

Arthritis Medication for Dogs

Osteoarthritis is a chronic condition of inflamed and painful joints that cannot be cured. However, new scientific breakthroughs have allowed us to reduce pain and discomfort and potentially slow the progression of arthritis by the use of many medications and nutritional supplements.

NSAIDs - non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications are a type of medication that can bring relief of arthritis pain by reducing inflammation. These medications include aspirin and ibuprofen, which are not considered safe for pets. However, several new NSAIDs are available for pets, and as every animal's physiology is different, one may be more effective for your pet than another. Because dogs and cats are very sensitive to the side effects that may include stomach and intestinal ulcers, liver or kidney disease (much more than are humans) it is recommended that routine blood tests be performed prior to use to prevent exacerbation of underlying problems, and at least once yearly to monitor for side effects. **These medications should never be given concurrently with corticosteroids (prednisone)!** Three to four days should be allowed between different NSAIDs or cortisone to minimize side effects.

- **Rimadyl** – One of the safest NSAID for dogs; side effects are very minimal. Rare liver problems have been associated with use, and periodic monitoring of liver functions tests are recommended. Rimadyl may be given twice daily or only as needed, and appears to have increasing benefits over the first several weeks of use.
- **Deramaxx** – another NSAID available for dogs. It has less reported liver problems associated with its use. Treatment in dehydrated animals or those with underlying kidney disease may cause damage to the kidneys, so caution is warranted. Deramaxx may be given once daily or only as needed.
- **Metacam** – a NSAID similar to Deramaxx in side effects. May be given once daily or as needed, and comes in a liquid form.
- **Aspirin** - Has been shown at higher levels to be destructive to cartilage. It may be poorly tolerated by some animals and cause vomiting or ulcers. Most dogs studied showed subclinical evidence of stomach bleeding after a single dose of aspirin.
- **Ibuprofen** (Advil, Motrin) - Has toxic metabolites that affect the liver and kidneys. **Should never be used in dogs or cats.**
- **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol) – Is not a NSAID. It has reasonable analgesic effects and is safe for dogs, but has no anti-inflammatory effects. May be helpful in treating breakthrough pain, or to supplement between types of NSAIDs. **Is very toxic to cats!**

Corticosteroids - Includes prednisone, prednisolone, and dexamethasone. They are destructive to cartilage in the long-term use, and have more side effects. They should only be used for palliation when NSAIDs have failed to control severe arthritis pain in dogs. Since cats should rarely be given any NSAIDs and tolerate corticosteroids well, they may be useful in arthritic cats.

Tramadol – A narcotic like pain medication, which can be used along with a NSAID to control pain. It is very safe, but may cause sedation or dysphoria (uneasiness). It can be used long term safely.

Amantadine - an NMDA blocker, which decreases the spinal cord's ability to respond to pain. Chronic pain stimulation can increase pain sensation even when the cause itself is not worse, and a course of this medication may help minimize the exaggerated response to the pain. Side effects are uncommon, and it may be used with most other medication.

Gabapentin – a pain medication whose mechanism of action is not well understood. Can be used in conjunction with other medications such as NSAIDS or tramadol. Side effects may include sedation.

Duralactin – a nutritional supplement that contains dried milk protein from the milk of hyperimmunized cows. Duralactin reduced joint inflammation by decreasing white blood cell contribution to inflammation.

Anti-oxidants – such as fish oil capsules and Vitamin E are being studied to evaluate their effectiveness, but may be beneficial.

Nutraceuticals - A class of naturally occurring chemicals that make up the building blocks of cartilage. Supplementation of these has been proven to improve the health of joints, especially when used early in the disease process. Their presence also helps decrease the enzymes that create ongoing cartilage destruction. They are especially helpful in any joint surgery or injury, developmental joint disease (i.e. hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, OCD), or rheumatoid arthritis. They may potentially help with disk disease as well. These products may be used in conjunction with NSAIDs. These nutraceuticals are very safe, and have no significant side effects.

Dasaquin or Cosequin - is an oral tablet that is given on a daily basis. Most animals require 2-6 weeks to show improvement. They have a unique combination of glucosamine with other ingredients, and are amongst the only brands that undergo studies to ensure efficacy of the product; that make it more expensive but more effective than over-the-counter combinations.

Adequan - an injectible form of a glycosaminoglycan that is usually given as a series of injections 1-2 times weekly for a total of eight injections. Most dogs show a good response to Adequan, but a few will not show improvement. Follow-up injections are usually given in pairs 6-12 months later or as deemed appropriate.

Acupuncture – has been shown to be very effective in the management of chronic painful conditions such as arthritis. Most animals are very tolerant of treatment, and may be weaned to infrequent treatments.

Weight control – one of the most helpful methods to improve your pet's arthritis pain is to keep them slim with minimal body fat. Excess body fat increases inflammatory chemicals in the body that may increase arthritis. Many weight control diets are available. Hills J/D diet helps support arthritis dogs with weight loss and increased amounts of anti-inflammatory ingredients as well.

All these medications have advantages and disadvantages. Not all animals will respond to all medications. Please feel free to inquire about and discuss any of these products and their potential benefits to your pet.