

arthritis and degenerative joint disease

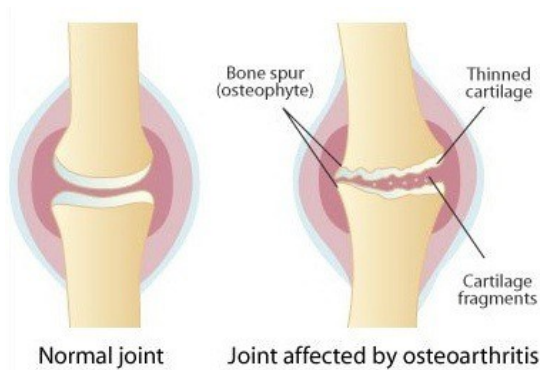
colder weather can bring out the aches and pains in older animals

what is osteoarthritis?

Most joints in the body depend on a layer of cartilage, acting as a shock absorber inside the joint, to provide a smooth surface so the adjoining bones can move freely over each other. This is aided by the lubrication provided by synovial fluid, the sticky liquid in joints.

With arthritis, the cartilage deteriorates, wears away and becomes rough, sometimes severely enough to allow the bones themselves to rub together. The synovial fluid becomes thin and watery, losing some of its lubricating properties.

These changes together create friction and pain inside the joint.



Causes include:

- Abnormal alignment of bones that make up a joint (e.g hip dysplasia)
- Trauma
- Aging
- Continual wear and tear on the joint structures
- Obesity
- Arthritis can also occur in a joint with no obvious cause

One or more joints may be affected - any joint can be involved but the most common are hip, knee, shoulder, elbow and spine.

Osteoarthritis is a very common condition. It is more prevalent in older dogs of medium and large breeds, but pets of any age and size can be affected by this painful degenerative disease.

signs to watch out for:

- * Reduced activity
- * Reluctance to walk or play
- * Difficulty getting up or stiffness in the legs - especially early in the morning or after resting
- * Lameness or limping (may be difficult to detect if both legs are affected)
- * Favouring a leg
- * Difficulty climbing stairs or getting into the car
- * Licking or chewing at the joints
- * Yelping in pain when touched
- * Reduced appetite
- * Personality change (possibly aggression)

If your pet is suffering from any of these signs, it may be time for a check-up.

Winter is the time when our pets suffer the most from arthritis, but the pain can last all year long. As arthritis progresses, the pain becomes much worse.

Since the disease develops gradually, it is often assumed to be 'just old age' and that nothing can be done. Fortunately this is not the case - a variety of treatments are available.

