



SURGERY:

Long-term Management of Degenerative Joint Disease

Overview	Degenerative joint disease is a manageable disease and knowing the various modalities that are available to help palliate are an important part to long-term control.
Weight management	Monitoring the weight of the patient is very important, as weight control has been shown to improve clinical signs associated with osteoarthritis. Dogs should have a waist noticeable behind the ribs and you should be able to feel the ribs under their skin. Calculate the amount of kcal (body weight (kilograms) X 30 + 70 the patient should be receiving. Easy ways to start weight loss include meal feeding, reducing the amount of food, switching to a low-calorie diet, and replacing treats with healthy food such as carrots. Regular exercise is also beneficial for weight loss and physical therapists can help plan appropriate routine activities.
Diet with high levels of omega fatty acids	Prescription diets such as Purina JM are recommended as they contain high levels of omega 3 fatty acids, which act as natural anti-oxidants. These diets have an anti-inflammatory effect on inflamed joints. This prescription diet also contains a natural source of glucosamine and a high protein to calorie ratio to maintain a lean body condition. It is important to wean onto this diet over a period of 2 to 3 weeks to prevent excess flatulence and/or diarrhea.
Nutraceuticals	These are a class of drugs available that contain natural supplements to help with joint function. Dasuquin with MSM is a high quality pure form of chondroitin sulfate and glucosamine that is readily absorbed by the intestines in dogs. In addition, it contains avocado/soybean unsaponifiables (ASU), which are natural anti-oxidants to help with osteoarthritis. Other nutraceuticals are available for use and there are no adverse affects of these medications. Care should be used when purchasing a nutraceutical, as this class of medication is not FDA regulated. Therefore, stick with a brand that you have seen a good clinical response.
Exercise and physical therapy	Maintaining good muscle mass and range of motion of the joints is important for improved long-term function. Daily walks, swimming, incline walking, and regular activity are recommended. In addition, there are several other physical therapy modalities available as needed. The pet owner can start a weekly log recording activity level and attitude to monitor for improvement or worsening.
Pain management	Intermittent use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories may be needed during periods of soreness due to changes in the weather or high activity. If using pain medications intermittently, it is a good idea to check blood work every 6-9 months. There are also many other classes of pain medications available for use as needed. These include NMDA blockers, narcotic like drugs, and dopaminergic agonists like Gabapentin, Tramadol and Amantadine, respectively. Question the owner about signs of pain (panting, lips pulled back - grimacing, unable to sleep, and restlessness) and have them keep a weekly log to record if their pet is having more bad days than good.
Conclusions	Degenerative joint disease is common among companion animals and understanding the different causes and treatments is an important part of small animal practice. There are certain diseases where surgical intervention is recommended such as cruciate disease. If conservative management is not resulting in an improvement in clinical signs after 4 weeks, a consultation by one of our surgeons to evaluate the patient for a surgically correctable orthopedic condition is recommended. In conclusion, a multimodal approach is essential in the treatment of degenerative joint disease.

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Michigan Veterinary Specialists provides Surgery Service at all three hospital locations. A member of the surgery team is on-call 24/7 to provide consultations to MVS emergency doctors and to perform the emergency services. Our surgeons are available for questions and consultations on surgical conditions during the weekdays.

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