Managing Arthritis, Hip Dysplasia and Other Joint Diseases (Part 2)

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Managing Dog Arthritis and Other Debilitating Joint Conditions
Joint disease and arthritis in dogs can include stiffness, limping, or favoring a limb - particularly after sleep or resting, inability to rise, reluctance to jump or even climb stairs, and noticeable pain. Because hip dysplasia (and other types of dysplasias) are primarily inherited conditions, there are no products on the market that prevent their development. Through proper diet, exercise, supplements, anti-inflammatories, and pain relief, you may be able to decrease the progression of degenerative joint diseases, hip dysplasia, and painful arthritis conditions in your pet (see **Causes of Dog Arthritis**, discussed at length in Part 1). For most animals, veterinarians begin with the first recommendations and work their way down this list as needed to control the pain and inflammation associated with degenerative joint disease. **Medical management** (discussed at length in Part 3) is many times the only realistic option for many pet owners. There is much *you* can do to control the pain, make your pet comfortable, and perhaps slow down the progression of degenerative joint disease. For the best results, implement several of the following steps daily to improve your pet's quality of life:

- **Proper Diet and Weight Management** - Weight management is the first thing that must be addressed. Considering that up to half of the pets in the U.S. are overweight, there is a fair chance that many of the dogs with hip dysplasia/osteoarthritis are also overweight. Helping a dog lose pounds until he reaches his recommended weight, and keeping it there, may be the most important thing an owner can do for a pet. However, this may be the hardest part of the treatment, but it is worth it. You, as the owner, have control over what your dog eats. If you feed an appropriate food at an appropriate level and keep treats to a minimum, your dog will lose weight.

- **Exercise** - Exercise is the next important step. Exercise that provides for good range of motion and muscle building and limits wear and tear on the joints is the best. Leash walking, swimming, walking on treadmills, slow jogging, and going up and down stairs are excellent low-impact exercises. An exercise program should be individualized for each dog based on the severity of the osteoarthritis, weight, and condition of the dog. In general, too little exercise can be more detrimental than too much; however, the wrong type of exercise can cause harm. While Frisbee is very enjoyable and fun for the dog, it is very hard on a dog's joints. Remember, it is important to exercise **daily**. Only exercising on weekends, for instance, may cause more harm than good if the animal is sore for the rest of the week and reluctant to move at all. Warming the muscles prior to exercise and following exercise with a "warm-down" period are beneficial. Consult with your veterinarian regarding an exercise program appropriate for your dog.

- **Warmth and Good Sleeping Areas** - Most people with arthritis find that the signs tend to worsen in cold, damp weather. So keeping your pet warm, may help him be more comfortable. A pet sweater will help keep joints warmer. You may want to consider keeping the temperature in your home a little warmer, too.

- **Providing a firm, orthopedic foam bed** helps many dogs with arthritis. Dog beds with dome-shaped, orthopedic foam distribute weight evenly and reduce pressure on joints. They are also much easier for the pet to get out of. Place the bed in a warm spot away from drafts. Or add a pet bed heater (can slip inside of any pet bed) and warmth and comfort are just a few seconds away.

- **Make Daily Activities Less Painful** - Going up and down stairs is often difficult for arthritic pets, and for dogs, it can make going outside to urinate and defecate very difficult. Many people build or buy pet ramps, especially on stairs leading to the outside, to make it easier for the dogs to go outside. Carpeted stair-steps are ideal for arthritic large or small breed dogs to give them a boost up to their favorite spot on the bed or sofa. ComfortLift Carrier is perfect for helping arthritic, lame, or recovering pets up onto their feet or in and out of vehicles.

- **Larger breed dogs** can especially benefit from elevating their food and water bowls. Elevated feeders make eating and drinking more comfortable for arthritic pets, particularly if there is stiffness in the neck or back.

Part 2 of 3. Please continue reading to learn medical treatment options to relieve your dog's arthritis symptoms in Part 3

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Part 1: Causes of Arthritis	Part 2: Managing Arthritis at Home	Part 3: Medical Treatment of Arthritis

Nutritional products to help you manage your dog's arthritis symptoms:

Joint Supplements

Vitamins

Healthy Diet

Pain Relievers

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