

Help for Arthritis

An expert answers your question about arthritis.

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Q. My 10-year-old Lhasa/Poodle cross has begun to limp, especially when getting up from sleeping. Our veterinarian says she has arthritis in her right shoulder and we should wait until it's more of a problem to start treating. Is this all right to wait? Should I pursue treatment now?

A. Because dogs tend to live longer now and suffer the effects of aging more because of it, I deal with this issue daily. Perhaps the most common of these ailments is arthritis or degenerative joint disease. Increased awareness of our dogs' needs has also resulted in more owners wanting improved quality of life and comfort for their pets. Certainly none of us would want our best friends to live in pain.

My recommendation is to treat as early as possible before advanced and irreversible degenerative changes, increased pain, muscle atrophy and secondary problems in other limbs develop. Intervention may include exercise, diet changes and weight loss. Treatment with traditional medications may be recommended in many cases and may include aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and steroid derivatives.

Benefits of many other drugs and products have recently been noted in cases of arthritis. Many antioxidants, mineral supplements, "nutraceutical" products and disease-modifying osteoarthritis drugs are available. These have the potential for reducing pain and inflammation while promoting healing within affected joints. The earlier these treatments are administered, the greater the chance of a favorable outcome. Treatment options in especially difficult or advanced cases may include surgery, chiropractic treatments and acupuncture. Good luck!