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Pup in Pain -- Arthritis in Dogs and How to Help



Judy Koutsky
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Arthritis in dogs can be painful for some dogs and no sweat for others. Here's how to recognize symptoms and treat arthritis in your aging pooch.



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Arthritis in dogs is fairly common and something to watch for as your pet ages. But how do you know for sure if your dog is afflicted?

It can be hard to tell. "Some dogs with horrible arthritis on radiographs [x-rays] show amazingly few symptoms. Other dogs with minimal radiographic evidence of arthritis can be very symptomatic," says [Dr. Judy Morgan](#), a holistic veterinarian and author of "[From Needles to Natural -- Learning Holistic Pet Healing](#)." With this in mind, how do you know what to look for?

Symptoms of Arthritis in Dogs

Symptoms can vary, but Dr. Morgan notes these are some common ones:

- Lethargy and reluctance to play or run
- Limping
- Whining, sighing or crying in pain
- Difficulty getting up from lying down
- Difficulty going up or down stairs
- An inability to jump on the furniture
- Snapping or biting when petted or approached
- Hiding
- Sitting or lying down while eating
- Swollen joints
- Overgrown nails from decreased movement
- Muscle atrophy
- Lack of appetite
- Lack of interest in surroundings

If you see any of the above symptoms in your dog, it's time to see the vet. If your dog is having trouble getting up and down or is clearly uncomfortable, your vet will do a full exam to see what's going on.

Treatment Options For Arthritis in Dogs

Your dog's weight plays a big role in this condition. "The best thing you can do for an arthritic pet is to make sure that he or she is at a healthy body weight," says Dr. Sarah J. Wooten, author of "[Adopting a Shelter Dog: The Official Guidebook](#)." "Overweight dogs will have a much harder time getting around, and studies show that the signs of arthritis in overweight and obese pets can be reduced up to 25 percent by weight loss alone."

Besides maintaining a healthy weight, there are a variety of treatment options, both conventional and holistic, for dogs suffering from arthritis. According to Dr. Wooten and Dr. Morgan.

Here are some common treatment options for dogs who have arthritis:

- Pain medication and anti-inflammatory medication, such as Duralactin
- Joint supplements such as glucosamine, chondroitin, methylsulfonylmethane (MSM) and hyaluronic acid or a product called [Dog Gone Pain](#)
- Cold laser therapy
- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Stem cell therapy
- Arthroscopy
- Herbal ointment pain relief, such as arnica

- Omega 3 fatty acids
- Physical therapy
- Gentle exercise, such as walking up and down gentle slopes or very low steps or swimming (if your pet likes water)

Talk to Your Dog Walker

Inform your [dog walker](#) that your pet has arthritis and to avoid excessive exercise or stairs, advises Dr. Wooten. Many will have had previous experience with arthritic dogs, as the condition is common. If your dogs lags behind or slows down during walks, ask your walker to shorten their duration. Dr. Wooten also suggests that if your dog has spinal or neck arthritis, you tell your dog walker to attach the leash to a harness instead of a head halter or collar.

Lastly, avoid walking the dog when it's excessively hot or cold outside. Have an open and honest conversation with your dog walker and field any questions pertaining to arthritis and how it affects dogs, particularly yours.

Want to know more about caring for your aging pup? Read [Help Your Senior Pet Live His Golden Years in Style!](#)

Judy Koutsky is the former editorial director of KIWI magazine, a green parenting publication. She was also executive editor of Parenting, AOL Parent and BabyTalk. Follow her on [Twitter](#).

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