Recommendations for Pets with Arthritis

There are several different kinds of treatment that are routinely used in cases of “chronic pain”, such as osteoarthritis. It is often difficult to determine how much discomfort, or pain, these animals are in due to the fact that our animal patients are non-verbal. How much pain animals are experiencing is often overshadowed by personal biases. For that reason, I prefer to replace the term “chronic pain” with the behavior it elicits; i.e. “disability”. In this way, it is much easier to observe when positive changes are occurring such as improved mobility and abilities, interactions with owners and other improvements as it relates to quality of life issues.

Managing our patients with disabilities involves the use of both pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic tools. They are complementary to one another so it is important that rehabilitation therapy be managed in conjunction with your primary care veterinarian.

The following “tools” are commonly used:

1. **Weight Loss;** This is often overlooked, but in my opinion, is one of the most important things that need to be addressed in pets with disabilities. Sometimes weight loss alone may help a pet feel significantly more comfortable. In a landmark study, Purina documented that normal weight pets live an average of **2 years longer! If you love your pet-feed them less!!!**

2. **NSAID’s;** Common brand names are Rimadyl, Deramaxx, Metacam, Previcox and Zubrin. Aspirin is also an NSAID. It is important that you follow your veterinarians instructions regarding their use and DO NOT combine aspirin with any of these. Also, it is important to monitor, and report, any adverse reactions-not eating, vomiting, diarrhea and bloody stool are a few.

3. **Adequan;** This is an injectable medication that your primary care veterinarian may recommend. It is a “polysulfated glycosaminoglycan” which may improve how your pet feels, as well as slowing the course of osteoarthritis by maintaining joint lubrication.

4. **Glucosamine Supplementation;** The goal of these oral supplements is to help maintain joint health. Common brand names are Cosequin and Dasuquin. Glucosamine supplements are available at human health food stores, but for the best quality (and correct dosage) for your pet, get them from your veterinarian.

5. **Fatty Acid Supplementation;** This can be in the form of daily supplements, or a diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids can be fed. There are several different diets available-J/d from Hills, JM from Purina and others.

6. **Acupuncture;** This non-traditional form of pain management is quickly becoming more mainstream. Many human hospitals now offer acupuncture as a means of controlling pain. Acupuncture affects the nervous system and is an effective method of pain management.

7. **Class IV therapeutic laser;** Used by itself, or in conjunction with acupuncture, therapeutic laser is an effective means of controlling pain and inflammation. It works by “photobiomodulation” using light to affect tissues.

8. **Rehabilitation;** Just like in humans…Moving is the best medicine! Rehab (physical therapy) for animals is important to help them remain active with a good quality of life.