

Home Care for the Arthritic Dog

Tips to manage your older dog's arthritis.

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Many older dogs slow down as they age because of arthritis of their joints. With proper care, these dogs can live normal lives free of pain and discomfort. Here are some tips that can help you successfully manage your dog's arthritis.

Weight management is critical. Older dogs often suffer from obesity, defined as weighing 15 percent or more than the ideal weight. Extra weight puts additional stress on injured joints and contributes to ongoing joint pain and inflammation. Your vet can help you put your dog on a medically supervised, restricted-calorie diet. Feeding several small meals a day reduces begging and can increase weight loss.

Controlled exercise maintains muscle tone and helps arthritic joints stay limber and flexible. Dogs enjoy leash walks, or even better, supervised swimming, which won't further injure damaged joints.

Proper bedding will keep your older dog comfortable. Several companies manufacture beds made of space-age foam material. These are easy to clean and reduce pressure on the joints when the dog is resting or sleeping. A little bit of money spent on an appropriate bed will go a long way in keeping your dog comfortable when he's not moving around.

Physical therapy can be performed at your veterinarian's office or at home. Simple exercises, using controlled joint flexion and extension, can be done several times each day to keep the joints moving through their normal ranges of motion. Owners can learn massage therapy and acupuncture, which help dogs relax and maintain the proper muscle tone needed to support damaged joints.

Work with your veterinarian to create a personalized plan for your dog. Once you get started, you'll be surprised how easy it is to keep your dog comfortable without the need for frequent anti-arthritic medications.