

Treat Arthritis in Dogs Naturally

Help slow the progress of osteoarthritis with alternative therapies for dogs.

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When it comes to osteoarthritis in dogs, natural and alternative therapies are safer and can be just as effective as commonly prescribed drugs, according to Allen M. Schoen, DVM, adjunct professor at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine in North Grafton, Mass., and author of *Kindred Spirits* (Broadway Books, 2002).

"Drugs may relieve pain, but they also can cause further degeneration of your dog's joints and health," Schoen explains. Non-steroidal drugs, such as Rimadyl, can damage the liver, while steroids may cause muscle atrophy, gastrointestinal bleeding, liver and kidney disease, and Cushing's disease. "My goal is to maintain joint health and overall health, in addition to relieving pain and inflammation," he says, adding that a combination of natural and alternative therapies yields the best results.

Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate: Daily glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate help protect and lubricate joints, says Schoen. It may take four to six weeks before you see results. Injections of Adequan, a liquid form of glycosaminoglycans, can produce improvement more quickly.

OthersSupplements: Daily doses of vitamin A, E, and Ester-C, as well as MSM (methylsulfonylmethane), help the arthritic dog. The mineral selenium acts as an antioxidant.

An essential fatty acid supplement from fish oil or flaxseed oil works as an anti-inflammatory. Cetyl myristoleate is an up-and-coming joint lubricant and anti-inflammatory. **Acupuncture:** Schoen highly recommends acupuncture for dogs with arthritis. It increases circulation to the muscles and joint capsule, which provides more oxygen and slows cell degeneration. It also relieves painful muscle spasms; increases leg strength by stimulating nerves and muscles; and releases endorphins to make the dog feel better, he explains. Acupressure can help your dog between sessions.

Herbs: Boswellia, an herb, and devil's claw are both anti-inflammatories, while alfalfa provides basic building blocks for the joints. Schoen also uses a variety of Chinese herbs.

Physical therapies: Schoen recommends an exercise program of frequent short walks, daily stretching, and massage for canine arthritis sufferers. If available, try physical therapy, swimming, Tellington Touch, trigger-point therapy, or underwater treadmill exercise at an animal rehabilitation center.