

A DOG OWNER'S GUIDE TO JOINT HEALTH



A lifetime of joint
care for your dog



WHY JOINT CARE STARTS NOW

Arthritis isn't just an 'old dog' problem. Whatever their age, it's never too early to protect your dog's joints

→ WHAT IS OSTEOARTHRITIS?

Osteoarthritis (OA), often simply called arthritis, is a common joint problem in dogs. It happens when the cartilage and bone inside a joint become damaged over time and it can affect one or more joints. This leads to stiffness, pain, lameness and reduced mobility, which can affect your dog's quality of life. OA is a progressive condition, meaning it tends to deteriorate if not managed. In fact it can lead to complete joint failure.

→ WHEN DOES IT START?

OA usually develops because of an underlying cause that starts the damage within the joint. This may include being overweight, a genetic predisposition, or inappropriate levels of exercise - either too much or too little. Joint damage can begin before any signs are visible and even younger dogs can be at risk. Some breeds are more genetically prone to OA.

→ THE GOOD NEWS

By understanding OA early, you can take steps to delay or even prevent it from developing. Recognising potential issues - such as your dog's weight, activity level, or breed risks - means you can tailor exercise and feeding routines to suit your individual pet. And if your dog is diagnosed with OA, there are many ways to manage it effectively with the right care and support.

DID YOU KNOW?

38%

It is estimated that 38% of dogs over 1 year old have arthritis¹

Early detection and treatment intervention for OA has the potential for vets to enhance the wellbeing of their canine patients.¹

IS MY DOG AT HIGHER RISK OF OA?

(Tick all that apply)

- Large or giant breed
- Working or agility dog
- Overweight or prone to weight gain
- Very active lifestyle
- Regular high impact activity (e.g. repetitive jumping or chasing)
- Previous joint injury or surgery

TIP: If you ticked 'yes' to any of these, your dog may be at higher risk. Talk to your vet for advice on how to help protect their joints.

BREEDS AT HIGHER RISK OF JOINT DISEASE INCLUDE:



Labrador retriever



Golden retriever



Springer spaniel



Boxer



German shepherd



Rottweiler



Border collie



Bernese mountain dog

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PUPPYHOOD AND BEYOND



Arthritis is often considered an old dogs' disease, however unfortunately it can occur in dogs of any age including puppies. Therefore, your dog's future joint health starts from day one. The right nutrition, exercise and weight management in the early years all help to protect joints and reduce the risk of problems later in life.

→ FEED FOR STEADY GROWTH

Feeding a complete lifestage appropriate puppy diet provides the right balance of nutrients for healthy bone and joint development. It's important to avoid overfeeding – even a little extra weight can put unnecessary strain on growing joints and increase the risk of joint problems later on.

→ EXERCISE APPROPRIATELY

Puppies should be encouraged to play and explore at their own pace. Gentle, varied activity helps build strength and coordination, but repetitive high impact exercise, such as prolonged ball games, jumping in/out of cars and on/off furniture should be avoided. And remember, it's the type of exercise that matters most, not the amount. Always ensure exercise is performed on a non slip surface.



PUPPY MYTH BUSTER!!

"A puppy's walk time should be restricted to 5 minutes x their age in months."

>>> There's **no evidence to support this rule.** What matters most is avoiding activities that are too intense or high-impact for growing joints.

→ MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Keeping your puppy at a healthy weight not only reduces stress on joints but also sets up good habits for life. Overweight/obese puppies are 5 times more likely to be overweight adult dogs and therefore at an increased risk of joint related problems.¹ Ask your vet or vet nurse to show you how to check your puppy's body condition score so you can keep track of healthy growth as they mature.

DID YOU KNOW?

Exercise is really important for socialising your puppy, helping them get used to the sights, sounds and smells of everyday life. The mental stimulation benefits from a 'slow sniffy walk' is easier on the joints than repetitive long intensive exercise.

