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Does your pet have arthritis?

Key points

- Signs of osteoarthritis may be subtle and easy to miss
- Early treatment is critical to slow progression of the disease
- Maintaining lean body weight is absolutely critical for arthritic patients
- Nonsteroidal, anti-inflammatory and analgesic drugs, acupuncture, and physical therapy may be recommended for later stages of the disease

Exactly what is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a chronic degenerative disease that may affect any joint but is commonly found in a pet's hip, elbow, shoulder, knee, wrist, ankle or in the spine. It occurs when cartilage in the joint is damaged, either following a traumatic event or with wear and tear that increases in athletic animals, obese animals, or when the joint is congenitally abnormal.

Cartilage decreases joint stress by reducing impact on the ends of the bones in joints, like a gelatinous shock absorber. Cartilage contains no nerves – if your pet is showing any signs of pain, the damage and changes in underlying bone have already begun.

Signs of arthritis include:

- Reluctance to take walks of usual length
- Stiffness (that may disappear once the pet has 'warmed up')
- Difficulty climbing stairs, climbing in the car, on the bed or a sofa
- Difficulty rising from rest
- Limping
- Abnormal gait
- Licking of a single joint
- Acting withdrawn, spending less time playing with family (which is often misunderstood as a sign of 'aging')
- Soreness when touched
- Rarely, aggression when touched or approached