



ARTHRITIS IN DOGS AND CATS

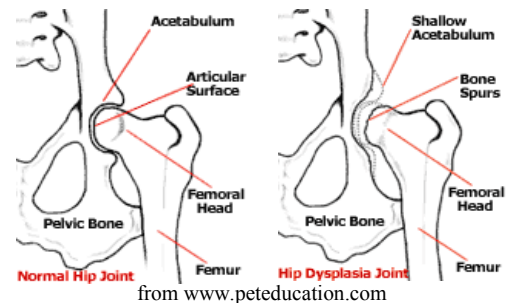
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Arthritis results from inflammation in the joints and is generally divided into two types - degenerative and inflammatory - according to the source of that irritation.

Degenerative Joint Disease (osteoarthritis) results from destruction of the cartilage that protects the bones that make up the joint. Cartilage destruction can be the result of normal stress on abnormal joints or abnormal stress on normal joints. Hip dysplasia, a malformation of the hip sockets, is one example of normal stress on normal joints. Degenerative joint disease can be further subdivided into primary disease for which no known cause is evident and secondary disease for which a cause can be pinpointed.

Among the causes of secondary degenerative joint disease are:

- Hip dysplasia
- Patella luxation (loose kneecaps)
- Osteochondritis dissecans (OCD, the development of cartilage “flaps” in the joints when bone development is disturbed)
- Trauma
- Ruptured cruciate (knee) ligaments



Secondary degenerative joint disease can sometimes be prevented or halted by surgical repair of the joint before arthritis progresses. Degenerative arthritis may not manifest until the dog has had years of abnormal stress. Since cartilage has no nerves, the damage can progress with no outward signs until the joint is severely compromised and the lubricating fluid has thinned and lost its ability to protect the bone surfaces.

Inflammatory Joint Disease can be caused by infection or by underlying immune-mediated diseases. Inflammatory arthritis usually affects multiple joints and is accompanied by signs of systemic illness including fever, anorexia, and all-over stiffness. Again, this type of arthritis is subdivided into infectious and immune-mediated categories.

Infectious joint disease can be caused by:

- Bacteria
- Tick-borne diseases such as Lyme Disease or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever
- Fungal infections



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Immune-mediated arthritis is caused by underlying weakness in the immune system and can be hereditary. Rheumatoid arthritis, a deforming type of immune-mediated arthritis, is rare in dogs. Systemic lupus and an idiopathic (unidentified) immune-related arthritis both can cause nondestructive joint infections. Because infectious joint disease and immune-mediated joint disease call for different treatment protocols, diagnosis must be accurate. The immuno-suppressive drugs used to treat the immune-mediated disease may allow the infectious type of disease to thrive.

Signs of Arthritis:

- Reluctance to walk, climb stairs, jump or play
- Limping
- Lagging behind on walks
- Difficulty rising from a resting position
- Yelping in pain when touched
- A personality change resisting touch

Treatment

Degenerative joint disease can sometimes be halted or prevented by surgery when x-rays indicate joint malformations. If surgery is not indicated or advisable, relief can be achieved with painkillers, exercise, rest, and diet. However, even over-the-counter painkillers should not be used without the advice of a veterinarian.