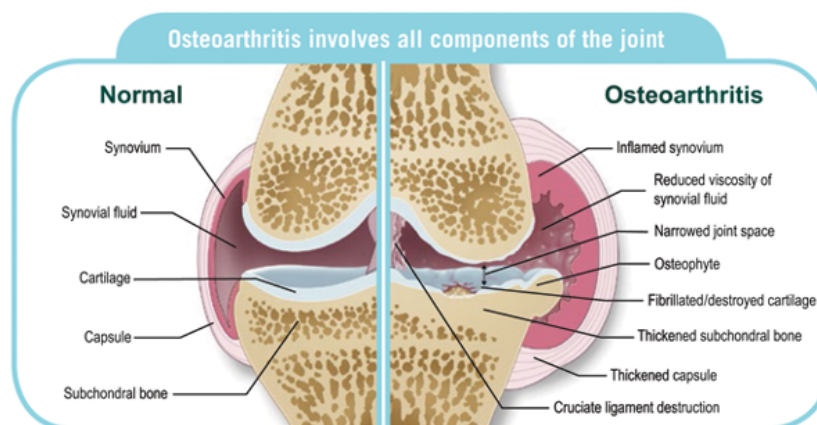


# Arthritis in Small Animals

## What is arthritis:

Arthritis, also called osteoarthritis or degenerative joint disease (DJD), is a progressive and irreversible inflammatory condition of the joints that can affect both dogs and cats. It is a condition where the cartilage that overlies the bone within a joint becomes damaged and eventually wears away to the point there is no cartilage covering the bone that is part of the joint. This is painful for the animal.



[https://www.zoetis.com/products/pages/rimadyl/dvm/osteoarthritis\\_iframe.aspx](https://www.zoetis.com/products/pages/rimadyl/dvm/osteoarthritis_iframe.aspx)

In a normal articular joint, the bones in the joint move smoothly as there is cartilage covering both ends of the bone and there is a joint capsule around this area which contains synovial joint fluid which provides lubrication.

## What contributes to arthritis:

Arthritis can be classified as primary or secondary arthritis. Primary arthritis is arthritis that develops over time due to normal wear and tear of the joints through regular use of the joints. Secondary arthritis is arthritis that develops due to an abnormality that results in damage to the joint, such as poor bone alignment since birth or a traumatic event.

In addition, being overweight contributes to the development of arthritis as the excess weight puts extra pressure on the joints.

## How is arthritis diagnosed:

Usually, arthritis is first suspected when there are changes at home and then can be diagnosed by a veterinarian performing a physical exam and any needed diagnostic imaging.

Dogs often show lameness at home but can also have more subtle signs such as being stiff after resting but normal once they get going. On a physical exam by a vet, lameness is often detected and decreased

ability of the joint(s) to move, termed decreased range of motion. There can also be pain and swelling at the joints.

Cats may not show the lameness as obviously as in dogs. Often, they just become less active over a period of time, which is often just attributed to old age while it can actually be due to arthritis. They may also jump less, hide more, and have difficulty getting in and out of the litter box, so there may be inappropriate urination and defecation. On physical exam, they can have similar signs to dogs, including decreased range of motion, swelling at joints, and pain, although they can hide their pain when they are in clinic.

In addition to the physical exam, imaging can be used to help diagnose arthritis. Radiographs (x-rays) are a way to diagnose arthritis which can be done in the clinic here. There are advanced imaging options, such as CT scan and joint scoping, that can be done at referral clinics if it is needed.

### Treatment of arthritis:

Much of the treatment for arthritis is aimed at patient comfort as the changes to the joint can not be reversed. For the best treatment, there is a combination of medical and non-medical treatments.

Medical treatment includes pain medication and joint supplements. The pain medication that is often used is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID). These NSAIDs reduce pain by decreasing the inflammation in the joint and may aid in slowing down the destructive process of arthritis. These are often used on an as needed basis and with long term use there can be side effects so if your pet needs NSAID treatment, then regular blood work is needed to monitor their body's ability to handle the NSAID as there are potential side effects from its use. If needed, additional pain medication may be added on by your veterinarian.

There are many different joint supplements available. These promote healthy joints by providing some building blocks that to aid in cartilage repair and essential fatty acids that contribute to decreasing the inflammation in the joint. There are herbal products available as well.

Non-medical treatments include weight loss if the animal is overweight. Also, continuing physical exercise but at a low intensity level, such as walks (not running) on grass and swimming. Physical therapy (termed rehabilitation in veterinary medicine) is also an option to aid in proper use of the affected joints.

This was just a brief overview of arthritis in cats and dogs. If you have any questions, feel free to give the clinic a call. Here are some links to articles from Veterinary Partner (by VIN) that explain more about joints and joint disease in cats and dogs:

Normal Joints Look Like this in Dogs and Cats

<https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=4951903>

Arthritis in Dogs and Cats: What Can be Done?

<https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=8896028>

Medications for Degenerative Arthritis in Dogs and Cats

(<https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=4951467>)