



Snippets

Small animal newsletter

Issue 10

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OSTEOARTHRITIS MANAGEMENT

Osteoarthritis (OA) has multiple causes, most commonly trauma to a joint, malformations (often breed related) or infection. It is the number one cause of chronic pain in pets. Treatment involves a holistic approach which is customised for each case, often several treatments together give a better result than a single therapy. As in human medicine, not all treatments suggested are medications. Some cases require surgery to correct underlying joint irregularities / malformations or remove bone fragments contributing to inflammation of the joint.



A normal hip joint



Advanced osteoarthritis

How do I know if my pet has Arthritis? Some signs you may notice include pain or stiffness when getting up or down, difficulty in climbing steps or getting into the car and general laziness on walks. It is worth noting that about 1 in 6 adult dogs suffer from the disease. If you see any of these signs it is recommended to present your dog to a veterinarian for correct diagnosis.

Non-surgical Treatments

Weight Control – one of the most important things you can do for an arthritic animal is to relieve pressure on joints by reducing weight to a minimal level. This can be achieved by managing intake and exercise, but as movement is often limited, prescription low calorie foods are often required to slowly reduce to optimal weight.



Exercise Control – frequently muscle wasting occurs in chronic cases of arthritis due to less use of the muscles. Exercise is necessary to keep mobility, and maintain a fit bodyweight but often weight-bearing is a cause of pain. It is preferable to limit exercise to short frequent walks, and limit exposure to other young boisterous animals and children.

Non-weight bearing options to re-build wasted muscles and maintain mobility, include swimming, massage and physiotherapy. If it suits your dog, hydrotherapy can be a good method of establishing. A planned swimming programme and initiating improvement of muscle strength. We are lucky enough to have a facility for this treatment in the area.



Massage and Gentle flexion / extension of the arthritic joint also may help. Physical activity at the appropriate level is used in conjunction with other measures to achieve a comfortable result.

Home comforts - In mild cases, some simple steps taken at home will help to reduce the level of pain and discomfort. Ensure that your dog has a warm, comfortable place to sleep that is away from drafts. Plenty of bedding will help protect any sore joints.

Nutrition – maintaining optimum weight and containing Omega nutraceuticals in correct balance, Hills joint diet (j/d) has given good results in some dogs, but is not yet licensed for cats in New Zealand. It is a convenient way of treating with Omega 3 and 6 in correct ratios, Glucosamine / Chondroitin and controlling weight. Should your pet be overweight initially, a restricted calorie reducing diet will be recommended as increased body weight puts pressure on arthritic joints.



Medications

Nutraceuticals – Chondroitin, Glucosamine and Omega 3 Fatty Acids have all been shown to benefit arthritic pets. Chondroitin Sulphate and Glucosamine are used as building blocks for regenerating cartilage. Omega 3 fatty acids have been shown to have anti-inflammatory properties. These products require at least one month to build up adequate amounts and improve the condition.

Polysulphated Glycosaminoglycan injection (CARTROPHEN or Pentosan injections) – this is a medication usually given in a course of treatment which inhibits harmful enzymes in the joint which destroy cartilage, stimulates joint repair and increases joint lubrication. The course consists of weekly injections for 4 weeks then a repeated single injection at 4-6 monthly intervals.

Non-Steroidal anti-inflammatory medications – these medications suppress the inflammatory biochemicals which lead to the pain experienced in arthritis and cartilage damage.

There are specific animal products which have a far safer profile than similar human medications. Several different medications in this class of drugs have been developed, and sometimes these have to be trialed to establish individual preferences. Generally these are started on a higher dose and chronic use continues at a lower dose with 6 monthly check ups. Pre-existing liver or kidney disease may preclude their use, so blood tests will often be necessary before treatment is started.

Steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs – these have wider effects around the body but are powerful anti-inflammatories. Long term use is discouraged because of more frequent side-effects.

Non anti-inflammatory analgesics – These can be used for cases with contraindications for other medications, or in conjunction with anti-inflammatories, as they have no direct action in this area.

UNDER THE WEATHER?

Very young or older animals often succumb to the dehydrating effects of vomiting or diarrhoea more rapidly in the summer because of the warmer weather adding to the dehydration. So if your pet is bringing up food/water or has watery faeces, it is important to take action before their body condition deteriorates:

- Remove food for 6-8 hours and if vomiting you can introduce small meals of chicken / fish and boiled rice for a few days, then gradually re-introduce the pets normal food over a further few days, mixing into the lighter diet
- Give frequent small amounts of electrolyte (such as Vytrate or Lectade available at the clinic) or water but withhold for a few hours if vomiting continues
- If vomiting/diarrhea are frequent and/or your pet seems lethargic – call the clinic for a check up

There are many causes of vomiting and diarrhoea, including poisonings, consuming inappropriate foods or rubbish, infections, intestinal inflammation or gastritis, intestine cancers etc. The examination and information on history we get at the clinic may obviate the cause and treatment – otherwise blood tests, xray or ultrasound may be necessary.



DOWN THE MICROSCOPE

Often during a consultation, we will take a sample and head out to the laboratory and look down the microscope. If we have time, we will often let the owner look down the microscope as well. Here are some of the things we are looking at:



Demodex

When we see a dog (usually young) with a crusting often generalised skin condition, we will do a skin scraping, looking for particular for Demodectic mange.

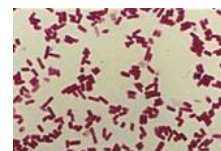
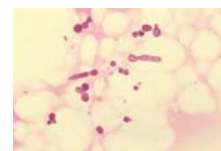
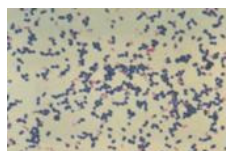
Blood smears



Last but not least, we use blood smears in conjunction with the blood analysers. We are looking for the confirmation of certain blood cells which may indicate a particular disease process, the presence or absence of certain cells and the presence of blood parasites.

You can see from this, we are not just “popping out of the room” for a while, but actually can get a large amount of information from a small amount of tissue!

Ear infections



We regularly take ear smears from dogs with ear infections looking for the causative agents. We are looking for a type of yeast called Malassezia, and cocci and rod bacteria. By identifying the organism involved, we can choose the most appropriate medication.

** SPECIAL OFFER **

Frontline Flea Treatment

Purchase any pack of Frontline and get a free stationery pack!

while stocks last



Facts of the day.....



“only dogs and humans have prostates”

“A dog's smell is more than 100,000 times stronger than that of a human's”

