

PET PERKS

Mobility Issues in Older Dogs

Dr. Christie Ryan DVM

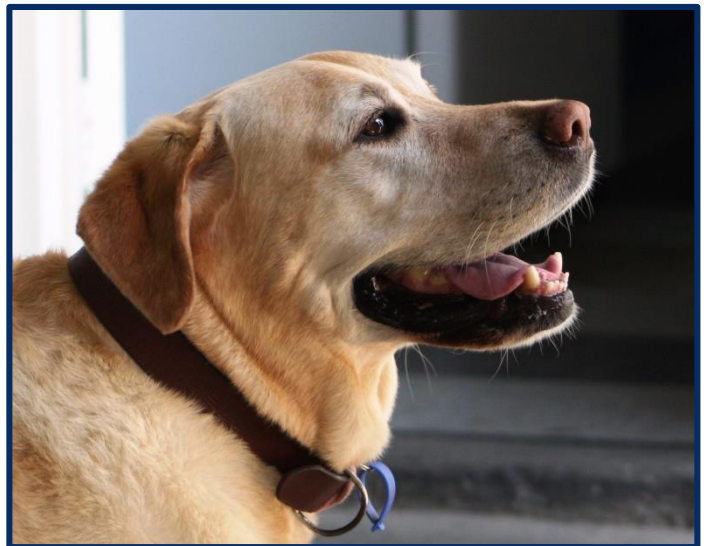
As many owners of middle-aged to older dogs will know, arthritis is a common ailment we see. Just as in people, many dogs as they age will develop changes to their joints leading to arthritis (or osteoarthritis). Commonly, in dogs, arthritis develops secondarily to other joint diseases such as hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, cruciate ligament disease, or patellar luxation. Additionally, the more extra weight a dog is carrying the more likely they are to develop arthritis due to having extra strain on their joints.

If you speak with anyone that has arthritis they will tell you it is a painful condition. We appreciate that the pain associated with arthritis is experienced by dogs as well. However, our pets do not always show obvious signs of pain, especially if they have been dealing with the pain or discomfort for quite some time. Pain is complex and multi-faceted, so we must take into account the pain itself and how the pain makes the pet feel. How dogs express pain can change depending on the pet's age, breed, personality, and additional stressors like anxiety or fear. Therefore, when we look for and assess pain in our patients it is tailored to that individual pet.

Behavioural changes in dogs experiencing acute pain can include:

- Change in posture or body position
- Change in personality
- Increased or changes to vocalization
- Change in their reaction to being touched
- Change in their interaction with their owners and/or other people
- Change in mobility
- Decreased appetite

Assessing dogs with chronic or long-term pain can be much more difficult, especially because the signs can be subtle and come on gradually. As the owner, you are extremely valuable to the veterinarian to aid in determining if your pet is experiencing chronic pain.



Things to ask yourself and to discuss with the veterinarian include:

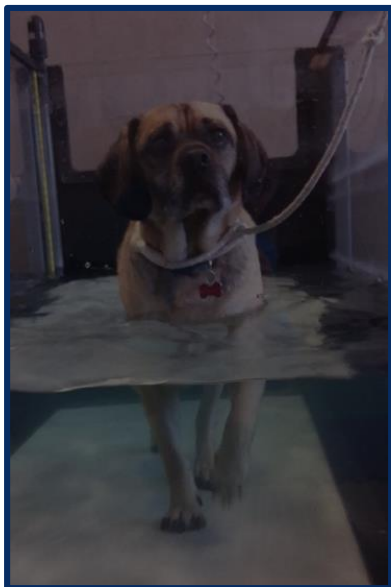
- How energetic, happy, active vs lethargic, playful is your dog?
- How easy is it for your dog to lie down, sit, jump up, and tolerate exercise?

- What is your dog's personality and attitude like? How social is your dog?
- Are they showing any signs of distress such as moaning and groaning or have a changed response to other dogs and humans?
- Are they showing any signs of pain such as stiffness, limping, or inability to get comfortable?