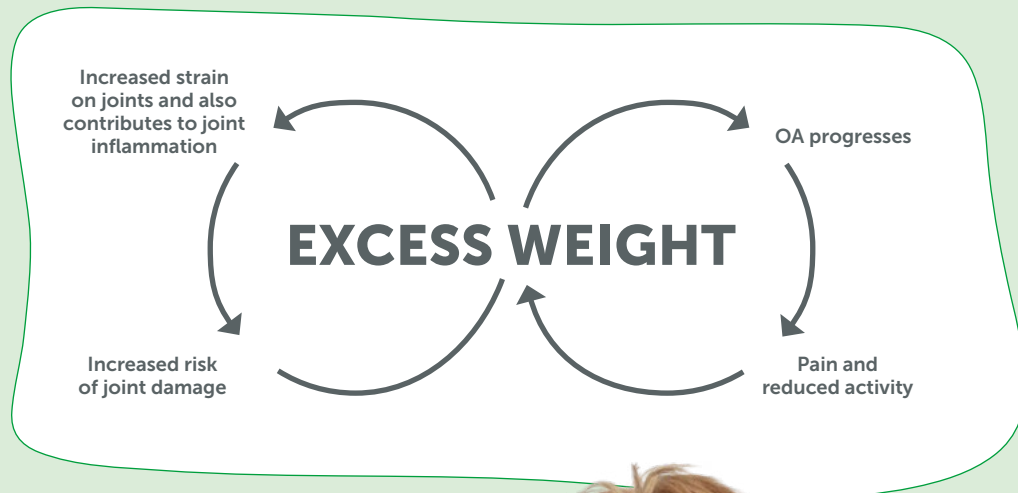


INTO ADULthood

Keeping your dog at a healthy weight is the most important thing you can do to protect their joints.

→ WHY WEIGHT MATTERS

Carrying extra weight puts added strain on your dog's joints and can also increase joint inflammation. Over time, this combination speeds up joint wear and tear, increasing the risk of OA. As discomfort sets in, dogs may become less active, which makes it even harder to keep weight under control, creating a vicious cycle of pain, stiffness, inactivity and weight gain.



DID YOU KNOW?

Being overweight more than doubles the risk of joint disease.²



SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF OA

Learning to recognise the signs can make all the difference as the sooner OA is identified, the more effectively it can be managed.

Dogs often don't whine or cry when in pain, so joint problems can be easy to miss. Changes in behaviour can also be a sign of pain.

Behaviour changes

- Irritable
- Playing less
- Less sociable
- Depression or low mood
- Less tolerance to being handled
- Increased/excessive panting
- Developing noise phobias or previous phobias have intensified

Any behaviour changes? Discuss with your vet.



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IS MY DOG SHOWING SIGNS OF JOINT PAIN?

Physical/Posture changes

(Tick all that apply)

- Stiffness after rest
- Slowing down on walks
- Reluctance to jump, climb stairs or get in the car
- Limping
- Gait changes, dragging feet
- Changes in stance to take pressure off a particular leg
- Licking or chewing joints
- Muscle loss
- Asymmetrical sitting position
- Asymmetrical nail wear
- Changes in coat pattern
- Change in posture or upward curvature
- Low head position
- Tucked up tail
- Different sleeping position
- Restless, difficulty getting comfortable or pacing, shifting weight when standing

DID YOU KNOW?

Limping is almost always a sign of pain

Don't fret, speak to your vet!

LIVING WITH OA

If your dog has been diagnosed with OA, there's a lot you can do to help them stay comfortable and mobile. Management works best when you and your veterinary practice team work closely together.

Why X-rays are important

X-rays help confirm the diagnosis of OA, show how advanced the disease is and rule out other possible causes, helping your vet put the right treatment plan in place.

VET PROFESSIONALS CAN HELP WITH:

Pain relief

Dogs often hide their discomfort, but OA can be very painful. Your vet can prescribe medication to help.

