

Soothing Arthritis Solutions

Help your dog cope with arthritis and live more comfortably.

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Priscilla, a pudgy Weimaraner, was about 3 or 4 years old when adopted by Sharon Blankenship of Petersburg, Mich. Although Priscilla initially joined the other household Weims in their romps and two-mile daily walks, she began to slow down and lag behind after about a year.

She became reluctant to leave the house, walked stiffly, and frequently would turn back before our walk was done, Blankenship says. Eventually, she couldn't be coaxed out to walk with us. Although still relatively young, Priscilla seemed old beyond her years. A veterinary diagnosis revealed she had arthritis.

A degenerative joint disease, arthritis affects cartilage, bone, and surrounding soft tissues. Commonly seen in middle- and old-aged dogs due to aging or mechanical damage to the cartilage, arthritis causes the cartilage to become less resilient, more prone to breaking down, and less able to recover and heal from injury or trauma, according to Darryl Millis, DVM, American College of Veterinary Surgeons diplomate, and professor of orthopedic surgery at the University of Tennessee.

But arthritis can also occur in any age animal even puppies due to orthopedic injuries or disorders, such as hip or elbow dysplasia or cruciate ligament damage. Immune-related diseases, such as lupus and

rheumatoid arthritis, and tick infections can also cause cartilage damage, Millis says.

Arthritic dogs typically show signs of lameness, stiffness, difficulty in sitting or standing, decreased interest in play or exercise, reluctance to go up or down stairs, or hesitancy to jump onto furniture or into the car.

According to Millis, arthritis is more prevalent today for reasons that remain unclear. It could be due to dogs living longer, to increased obesity which directly contributes to arthritis or because owners are more tuned into arthritis, so it's being reported more. There are more cases that could benefit from treatment, however, Millis adds. People often attribute decreased activity to old age, but dogs also reduce their level of activity because of chronic arthritic pain. Many owners of older dogs that we treat for osteoarthritis state their dog is much more active after initiating treatment, and they didn't realize how much pain their dog must have been in, Millis says. Although arthritis is progressive and not curable, various management techniques can reduce or even eliminate its symptoms.