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## Alternative Therapies for Arthritis

Arthritis is one of the most common and frustrating problems encountered in dogs. It restricts not only our enjoyment of pet ownership, but a dog that cannot run with the pack can rapidly move down the hierarchy and become miserable. It is therefore important to do all we can to help slow the progression of the disease (as progress it will), and not just consider pain relief as the answer.

In fact, just treating with some painkilling drugs can actually promote the speed of degeneration of the joints, and manufacturers are always trying to find ways in which drugs can be used to reduce this possibility. Much of the marketing of products to Vets is based around this issue, something that is not always immediately obvious to the owner of the pet.

The causes of Arthritis are numerous; stresses of competition, injuries, breed deformities, inappropriate diets during growth are just some of the causes. Each of which could be an article in itself. Once it has occurred there is no going back but I am a firm believer in taking a proactive and positive approach to these cases, finding the right treatment that best suits the dog and find that in doing so it is rare a case cannot enjoy a full and happy life.

Arthritis as a term simply means inflammation of a joint, and the inflammation can effect the bone, the joint capsule, or other joint structures. In order to achieve the best success in treating chronic lameness one must define the site and qualify the factors affecting the lameness. Often your Vet will be the best placed to achieve this with X-Rays, MRI in extreme cases, and the experience that comes from assessing many cases.

Don't forget other professionals such as registered Physiotherapists and Chiropractors who can be called in by your Vet to create mobility programmes and alleviate muscle stresses, essential in a proactive approach, as it is all too easy for a dog to avoid movement and the progressive restriction in turn aggravates the problem.

Alternative (I do hate that word – Complementary is much better as we should all be working together to benefit patients) Therapies have a significant place in treatment of Arthritis and can be broadly broken down into 4 categories: Homeopathy, Acupuncture, Herbs and Nutraceuticals.

**Homeopathy** concentrates efforts on stimulating the innate healing ability of the animal and so speeds up the healing process, and can be especially useful in helping cases: when given alongside some of the supplements.

One can only offer pointers to help you in this brief format but I hope the description of the following remedies will show some of the ways in which Homeopaths look at, and hence prescribe for Arthritis.

**PULSATILLA:** The lameness will be worse when the dog first moves off, being eased only by gentle slow motion. The symptoms tend to be worse from warmth (i.e. the summer) and there may be cracking noises from the neck and shoulders on movement if these are affected. As a breed Golden Retrievers seem to commonly benefit from this remedy.

**RHUS TOX:** One of the most commonest remedies for arthritis, the symptoms are always worse for rest, when the dog is noticeably uncomfortable on getting up. With Rhus tox lameness improves with exercise, if not too excessive, but the dog goes lame again the next day. These cases tend to be better for warmth and very much worse from cold and damp, hence are worse in the winter, The areas most likely to be affected are the hips, shoulders and back.

**CAUSTICUM:** Creaky joints, with a tendency for contracture of the tendons, and symptoms improved by local warmth and damp days but worse in clear fine weather. Affected dogs are often better on soft ground rather than roads. The joints most affected are the stifle, wrist and knuckles.

**BRYONIA:** This remedy is most commonly employed in acute cases of arthritis where the joints are hot and swollen and the dog is in severe pain so will not move. All Bryonia symptoms are worse from movement and touch yet improve from hard pressure, so the dog will lie very still on hard floors and on its affected side.

**RUTA GRAV:** A great remedy for back pain, especially the sacroiliac area, and also for repetitive strain injuries. Muscles over the affected area feel sore, and the dog wants to walk around all the time, since remaining in one position is uncomfortable. This is an excellent remedy for tendon injuries. Symptoms are worse for cold and wet weather.

**HECLA LAVA:** This remedy seems to assist in the removal of small fragments of new bone that build up around arthritic joints. It will need to be given over a long period since this is a slow process.

**ANGUSTURA VERA:** This remedy has been found to be of use in hocks where the joints click on movement, the lameness is worse on hard surfaces, and the joint appears stiff with reduced action resulting behind. I find it often helps Labradors and Rottweilers with very straight hocks.

**Acupuncture** is just one part of Traditional Chinese Medicine (which is based largely on use of herbs) involving the insertion of needles (or more recently the application of painless Laser) into specific points on the body to cause a desired healing effect. It is used all over the world to treat a wide range of problems, but most commonly pain, in all species. Often used in combination with other treatments such as Physiotherapy in the West, and herbs in Eastern countries, it is a drug free and safe way of maintaining athletes (such as Greyhounds) in top condition, or mobilizing and strengthening the aged arthritic patient.

