

Arthritis and chronic pain are not purely human conditions. Dogs and cats feel pain too and arthritis causes long term pain that can affect your their behavior and activity level. Modern veterinary diagnostics and therapies can offer some hope.

By: Michael King, DVM

Pain has many causes. When it happens to your pet friends, it's especially sad. It generates almost the same emotions in us as when our children hurt.

Arthritis is even more common in dogs than it is in people. One out of every six people, or about 43 million, suffers with some form of arthritis. Compare that to dogs where about 20%, or one in five dogs, feel the pain of arthritis. This number almost doubles in dogs older than 7 years.

This occurs as both people and dogs and cats grow older. The joints don't function as smoothly and lose some of their ability to lubricate joint movement as time passes.

Often a pet owner overlooks this pain as simply "the pet is getting older". In fact, some veterinarians believe that over half of all dogs and cats with painful arthritis are going untreated because their owners don't recognize the subtle and

insidious symptoms of joint pain.

“Pet owners should understand that pain can be just as difficult and life changing in pets as it is in people,” says Dr. Robin Downing a veterinarian who runs a pain management practice for animals. Dr. Robin Downing is one of only four veterinarians in the world credentialed by the American Academy of Pain Management which has about 6,000 active members ranging from physicians, oriental medicine doctors and nurses.

“Stiffness and reluctance to move, or unexplained behavioral changes in pets is just not normal. Many owners may pass these signs off as “getting old”, but chronic pain is real and today can be managed much better than in years past,” notes Downing.

“The primary problem in pets is osteoarthritis. You will see these both dogs and cats tire easily, dogs may lag behind other dogs, and they will not want to jump or may noticeably limp”.

“I think pain in cats is very under recognized. Cats suffer from arthritis just like dogs. The biggest problem with arthritis is that it is a progressive and degenerative condition. In addition to this main cause, surgical pain and pain from injuries account for most of the problem in veterinary medicine”. But Dr. Downing offers some hope; “There are a number of ways we can help these pets live without the nagging stress of

chronic pain. Pain we can predict, like surgeries, can be helped with pre-analgesic medications. For other pain, veterinarians are now taking a more multi-modal approach using metabolic analysis, life style changes, nutrition and pharmaceuticals”.

Moderate exercise is recommended to keep pet's weights in a normal range and not add to the stress on already stressed joints. If possible, swimming is a good form of exercise because it is non-weight bearing. Soft warm beds, ramps for getting in the car and elevated dog bowls all help pets with arthritis pain.

While specialty pain clinics are still rare, now many veterinary hospitals can help with physical therapy and rehabilitation departments and offer advanced modalities such as ultrasound, water treadmills and even wheelchairs.

Veterinarians also have new generation non-steroid medications that can help. As both cats and dogs may have serious side effects to aspirin and ibuprofen, pain medications should only be prescribed by your veterinarian.

This new generation of non-steroid medications uses the science of enzyme inhibitors, and they act like many of the new human arthritis medications. Many pets, especially those with chronic and progressive hip dysplasia are getting good relief with these medications especially along with proper home care

and physical therapy. One example is called Previcox®.

Dr. Downing says, “There are many clients that come in thinking their pets are just getting old. After we identify the dog’s pain and create a plan to help alleviate that pain, the same client will return and report that same dog is doing things it hasn’t done in years. It really makes a difference!”

Chronic pain can change a person and it can change your pet’s personality and interaction with people. Dr. Downing is leading the way for pets to get some real relief from their veterinarians.

There is now even a specialty group to help organize and train veterinarians in pain management. The International Veterinary Academy of Pain Management is dedicated to improving the identification, prevention and relief of pain in animals. Only 3 years old, this organization will shift this field of study into high gear and all veterinary hospitals and their patients will benefit from it.

If you are concerned that your pet may be in pain, ask your veterinarian. Gage the doctor’s sensitivity to your concerns about this pain and make sure your pets are cared for by a veterinarian who understands and reacts to your concerns about pain.

For more information about chronic pain management visit www.ivamp.org. Also

ask your veterinarian or visit
www.MyVNN.com.

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