Management

Management of chronic or long-term pain associated with arthritis can be quite difficult. Oftentimes we have to use several different modes of treatment and adjust them if there are acute flare-ups, breakthrough pain, a new source of pain, or worsening of signs.

Therapeutic exercise/Rehabilitation:



- Studies have shown that there is an improvement of the arthritis – pets experience less anxiety and depression, lost weight and require less pain control
 - Aquatic exercise (underwater treadmill) increases resistance on the joints while decreasing the amount of weight put on the joint
 - Heat, cold, ultrasound, and laser – decreases inflammation, especially in acute flare-ups, and can decrease pain
 - Massage – positive physical and psychological effect for both pet and owner, increases blood flow and drainage of the lymphatic system
 - Stretches – stimulates the muscles and joints
 - Acupuncture – stimulates pain relief, healing, and the immune system
 - Weight loss/optimal weight

Medications:

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs)
 - Pain killer, anti-inflammatory, and fever-reducing medication
 - Work by suppressing the molecules the body secretes in response to pain or inflammation
 - Typical first-line pain control medication
 - Indicated in the treatment of mild to moderate pain, often used in combination with other medications for moderate to severe pain
 - Side effects – vomiting, nausea, inappetance, gastric ulcers or worsening of underlying kidney disease
 - Monitoring bloodwork with long-term use is recommended
- Opioids
 - Pain killer and sedative medication
 - Acts at the level of the central nervous system to inhibit pain signal transmission
 - Every patient will respond differently to opioids

- Indicated in the treatment of moderate to severe pain
- Side effects – sedation, vomiting, nausea, incontinence, cardiovascular suppression, and dysphoria
- Additional add-on medications
 - Work to help support NSAIDs and/or opioids but are not used on their own
 - Often work at the level of the central nervous system (the brain)

Diets and dietary supplements:

- Prescription veterinary diets (only available at veterinary clinics)
 - Medi-Cal Royal Canin Mobility or Mobility + Satiety
 - Hill's j/d
 - Iams Joint Plus
 - Purina Joint Mobility
- Omega-3 fatty acids
 - Anti-inflammatory effects that can help decrease inflammation and pain
 - Best utilized by our pets if the omega fatty acids are animal-based
 - Several different supplements available at the clinic
- Glucosamine HCl and chondroitin
 - Anti-inflammatory effects and help stimulate joint fluid production (lubricates the joint)
 - Several different supplements available at the clinic
- Green-lipped mussels
 - Contains omega-3 fatty acids, chondroitin, and several other vitamins and minerals which have anti-inflammatory effects
 - Several different supplements available and often in joint diets available at the clinic

Managing the discomfort and/or pain that arthritic dogs feel can be difficult and ever-changing. Oftentimes we like to use several different types of management to ensure that your pet is as comfortable as possible. If you have any questions or concerns about arthritis, pain, and your pet please call the clinic!

We are happy to announce at the Kirkton and St. Marys Veterinary Clinics, as well as the Ilderton Pet Hospital, that we are now offering laser therapy as one of our multiple management tools for dealing with patients with pain issues. Below, veterinary technician Katie from St. Marys highlights some of the uses and benefits of laser therapy.

Laser Therapy

Katie Riddell VT

Laser Therapy is an alternative therapy using a drug free, surgery free, non invasive method of treatment with no side effects. The laser light triggers a photochemical reaction in the body that increases blood flow to the tissues, which then promotes improved function in the growth, replication and repair of the cells. It increases the release of natural painkillers and restores metabolic function. Energy delivered by the light changes cell chemistry by increasing production of cell fuel, reducing inflammation and pain. It can help to manage a number of conditions our senior pets may suffer from such as osteoarthritis, degenerative joint disease, and intervertebral disc disease. Some pets may feel an improvement in their condition immediately after therapy, where as other may take a few treatments. Regardless, the healing effect is long-lasting as the restoration of healthy function continues well after the initial treatment.

