Rheumatoid Arthritis: Causes and Signs

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Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a rare condition occurring most commonly in toy or small breeds of dogs, generally between 5-6 years of age.

RA results when a dog's immune system malfunctions, mistaking some of the body's own protein for foreign protein. The immune system then produces antibodies to attack the "threatening" protein. This process deposits protein-antibody complexes in one or more joints, which then become inflamed. This process also perpetuates itself until the immune system ultimately wears away the cartilage and bone within the affected joint(s).

RA ranges in severity from stiffness to inability to walk. A dog with RA may also exhibit fever, loss of appetite, enlarged lymph nodes, and swollen and painful joints.

If your dog shows any of the above signs, visit your veterinarian for testing and diagnosis. While RA currently has no cure, dogs with RA do not have to suffer a diminished quality of life. Your veterinarian will prescribe anti-inflammatory drugs such as buffered aspirin, steroids, or immunosuppressant medications. Rest, careful exercise, and weight control also help relieve RA symptoms.

Ultimately, the long-term goal in treating dogs with RA is controlling symptoms and preventing further joint injury to maximize mobility and comfort.

Read more on Rheumatoid Arthritis in Dogs on PetEducation.com >

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