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Creaking Into Winter

As we grow older we all get a few stiff joints or aches and pains usually due to osteoarthritis. Our dogs and cats are the same. It's estimated that 20% of the dog population in the UK suffer chronic pain due to osteoarthritis, and indeed sometimes this can be totally debilitating for a pet.

Osteoarthritis is a progressive and irreversible degeneration of the cartilage in a joint, eventually leading to the joint being painful and unable to function. It can be caused by an injury, obesity and by genetic predisposition.

Commonly dogs in the early stages are fine when they are out for walks and playing, but after they come back into the house and lie down they stiffen up. Without management the disease is likely to progress to lameness on walks and eventually being unable to go a walk.

Cats can be even more difficult to assess, but if your cat stops lying on its favourite chair or windowsill or can't manage to negotiate the cat flap then it's likely that there is something stopping them jumping - usually arthritis in their back or hips.

For both cats and dogs we use a 6 point plan to manage Osteoarthritis:

1. Where there is pain there should be painkillers. These are also anti-inflammatories for the joints which are important in reducing the progression of the disease. Acupuncture and physiotherapy can also be used to reduce pain.
2. Bodyweight - getting to a slim target bodyweight is key. This will not only reduce the amounts of any medications required but also reduces weight bearing on the joints and hence further damage.
3. Care and common sense are a big part of the plan. Simple things like a nice warm bed for sore joints, or a ramp to get into the car will all help.
4. Diet - special diets with increased omega-3 fatty acids, glucosamine and chondroitin have been shown to improve the inflamed joint environment. With time some dogs can be managed on diets like Purina JM only, removing the need to be on painkillers at all.
5. Exercise - getting a proper exercise plan for your pet is very important, both for their rehabilitation and to minimise further damage.
6. Regular check-ups. If your dog has osteoarthritis, aim to bring them for a routine check-up every 6 months to check weight, diet and exercise plan.

Most of the adjustments for pets with osteoarthritis are very easy to implement. The first step is to recognise the signs in your pet. During November we are offering reduced rate consultations for owners who think their pet might be suffering from osteoarthritis - just let a member of staff know that you would like an Arthritis Consult when you arrive.

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Office: Weekdays 8.30 - 6pm, Sat 8.30 - 12noon

Consulting times:

Weekdays 9 - 10am and 5 - 6pm, Sat 9 - 11am

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