

Helping Your Dog Move with Comfort: Understanding Arthritis

The Basics

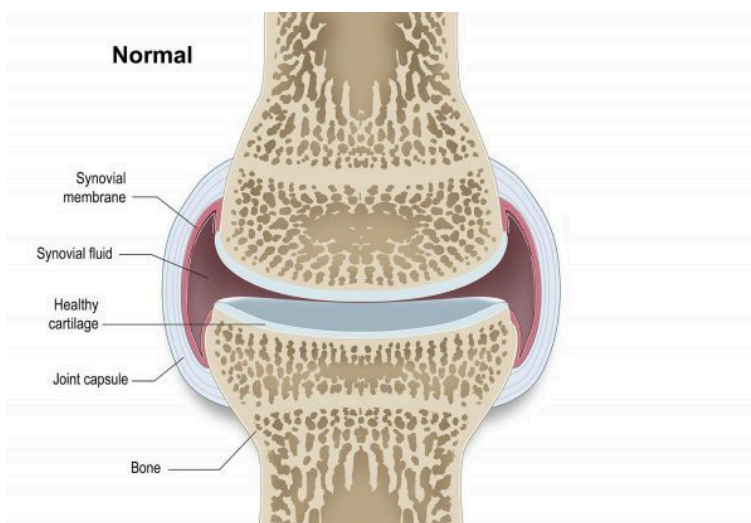
Arthritis is a common condition in dogs that causes joint pain and stiffness, often developing from an underlying issue like injury or joint disease. Studies show that up to 40% of dogs under four already have early signs of arthritis, but most aren't diagnosed until they're 8–10 years old, when symptoms become harder to manage. Recognizing the subtle early signs and starting treatment early can greatly improve comfort, mobility, and quality of life.



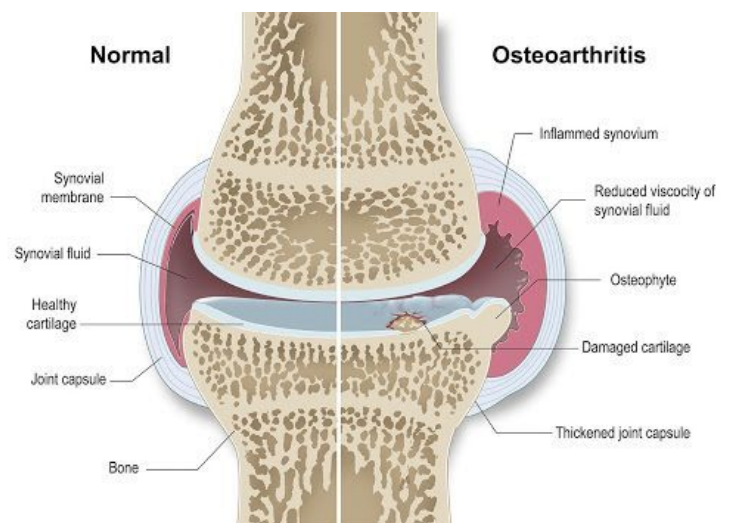
What is arthritis?

A joint is the connection between bones that allows smooth, pain-free movement. In healthy joints, cartilage cushions the bones and joint fluid provides lubrication. With arthritis, this cartilage breaks down, causing inflammation, swelling, and friction between the bones. Over time, this leads to stiffness, pain, and muscle loss around the affected joints.

The most common form of arthritis in dogs is osteoarthritis (OA), also known as degenerative joint disease (DJD). It usually develops after joint injuries or conditions like hip or elbow dysplasia, cruciate ligament tears, or trauma that cause instability and wear over time.



A healthy joint without arthritis



Comparing a healthy joint to one that has arthritis

Diagnostic Tools

Veterinarians diagnose arthritis by examining your dog for pain and reduced mobility, then confirming it with x-rays, which show joint changes like swelling or bone spurs. Sedation is usually recommended to keep your dog still and comfortable during imaging. In some cases, arthroscopy or surgery may be used to look directly inside the joint for a more detailed assessment. In some cases, your veterinarian may also recommend a joint tap to check for infection or immune-related disease, or advanced imaging such as a CT scan or MRI to get a clearer view of the bones, joints, and surrounding tissues. These tests require anesthesia but can provide valuable details to guide treatment.



Disease Management

While arthritis can't be cured, there are many ways to manage it effectively and keep your dog comfortable for years. Treatment often involves a combination of therapies, such as pain management, weight control, joint supplements, Omega-3 fatty acids, low-impact exercise, physical rehabilitation, and sometimes surgery or complementary treatments like acupuncture.

Key Take-Aways

- The most common kind of arthritis in dogs is osteoarthritis (OA).
- Arthritis is the leading cause of chronic pain in dogs.
- Chronic pain leads to disability and reduced quality of life.
- Arthritis can't be cured but there are many effective options available to help manage it.
- Early, proactive diagnosis and management is key to helping your dog live a long, active life.

