

HELPFUL TIPS FOR AN ARTHRITIC DOG:

Arthritis refers to inflammation or swelling in a joint. The cause can be abnormal bone or joint development, instability of the surrounding ligaments and tendons, damage or injury to the joint, an infection, or injury caused by the immune system. While anti-inflammatory medicines are popular treatments for arthritis, another approach involves protecting the cartilage in the joint and “nourishing” the joint. Here are 10 tips that may help your arthritic dog.

1. Slip-free Flooring. Hardwood and tile floors are slippery and can be very difficult for dogs with arthritis to navigate. Placing carpet or area rugs will help secure your dog’s footing. This can help prevent him from slipping and injuring himself.

2. A Soft Bed. Soft bedding can help support the bones and joints, making your pet more comfortable. This can be especially important in thin dogs in which bony prominences are likely to rub on hard surfaces. Some beds are made especially for dogs with arthritis, such as waterbeds, hammock beds, and beds with plenty of extra cushion.

3. Ramps or Cubes. Stairs and furniture can become difficult obstacles for your aging companion. Ramps or specially designed cubes can help pets safely climb stairs, get into or out of bed or get in and out of your vehicle. Ramps can be made of plastic or wood and are available from many pet catalogs. A new product called “Puppy Stairs” are soft modular cubes that fit together in combinations that permit pets to climb up or down from beds or sofas. These cubes are made of soft rubber, have rounded corners and washable covers. For more information about “Puppy Stairs”, visit www.puppystairs.com.

4. Medication. Various medications are available that can help your pet feel better. Drugs classified as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory **drugs** can work to suppress inflammation and pain by inhibiting synthesis of the class of compounds called prostaglandins. See your veterinarian to discuss if any medication could benefit your pet.

5. Peace & Quiet. As your dog ages, he may not be as tolerant or patient as he used to be. Sore joints make it difficult for your pet to enjoy rambunctious playful children. Supervise playtime and consider keeping your dog away from very young children. Even parties and holiday time can be distressing for an arthritic dog. He may want to join in the festivities regardless of the discomfort. To reduce joint pain and inflammation, you may want to limit his time as the center of attention.

6. Massage. Massage can increase flexibility, circulation, calmness and a general sense of wellness. Professional animal massage therapists are available to provide your pet a more thorough treatment.

7. Weight Control and Dietary Therapy. Arthritis is more of a problem in obese pets. Weight loss can be beneficial by helping to reduce the workload on the bones and joints. Read the article “Is Your Dog Too Fat” to determine if your pet is overweight. See Obesity in Dogs on how to help your obese dog. In addition to basic weight loss, diets formulated for pets with arthritis may be beneficial in some dogs. Diets, such as Hills® Science Diet® j/d™ and Purina® JM Joint Mobility™, supplemented with Omega-3 fatty acids, glucosamine, chondroitin sulfate have been shown to help dogs with arthritis maintain weight, reduce pain and improve mobility.

8. Exercise. Modest daily exercise can help some dogs. Special care is needed, so it is important to first see your veterinarian, who can recommend an appropriate exercise program. Exercise can strengthen the muscles and ligaments thus reducing the potential and risk of injury. See The Importance of Exercise in the Senior Dog to help explain why this is so important for your arthritic friend.

9. Extra Time. Don't rush a dog with arthritis. It often takes them extra time to walk, climb stairs or get in and out of the car. Support and help them if needed or just give them extra time to get around.

10. Grooming. Grooming should not be neglected, especially in the older dog. Arthritic dogs have a difficult time keeping themselves clean, especially in those hard to reach areas. Help your dog stay clean by trimming the hair around the rear end. Brushing will help remove mats and tangles, which can injure delicate older skin.