Health and disease are perceived differently by Western (drug based) medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Western medicine has a narrow and specific definition of disease as a definite morbid process, often with a characteristic train of symptoms. Traditional Chinese philosophy has, on the other hand, a holistic concept of health. It regards good health as the ideal state in which there is total harmony and equilibrium within the body, and of the body with the environment. When Yin and Yang are in balance the vitalities and spirits will be in a well ordered state. This concept of health agrees with the World Health Organisation's definition of health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity." (WHO 1964)

In illness TCM seeks to restore equilibrium in the body and rebalance the 'Yin and Yang'. Rebalancing the Yin and Yang could mean, in a modern sense, re-establishing normal biological patterns when the equilibrium has been upset by an over-powering agent such as a bacterial infection, or a distortion such as the anatomical changes from Arthritis. TCM stimulates the homeostatic power or 'wisdom' of the body to regain normal balance.

A bit far fetched? Maybe for our minds to grasp, but Veterinary acupuncture has a long history and there is evidence that it was practised successfully as long ago as the Zang and Chow Dynasties of China around 2000 - 3000 BC.

An Acupuncture treatment involves the insertion of fine surgical steel needles into a selection of Acupuncture points appropriate to the problem to be treated. Not all dogs allow this, and so the use of high quality Laser therapy is becoming more common, often with as good, if not better effect.

By law, only qualified vets are allowed to use acupuncture needles on animals. However, if you wish to provide back-up care for your dog, simple training from a qualified Vet will allow you to

perform finger pressure, or acupressure, at home in support of any conventional treatments your dog may be having.

**Herbs** The use of plants to heal - Herbalism - is probably the oldest form of healing still in use today. Today some 80% of the world's population still relies on herbal medicine for the treatment of disease, and even in "developed" nations, many drugs derive originally from herbs. Interestingly, few active agents in drugs have only one effect: and as modern pharmaceutical research seeks to isolate ingredients from herbs to create patentable drugs, they also tend to suffer other unwanted actions or side effects. Herbalists believe that the Nature provided balance of ingredients in herbal medicines work together to counteract any harmful side effects, whilst at the same time retaining the therapeutic benefits. As we understand more of this medical system, this idea is shown to be more and more accurate, and hence there is a modern resurgence of interest in this field. With this interest has come problems, as we have been indoctrinated in the idea that bigger is better, and high doses of some herbs can be toxic. Just enough to heal is needed, and so consulting a qualified practitioner is always a good idea.

The fact that dogs and other animals actively seek out and eat plants that are known to have medical properties as and when they need them (an instinct we seem to have lost) also supports the view that herbalism should have an established and widespread place in orthodox veterinary medicine today.

Examples of Herbs used to treat Arthritis in Dogs include:

**BOSWELLIA**, also known as boswellin or "Indian frankincense" comes from the *Boswellia serrata* tree that grows in the dry hills of India. For centuries, traditional Indian healers have taken advantage of the anti-inflammatory properties of the tree bark's gummy resin, called salai guggal. Modern preparations made from a purified extract of this resin and packaged in pill or cream form are used to reduce inflammation associated with osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Unlike conventional NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) *Boswellia* doesn't seem to cause stomach irritation.

**TUMERIC** is a herb I am finding very useful for Arthritis cases. Tumeric contains Curcumin, a compound isolated from the rhizome of the plant *Curcuma longa* that has traditionally been used for pain and wound-healing. Recent studies have shown that curcumin ameliorates multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, and inflammatory bowel disease in human or animal models.

The beneficial effects of Herbs are traditionally achieved through dietary consumption at low levels for long periods of time, the use of them at higher doses for therapeutic purposes needs caution and I would recommend seeking the advice of an holistic Vet

**Nutraceuticals** The North American Veterinary Nutraceutical Council defines Nutraceutical products as "substances produced in a purified or extracted form that are administered orally to provide or stimulate production of raw materials required for normal bodily functions" (1). This basically means dietary supplements, which assist the body in its return to normality following disease, or in maintenance of normality in stress situations such as athletic exercise. My interest was sparked some 14+ years ago following my attending a medical conference where a paper showed 42 or 43% of cases of Asthma, Eczema, & IBS responded positively to a "Stone Age" diet. I began looking closely at problems with Canine, Feline and Equine nutrition as a possible cause of disease seen in my patients.

