

Osteoarthritis and Degenerative Joint Disease

Degenerative joint disease (DJD), also known as osteoarthritis (OA) or just “arthritis”, is the most common cause of chronic pain in cats and dogs. DJD is due to chronic stress on the joint, either from an old injury or a poorly-developed joint and involves degradation of the cartilage and bone of the affected joint or joints. Some joints can be surgically replaced, thus curing DJD. DJD in other joints can only be managed medically, and cannot be reversed.

While DJD is not fatal, pets with DJD live in chronic pain and many euthanased due to this condition.

Signs and symptoms:

Most dogs and cats eventually develop some degree of DJD. Signs will set on gradually; while you may observe your pet limping, signs are usually more subtle than this. Dogs will be slower on walks and cats will stop jumping on furniture, or will urinate and defecate outside of the litterbox if the lip of the box is high or the litterbox is covered. Pets may also appear stiff, especially after resting or sleeping with improvement as they move around. Their stride will be shorter when they walk or run as the diseased joint(s) will not be able to move as well, and they may lose muscle on the affected leg and appear thin.

Prevention:

- *Weight management:* the single best thing you can do to minimize the risk of severe DJD in your pet is to ensure that their weight is healthy throughout their life. Both dogs and cats should have a waist that is visible when you look at them from the top and from the side; in fluffy pets, this may be more easily felt than seen. At the end of this document is a visual guide to ideal weight in dogs and cats.
- *Supplements:* joint supplements (glucosamine and chondroitin) such as Dasuquin[®] and fish oil supplements such as Eicosaderm[®] can help slow the degradation of cartilage and thus the development and progression of DJD.

Supportive (medical) treatment: if you suspect your pet has DJD, please discuss this with your veterinarian so that appropriate treatments may be recommended. Some treatments that your veterinarian may recommend are listed below.

- *NSAIDs:* non-steroidal anti-inflammatories are often recommended as a first-wave treatment to alleviate your pet’s pain, if there is no contraindication to these medications. If there is a pre-existing liver or kidney problem, NSAIDs can exacerbate this, so the doctors at La Costa Animal Hospital require a limited blood panel prior to starting NSAIDs, 2 weeks after starting and every 6 months if this medication will be used long-term. Metacam[®] (meloxicam) is the NSAID preferred at La Costa Animal Hospital, as we rarely see adverse effects with this product. It is a tasty (honey flavored!) liquid given once daily, and is also available as an injectable if your pet is in a lot of pain. While NSAIDs can work wonders for arthritic pets, their use is very controversial in cats. The doctors at La Costa Animal Hospital reserve the use of this medication in cats for very severe cases, as a “last choice” treatment.
- *Other pain medications:* may be recommended, such as tramadol, amantadine or gabapentin.
- *Adequan[®]:* this contains polysulfated glycosaminoglycan (PSGAG), which prevent the action of enzymes that degrade joint cartilage. This is administered as an injection; the exact frequency this is given will depend on your veterinarian’s preferred protocol and your pet’s response to this treatment, but most pets receive this twice a week for 4-6 weeks, then once monthly thereafter.
- *Acupuncture and massage:* these treatments can dramatically improve the quality of life of pets with arthritis. While acupuncture and massage are not offered as a service at La Costa Animal Hospital, we would happily refer you to practitioner if you feel these treatments may be right for your pet.

- *Hill's j/d*: this is a diet manufactured by Hill's pet foods for pets with arthritis. It is high in fatty acids, glucosamine, chondroitin and other supplements that support the muscles and bones.
- *Stem cell treatment*: is now being offered at La Costa Animal Hospital! Your pet's fat is surgically collected then sent to VetStem (<http://www.vetstem.com/>) for preparation as a stem cell dose. This dose is available 24hours later to be injected into your pet's arthritic joint. For more information, please visit our "Services" page.
- *Other supplements*: your veterinarian may recommend supplements such as s-adenosyl methionine (SAMe), niacinamide, vitamin E or selenium, grape seed extract, zinc, or others that have proven to help animals with arthritis

SELECT A BODY CONDITION SCORE FOR YOUR PET

1	2	3	4	5
VERY THIN	UNDERWEIGHT	IDEAL	OVERWEIGHT	OBESE
<p>RIBS – Easily felt with no fat cover</p> <p>TAIL BASE – Bones are raised, no fat cover</p> <p>SIDE VIEW – Severe abdominal tuck</p> <p>OVERHEAD VIEW – Accentuated hourglass shape</p>	<p>RIBS – Easily felt with little fat cover</p> <p>TAIL BASE – Bones are raised with slight fat cover</p> <p>SIDE VIEW – Abdominal tuck</p> <p>OVERHEAD VIEW – Marked hourglass shape</p>	<p>RIBS – Easily felt with slight fat cover</p> <p>TAIL BASE – Smooth contour with slight fat cover</p> <p>SIDE VIEW – Abdominal tuck</p> <p>OVERHEAD VIEW – Well-proportioned waist</p>	<p>RIBS – Difficult to feel under moderate fat cover</p> <p>TAIL BASE – Some thickening, bones palpable under moderate fat cover</p> <p>SIDE VIEW – No abdominal tuck</p> <p>OVERHEAD VIEW – Back is slightly broadened at waist</p>	<p>RIBS – Difficult to feel under thick fat cover</p> <p>TAIL BASE – Thickened and difficult to feel under thick fat cover</p> <p>SIDE VIEW – No waist, fat hangs from abdomen</p> <p>OVERHEAD VIEW – Back is markedly broadened</p>