Physiotherapy, massage and laser therapy

These can help reduce pain and inflammation, build muscle and improve mobility.

Weight control guidance

Your vet or nurse can help you create a safe weight loss plan if needed.

Hydrotherapy

A controlled approach on a water treadmill can help strengthen muscles and support joints.

MANAGING FLARE-UPS

Even well-managed OA can flare up after extra exercise, a slip or in cold weather. If your dog seems stiffer, reluctant to move or just not themselves, contact your vet. They can reassess your dog's pain relief and adjust their management plan if needed.



Your vet team can help at every stage, from prevention and early detection to lifelong management and support.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AT HOME?

Joint supplements

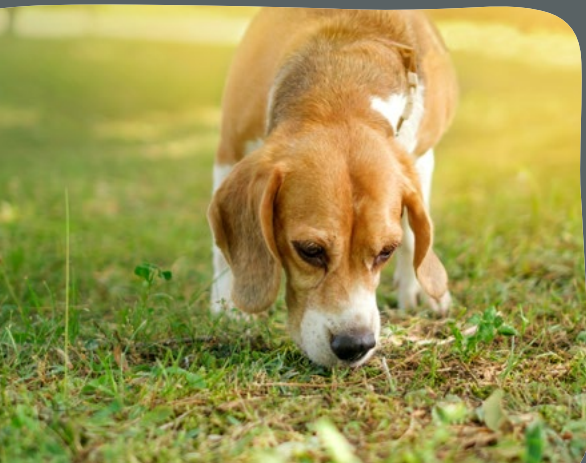
Ask your vet for advice on which products may help.

Exercise modification

- Aim for little and often. Two or three shorter walks a day are better than one long walk.
- Think about the environment for daily walks, in case your dog is struggling with the terrain. Try to avoid surfaces that could aggravate arthritic joints, flatter walks with short grass may be more suitable.
- Try to prevent sudden explosive activity such as chasing after wildlife as this can aggravate arthritic joints and cause acute flare up's.

Adapt playtime

Swap high impact games like fetch for gentler, mentally stimulating activities such as nose work or treat-searching games.



DID YOU KNOW?

Slower sniffy walks are much easier on joints as dogs get older or if they are suffering from OA at an earlier age. Lots of sniffing on walks is also great mental stimulation for dogs!

LIFESTYLE AND HOME ADJUSTMENTS



Small changes can make a big difference:

- Provide a supportive, comfy bed in a warm, draught-free spot.
- Consider an orthopaedic mattress.
- Use rugs or mats on hard floors to reduce slipping and make it easier for your dog to get up from lying down.
- Limit stairs using baby gates if necessary.
- Add ramps to help your dog manage steps around the home/garden or get into the car. And for access to furniture or beds.
- Ensure food and water bowls are easy to reach. Raised bowls can help reduce pressure on the neck and front legs.
- Ensure easy access to toileting areas, free from hazards and steps, and that the surface is non-slip.
- Avoid boisterous play with other dogs and throwing / chasing ball games.
- Trim the fur between the dog's paw pads for improved traction, grip and stability, thus minimizing the risk of slipping.



Your vet practice and supporting pet physio can advise you further on the best approach for your pet's particular needs.

If you have any question about osteoarthritis, be sure to ask your vet or vet nurse for advice



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References: 1. Wright, A. et al. (2022). Identification of canine osteoarthritis using an owner-reported questionnaire and treatment monitoring using functional mobility tests. *The Journal of small animal practice*, 63(8), 609–618. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsap.13500>. 2. Anderson, K. L. et al. (2018). Prevalence, duration and risk factors for appendicular osteoarthritis in a UK dog population under primary veterinary care. *Scientific reports*, 8(1), 5641. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-23940-z>

Krka UK Ltd, Thames House, Waterside Drive, Langley, SL3 6EZ, United Kingdom.
Tel: 020 7164 6156 | Email: info.uk@krka.biz | www.krka.co.uk

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