \$80 depending on the product and the size bottle. Depending on the size of the pet, and the size container, most will last one to three months. Some pet foods now contain glucosamine as well, though many do not contain enough to have a therapeutic effect. Ask us for a recommendation before using one of these foods. Eukanuba Large Breed, Eukanuba Senior Plus, & Science Diet Large Breed Dog Foods are the diets we recommend.

These diets are perfect for pets who are at risk for arthritis but do not yet have symptoms. They contain extra fatty acids, glucosamine and chondroitin, all of which have been shown to be beneficial to the joints. Amounts of these nutrients may not be adequate once signs are present but they help slow the onset of symptoms. Providing fatty acids in the food is usually less expensive than giving supplements. **We highly recommend these foods for any large breed dog.**

Many of our clients are using their own glucosamine medications for their dogs. Be aware that in the sulfate form, or without added elements such as Vitamin C, dogs don't absorb glucosamine from the intestinal tract efficiently. A dog may absorb eighty percent of a GAG product made for pets, but only forty percent of a human product. You will need to give twice as much of a human product to see the same effect.

Since there is no FDA oversight of nutraceutical products like these, some brands contain little or no active ingredients, despite label claims. For this reason, **we recommend getting your pet's supplement from us, not from a health food store or pharmacy.** Also be aware that the amount of glucosamine added to pet foods is usually not sufficient to replace a good supplement. We usually recommend a supplement **in addition to what is in the food** once symptoms of arthritis are present.

2) **Fatty acid supplements:** these are also a nutritional supplement. Fatty acids are present in most pet foods at low levels. Premium diets contain more fatty acids than grocery store brands. Extra amounts, above and beyond what is available in most pet foods, have anti-inflammatory effects, so they help relieve joint inflammation. They are also helpful for other chronic inflammatory diseases, including allergic skin disease and chronic kidney failure. As with the GAGs, about two thirds of dogs seem to be helped by these. They take longer to show an effect, usually 2-8 weeks. Fatty acid supplements usually cost \$15 to \$25 per month.

3) **Adequan injections:** Adequan is a glycosaminoglycan, similar to what is in supplements. It is an injectable instead of oral medication. For some dogs, the injections work much better than the oral granules. We give an injection twice weekly for four weeks, at about \$34 per visit, for a total of about about \$268. If it helps, we continue injections every 1-2 months to maintain the effect.

4) **MSM:** this is another anti-inflammatory substance that is inexpensive and can be used in addition to other arthritis drugs. We usually add MSM when Rimadyl and glucosamine are no longer sufficient to keep a pet comfortable. It can be given by itself in a capsule or with glucosamine in a dual product. It has very few side effects.

5) **Cholodin:** this nutraceutical improves neuromuscular function. It can help with hind leg weakness as well as with cognitive and neurological problems.

6) **NSAIDs (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs):** These are the mainstay of arthritis treatment of both people and pets. Included in this category are aspirin, Tylenol/acetaminophen, ibuprofen, Celebrex, and many others. Brands for pets include Rimadyl, Etogesic, Deramaxx, Zubrin, and others. Some pets tolerate one better than another, or have fewer symptoms on a particular drug. We may try a few to see which works best. Be careful not to substitute human products without our OK. Pets have very different tolerances than humans, and drug dosages also may be very different between species.

7) **Acupuncture:** acupuncture really helps some dogs a lot. Dr. Kluslow performs acupuncture at our clinic. Treatment begins with a 45-60 min acupuncture evaluation after which, she can estimate how many treatments are needed and how often. At first, treatments will be more frequent and will become less frequent as the desired effect is seen. Follow-up acupuncture treatments require 30-40 min. appointments.