

TIME FOR A CHECK-UP?



DOES YOUR DOG EXHIBIT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SIGNS:

- Difficulty rising from a resting position? YES NO
- Stiffness after exercise? YES NO
- Trouble climbing up stairs? YES NO
- Limping? YES NO
- Difficulty walking, running or jumping? YES NO

If you answered YES to any of the above signs, ask your veterinarian to examine your dog for arthritis. The sooner you do, the sooner your dog can be relieved from the pain it may be suffering.

COULD YOUR DOG HAVE ARTHRITIS?



DOGS CAN GET ARTHRITIS TOO

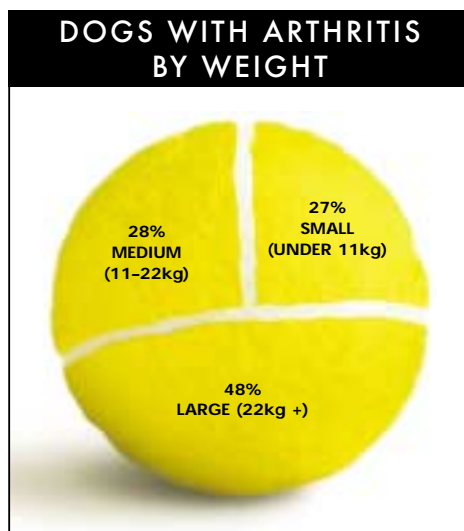
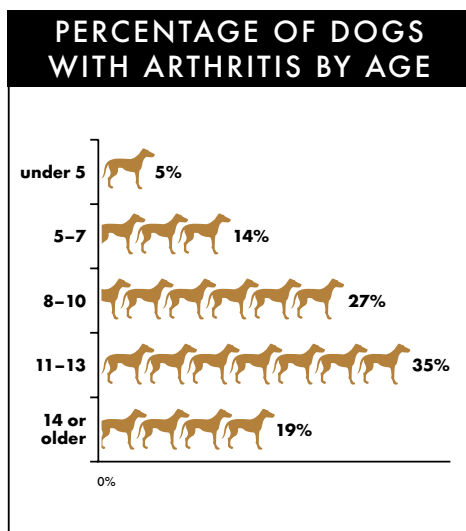
Arthritis is a condition that you're no doubt aware of in humans. But did you know that it can also happen to dogs? In fact, it's quite common, affecting more than one in five dogs.

This painful degenerative disease can occur at any age or weight. However it happens more frequently in large older dogs, such as Labradors, German Shepherds, Rottweilers and Border Collies.

At its worst - and especially if left untreated - arthritis can cause chronic pain, difficulty in movement and a decline in quality of life.

The good news is that medical care for problems associated with arthritis in dogs has advanced considerably in recent years and successful treatment is now available.

But first let's see whether or not your dog could be suffering from arthritis.



IS YOUR DOG TRYING TO TELL YOU SOMETHING?

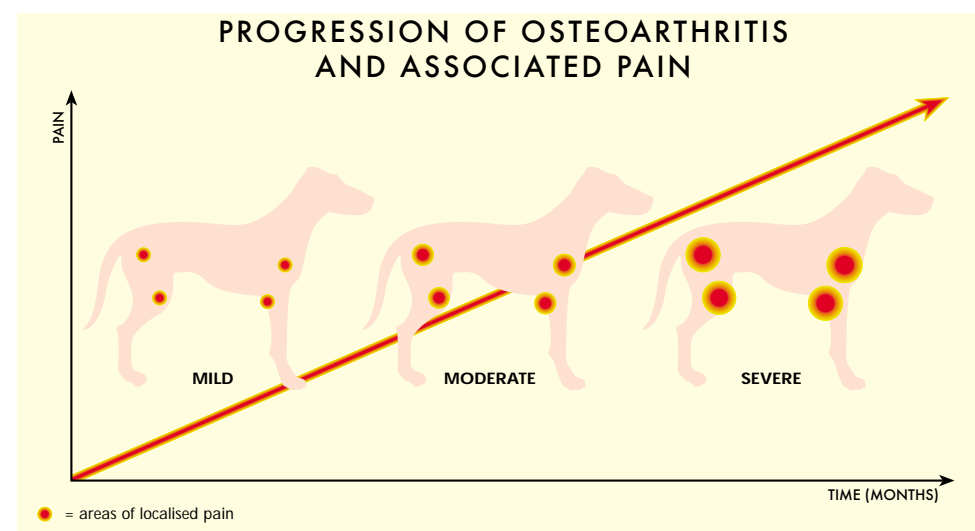
It's not in a dog's nature to complain. They tend to be very stoic and not show it when they are suffering from pain (unlike humans!).

