

Canine Arthritis Home Adaptations

There are many things we can do at home to make our canines more comfortable, enabling them to enjoy a good quality of life in their golden years. There are a few factors to consider as detailed below.

- **Feeding**

Arthritis can manifest in a range of joints including the neck so feeding from a raised food dish or placing bowls on biscuit tins or upside down washing up bowls may ease some of the pain with over flexion.

Prepare food away from your dog to avoid excitability and jumping up.

Choose a quiet location to use as the feeding area (ideally not having to climb up steps) and if multiple dogs are present, feed separately.

Providing a non-slip mat in front of the feeding area is also recommended to aid with grip.

Use of snuffle mats, interactive 'maze' food bowls and licki-mats can provide mental stimulation and encourage gentle movement of joints.

Different feeding techniques will add variation to your dogs routine and distract them from arthritic pain.

- **Diet**

Feeding an appropriate diet and managing weight is very important. Excessive weight causes further inflammation meaning more pain and a worsening of arthritis pain.

Feeding little meals more frequently may be beneficial and sometimes warming to room temperature can help with palatability.

We recommend the Virbac diet range which offers both a complete weight management and senior diet to ensure your dog receives the appropriate nutrition. Please ask a member of our team for more information.

- **Garden**

Stiff joints may mean accessing certain areas of the garden more difficult, particularly if there are steps, high edges and slippery flooring. Repetitive slips may make your dog reluctant to toilet outside and lead to 'accidents' indoors.

Avoid dog flaps as these can make accessing outdoors very difficult for arthritic animals.

Ramps (covered in non slip mat/artificial turf) and the use of rubber mats in slippery areas may help negotiating these areas.

- **Walks**

Avoid excitement prior to a walk with special care when multiple dogs are involved as this can cause further jumping and may lead to injuries. Sometimes it may be easier to walk an older dog separately to a younger dog to gauge the appropriate exercise to the energy levels of the animal.

Arthritic dogs may become fearful around boisterous dogs leading to anxiety with walks. Care should be taken to plan routes and protect the dog from being jumped on. Consider signage on leads to inform other dog owners to keep their dogs away.

Use a padded harness to limit strain around the neck when pulling and a coat when the weather is colder.

Vary the areas visited and exercise on level terrain such as short grass avoiding pebbles, steep gradients and heavy undergrowth. Allow time for the dog to spend time sniffing and enjoying the walk at it's own pace.

No ball throwing as this causes over exertion of joints making a sore joint even more painful.

Consider using an adapted dog pushchair to still enable your dog to enjoy being out and about.

- **Car Travel**

Transporting your dog comfortably will help with travel related anxiety. A well padded boot or seat belt strap will help your dog feel more secure during the journey. Discourage from jumping with a ramp for larger dogs or lift smaller dogs into the car.

- **House**

-Flooring: laminate, vinyl or tiled floors can represent a major obstacle for dogs with the tendency to slip or add further injury to joints a real risk. Place mats (yoga mats cut to size are good) carpet treads or runners with adhesive strips to prevent slippage.

-Beds: Offer a range of beds in easily accessible locations, free from draughts. A deep bed which is easily accessible with plenty of room to stretch out and sturdy edging is ideal. Orthopaedic beds/memory foam. Good quality sleep is very important.

-*Stairs*: Use a stairgate to prevent venturing up/down stairs, carry dog if possible or use a harness to guide your dog up/down.

-*Sofa Access*: Ideally discourage from jumping up onto sofa by placing a comfortable bed close by or provide a ramp for easy access up and down.

Toileting

Provide an area which is easily accessible which is free from hazards and clutter as these may present as obstacles and result in the pet having accidents in the home.

Playing

Gentle play and activities will help keep the brain stimulated and is important for the pets wellbeing. Re-starting some basic training, hiding treats to encourage scent work and spending quality time together will enhance the bond between owner and pet.

Avoid any high impact exercise such as ball chasing or playing with tug toys.

Husbandry

-*Nail trimming*: overgrown claws will cause further discomfort so it is important to have these clipped regularly and any fur between the toes to help with grip.

-*Grooming/massage*: this can help with the owner pet bond and is helpful to warm up muscular areas prior to exercise.