**Pet Lameness: Evaluation and Holistic Treatment Options**

Lameness, or limping, can be sudden or gradual in onset. Activity level, age, breed, and other factors can help determine where the lameness is occurring. For example, Dachshunds and other long-backed dogs are more predisposed to back injuries. Young, large breed, rapidly growing or heavy dogs are predisposed to osteochondritis dissicans (OCD) lesions—painful defects in the cartilage that must be surgically removed—as well as “growing pains” called panosteitis.

Older dogs are more inclined to have arthritis, cancer, or metabolic issues contributing to abnormal gait. Active dogs and purebreds are more likely to have hip or elbow dysplasia or ligament tears. Miniature varieties and small dogs are prone to luxating patellas and the possibility of degenerative hips. Cats can get many of the same conditions dogs do, although they are generally better at hiding lameness. As a result, arthritis is often under-diagnosed in them.

When a veterinarian evaluates gait on an animal, walking and pace are observed. All bones and joints are flexed and extended by the veterinarian to check range of motion for any pain, stiffness, or crepitus—crunchiness indicative of arthritis. A complete history should be taken, including if the animal may have had an injury, even if the injury was not a recent occurrence. Residual nerve sensitivity and pain can last for a long time post-surgery or even after small traumatic events.

According to Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM), there are several types of arthritis. Developmental orthopedic conditions such as hip dysplasia are generally considered the result of both kidney and spleen deficiencies. Bony osteoarthritis develops with age and can be considered “bony bi syndrome” with varying patterns that are treated with different herbs. Degenerative conditions are generally a renal issue according to TCVM and could include any combination of kidney yin, yang or qi deficiency. Against, all of these would have different therapeutic approaches in the TCVM system.

In Western medicine, anti-inflammatories are the most commonly prescribed medication for arthritis and lameness, without any regard to the age or pattern of the patient. These pharmaceuticals have a lot of potential for kidney and liver toxicity, bleeding in the gut, and upset tummies (including diarrhea and vomiting). Sometimes, these medications are not even clinically helpful for animals. When patients are on these drugs, liver and kidney values need to be evaluated every six months with bloodwork to make sure they are not adversely affecting the patient. This can get costly! If an animal is not responding to these medications, consider an alternative approach.

Acupuncture, herbal therapy, swim therapy, massage, T-Touch, reiki, and prolotherapy are some examples of natural remedies that can be very effective at managing lameness safely. Supplements for lameness include glucosamine, chondroitin, MSM, fish oils, omega 3 fatty acids, and Ester-C. When selecting supplements, make sure to find reputable brands and avoid wholesale company brands as studies have found many of these products have very negligible quantities of glucosamine in them. Chondroitin is expensive and has to be a particular molecular size in order to be absorbed, so again, a reputable brand is vital for efficacy.