

## Monitor Use of Pain Relievers for Your Dog

**An expert answers questions on pain relievers and dogs.**

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Q: I have a 3½-year-old German Shepherd/Chow mix that was diagnosed with immune-mediated joint disease about a year ago. She has since been taking Imuran and prednisone. I learned recently she no longer shows signs of the disease and can be taken off prednisone. She still needs the Imuran. I've been told these drugs are shortening her life. Is this true? How unhealthful are they?

A: Your concerns are valid; however, consider the whole picture. Immune-mediated joint disease and arthritis can be extremely painful, crippling conditions. If untreated, they can lead to severe, nonreversible degenerative changes in the affected joints.

Before administration, all medication must be evaluated and potential benefits weighed against possible side and adverse effects. If your dog is not experiencing adverse reactions, the drugs are not likely to have significant "life-shortening" effects. On the contrary, chronic pain reduces human life expectancy and probably does for dogs, as well.

Your veterinarian appears to be taking the proper approach. Reducing and eliminating doses should be the goal. Blood should be tested periodically to monitor bone marrow suppression, which can be seen with azathioprine (Imuran) therapy. Remember, the goal is quality of life, not quantity for quantity's sake. Good luck.