Pets with Arthritis

As the colder months approach, it can surely be more noticeable in the way our pets’ bodies respond to the cooler climate. And as our animal companions get older, their needs change just as people’s do. Dogs that once hiked miles at a time enjoy slower “sniffs” than high-paced walks. Our feline friends are especially good at hiding stiff joints and soreness. As the cooler months progress, so do achy joints and stiffness.

Symptoms of Arthritic Pain Include:

* Less playful or athletic
* More sullen
* Stiff gait
* Excessive panting or restlessness
* Less enthusiastic to jump (into cars or couch)
* Reluctance to walk up and down stairs
* Non-weight bearing or favoring of one leg
* Lameness
* “Bunny hopping”

Knee ligament tears are common in dogs and cats. The most commonly affected is the cranial cruciate ligament (CCL), similar to the ACL in humans. These ligaments help keep the knee, or stifle joint in animals, from moving too much in a forward thrust. Injuries can range from partial tears to complete tears and can lead to arthritis, or degenerative joint disease, over time. Surgery is only recommended for complete tears and only if the patient is a good surgical candidate. However, arthritis can still develop even with surgical correction.

Cats

Remember that cats in particular are very good at hiding pain—they do not tend to complain or limp as obviously as humans or some dogs. Sometimes lumps appear where muscles are bunching up from having to compensate for sore lower backs or hips. Cats generally will repair these injuries without surgery, with support to treat the pain and inflammation. Cats are also less tolerant of anti-inflammatory drugs than dogs and humans. Never give cats acetaminophen, for example. Cats and dogs who have existing kidney or liver disease are advised not to take any anti-inflammatory prescriptions. Acupuncture, however, is very safe, and provides a nice side effect of relaxation. Grooming may need to be supplemented for cats who are not feeling as well. Litter pans may need to be placed in easy access locations, and made shallower if a cat is arthritic.

What to Do:

Moderating exercise to keep joints supple and muscles toned but not over-tiring the pet can become a balancing act. In general, shorter sessions, more frequently, is a good way of achieving that. Quiet time and restful sleep become more important. More attention to the types of food fed is often required to allow more antioxidants in the diet. Antioxidants are vitamins and minerals that help correct degenerative changes in the body as it ages.

Treatment Options Include:

* Controlling pain and inflammation via:

1. Acupuncture
2. Massage
3. Medications
4. Herbs and Joint Supplementation
5. Restricted Activity
6. Physical/Water Therapy

* Surgical options recommended only for good surgical candidates
* X-rays of hips and other lame joints to confirm diagnosis

When the pain and inflammation are adequately controlled, and the body has the right molecules of nutrition and support for the cartilage and connective tissue, many pets become quite functional without surgery. Acupuncture and herbs are therefore a great option while deciding if surgery is right for your family’s pet, for those who are not good surgical candidates, or for those wishing to avoid surgery. Acupuncture and herbs are also great as an adjunct treatment for addressing pain after surgery, or when arthritis sets in later.