For Arthritis sufferers the two main types of product to consider include Mineral supplements and the Glucosamine/Chondroitin/Type-2 Collagen products

**MINERALS:** The more people learn about nutrition, the more they appreciate the critical importance of minerals, and especially trace minerals, as the cornerstone of any nutritional

supplementation programme. Products combining trace and major minerals really revolutionised my approach to spinal and degenerative bone problems of age. I have found quite a few cases of arthritic pain respond to these alone which begs the question – does routine neutering induce an osteoporosis type state in susceptible dogs? More research is needed on this I would suggest.

Minerals are arguably the forgotten dietary need. Often deficiencies are neglected whilst vitamins are taken in plenty. Most of the world's food is thought to be mineral deficient when produced by intensive farming methods. Lacking vitamins, the system can make some use of minerals, but lacking minerals, vitamins are useless. I have found them useful in cancer and skin disease, as well as using them for Musculo-skeletal and Arthritis cases. I have even found unstable diabetics can improve with care on Chromium and Vanadium supplements, and the required insulin dose may even be reduced.

**GLUCOSAMINE/CHONDROITIN/TPYE-2 COLLAGEN:** Perhaps the most well known products widely marketed for both humans and pets in various forms, and combinations with other products. Every product seems to promise fantastic results which always worries me as there are no magic bullets. However, in many cases they do bring benefits to patients. It is worth mentioning here that there is also the possibility of using Shark Cartilage supplements, but generally these have not been so popular due to environmental and ethical considerations, and the development of poultry sourced type 2 Collagen supplements are arguably better therapeutically. It is probably best to consider these supplements individually:

**Glucosamine.** This naturally occurring substance, found in high concentrations in joint structures, is a rate-limiting step in glycosaminoglycan (GAG) synthesis and joint cartilage repair. Thus, when given as a supplement it is said to stimulate the manufacture of cartilage components and the incorporation of sulphur into cartilage, thereby producing the substances necessary for proper joint function and for stimulating joint repair (as far as this is possible); This therefore addresses the cause rather than suppressing symptoms.

**Chondroitin sulphate.** These are long chain polymers, which are the major GAGs found in cartilage. Oral administration of this as a supplement has been found to have similar results to Glucosamine. It is said to be an effective and direct inhibitor of degradative enzyme activity and long term trials have shown supplementation to slow the progression of Osteoarthritis, to improve joint mobility, reduce pain and radiographic evidence of reversal has been seen. This is often given in combination with Glucosamine.

**Type 2 Collagen.** This is a more recent player in this field, superseding the Shark cartilage on environmental grounds (it is derived from chicken carcasses) and bioavailability (it is significantly better absorbed). In people with rheumatoid arthritis there is selective destruction of type 2 collagen via an immunological response. Supplementation with type 2 Collagen has been shown to affect the immune response, stopping the body attacking it's own collagen type 2, causing a proliferation of T-suppressor cells and ultimately decreasing the number of inflammatory cytokines that are partly responsible for the inflammatory reaction in arthritis. Whether this works exactly the same way in dogs, which rarely get rheumatoid arthritis but whose joint degeneration does in some ways have similarities, is not established adequately, but type 2 collagen does seem in my experience to work extremely well. It is also often combined with Glucosamine and Chondroitin.

A word of caution as many owners seek out and use heavily marketed products that have an interest in selling quantities. Too much can very occasionally set off underlying disease processes such a diabetes and so make sure your dog is not suffering from anything else before starting dietary supplementation.

### **In Summary**

There are many products, some of which I have not been able to mention here, that can help Arthritis cases to have a relatively normal life. It is a case of being pro-active in seeking out what is best for your dog in a logical way. Few cases cannot be helped by something, and the search can

be helped by professional advice on the exact nature of the problem, and possible solutions best indicated. Always consult your vet when starting a product to ensure there are no clashes with other medication and so the dose rates for your dog can be properly advised.

### **Some Useful links**

[www.bahvs.com](http://www.bahvs.com) for a list of Homeopathic vets

[www.abva.co.uk](http://www.abva.co.uk) for a list of Vets practicing Acupuncture

[www.acpat.org.uk](http://www.acpat.org.uk) for a list of qualified Animal Physiotherapists

[www.mctimoney-chiropractic.org](http://www.mctimoney-chiropractic.org) for Chiropractors treating Animals