But there are signs you can recognise which are indicators that your dog could have arthritis. These may include one or more of the following:

- reluctance to walk, climb stairs, jump or play
- limping
- lagging behind on walks
- difficulty rising from a rest position
- yelping in pain when touched
- a personality change
- licking of affected joints



Importantly, these signs become more obvious as arthritis progresses and the pain becomes much worse.



WHAT CAUSES ARTHRITIS?

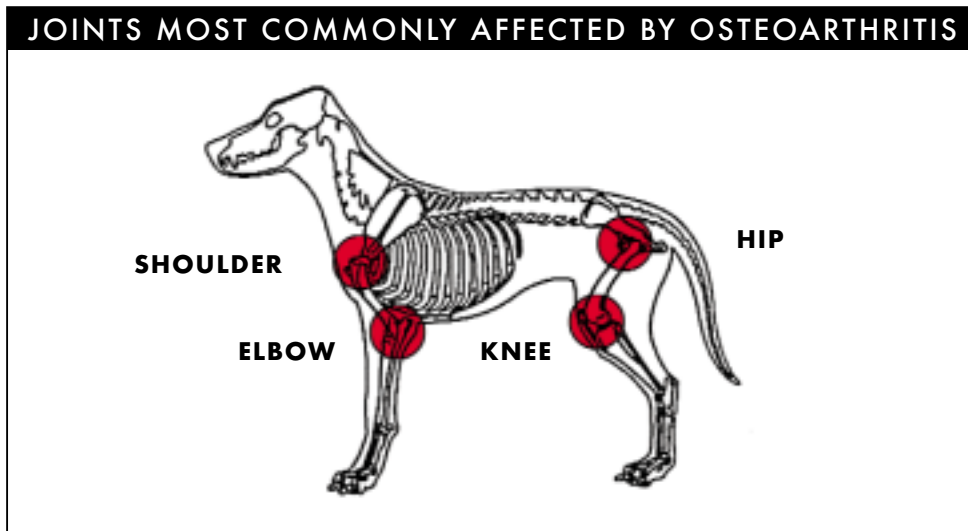
Most of the joints in the body depend on a layer of cartilage acting as a cushion, which also provides a smooth surface so the adjoining bones can move freely over each other.

This is assisted by the lubrication provided by synovial fluid, the oily liquid in joints. With arthritis, the cartilage deteriorates and the synovial fluid loses some of its lubricating properties, so that movement of the bones becomes less smooth. It frequently results from the cumulative effects of abnormal stresses placed on the joints.

This can occur with abnormal alignment of bones that make up a joint, as with hip dysplasia (a genetic disease where there is abnormal shallowing of the joint socket) or with trauma, ageing and continual wear and tear on the joint structures.

Obesity can contribute to arthritis, as the joint must carry a greater load than that for which it was designed. It can also occur in a joint with no obvious cause.

Arthritis - or osteoarthritis, to give it its proper name - can affect one or more joints. Any joint can be affected. However the most common joints are shown below.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

As a result of the changes that occur in the affected joint, arthritis in dogs is not a condition that can be cured. But the pain and discomfort can be very effectively controlled and managed.

The first step is to take your dog for an examination by your veterinarian. He or she will be able to diagnose your dog's condition and advise on the best course of therapy. Follow-up checks may also be required to monitor the dog's progress.

To help your dog be happy and enjoy life again there are four important areas of therapy:

- pain relief
- weight control
- exercise
- environmental changes



PAIN RELIEF

New developments in drug research have led to the introduction of treatments which can relieve much of the pain associated with arthritis in dogs. But it is important to talk to your veterinarian about pain relief medication. Your veterinarian can work out if your dog is suitable for various types of medications.

However, do not give human pain-killers to dogs. It can actually be very dangerous because dogs and humans react differently to many medications and side effects can occur.

WEIGHT CONTROL

If your dog is overweight there is an unnecessary increase in the load the joints must bear - thus adding to the pain and discomfort of arthritis. It is imperative that your dog's weight is kept under control. Results show that a weight-reducing diet can improve the quality of a dog's life. Discuss with your veterinarian the available approaches to help your dog achieve a more comfortable, healthier body weight.



ENVIRONMENT

Make sure that your dog has a warm bed away from draughts. This bed should be padded so as not to put excess strain on the joints. Also, try to reduce the number of stairs or the steepness of slope that your dog must use.



EXERCISE

Exercise must be in moderation. Over-exertion will put an excessive strain on the joints, but not enough exercise will lead to greater stiffness and muscle wastage. Gentle regular exercise is best as this keeps the joints moving and the muscle in 'tone'. Discuss with your veterinarian the appropriate exercise level for your dog.

