

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a painful and progressive disease involving joint inflammation, cartilage destruction and eventually bone changes. It is the most common cause of lameness in dogs, and can affect up to 1 in 5 dogs. The disease can not be cured, but there are treatments available to help control the pain, slow the disease progression and improve quality of life.

What causes osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis develops in a joint because of abnormalities present at birth or from acquired abnormalities due to traumatic damage. These can lead to abnormal forces on the cartilage, starting a vicious cycle of the disease. Progressive joint inflammation occurs, and destruction of the cartilage and production of extra bone around the joint.

What are the symptoms of osteoarthritis?

One or more joints can be affected, leading to pain, stiffness, joint swelling, lameness and reduced mobility.

Signs to be aware of are:

- ➔ Decreased activity
- ➔ Reluctance to walk, run, jump, play, climb stairs, get in the car etc
- ➔ Stiffness – often worse after rest
- ➔ Limping
- ➔ Difficultly rising from a resting position
- ➔ Lagging behind when out
- ➔ Soreness when touched
- ➔ Yelping or whimpering in pain (this is uncommon for most dogs)
- ➔ Acting aggressively or withdrawn
- ➔ Other character changes

How is osteoarthritis diagnosed?

A full clinical examination of your dog can help identify the joints affected. Dogs can show pain when the affected joints are manipulated, the range of movement may be reduced and there may be some creaking. Muscle loss may also be noted because the joint is not being used fully. The joint may also be enlarged due to increase in fluid, new bone development or soft tissue thickening. Radiographs can be taken to confirm joint changes.

How is osteoarthritis treated?

Treatment is not curative. The aim is to relieve pain, lessen inflammation, prevent further cartilage degeneration, improve mobility and enhance quality of life.

Treatment often involves several approaches which include:

- ➔ Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories to reduce inflammation and pain
- ➔ Joint care and nutritional products, often called nutraceuticals such as yumove – they help protect and repair cartilage
- ➔ Alternative therapies such as the K-laser which can be provided at the practice. This involves 6 sessions, in which a laser is used on the affected areas to stimulate cells and healing. The treatment is carried out in a normal appointment time and is not painful to the animal. Other alternative therapies include acupuncture.
- ➔ Physical therapy such as hydrotherapy and physiotherapy