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Born and raised in Greensboro, NC, Dr. Catherine Smith received her BS in Biology from Winthrop University in Rock Hill, SC and continued to go south to obtain her Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine from Auburn University in Alabama in 2015.

After graduation, Dr. Smith was thrilled to return to Greensboro to start her veterinary career. She currently shares her home with her rescued fur babies, a Shepherd/Husky mix, Marley and a Golden mix, Charley who love to have play dates with her parents' Lab/ Great Dane mix, Haley. Dr. Smith has been involved with several rescue organizations, including Animal Rescue and Foster Program and hopes to get involved in the community more as time allows through her church and rescue groups. Dr. Smith is also a member of Christian Veterinary Missions and has had the opportunity to participate in veterinary mission trips to Mexico and Mongolia. Dr. Smith enjoys being active and loves to travel whether it is to the beach or across the world to Australia.

Professionally, her interests vary across the field of veterinary medicine but she really enjoys the relational aspect of general practice. Dr. Smith feels blessed to practice veterinary medicine and is excited to fulfill a calling she has had since she was in elementary school. To be entrusted with a pet's well-being is a great honor and privilege.

ARTHRITIS IN VETERINARY MEDICINE: Does your pet seem to be slowing down?

What Is Arthritis?

Osteoarthritis, more commonly referred to as "Arthritis", is estimated to be present in one out of five adult dogs. Arthritis can occur in any joint but it most commonly affects the hip, elbow, shoulder, knee/stifle, wrist/carpus, ankle/hock, or the intervertebral joints that make up the spine. This happens when the cartilage that makes up a joint deteriorates from either trauma/injury, congenital abnormality or more commonly through wear and tear during the aging process. In a healthy joint, the cartilage acts as a shock absorber as force is exerted between bones and the joint. With deterioration, there is a decrease in shock absorption causing our pets to suffer from inflammation and joint pain.

What Are the Clinical Signs of Arthritis?

There are a number of symptoms that are attributed to arthritis that may be misinterpreted as signs of simple aging in our pets. Changes in your adult pet's behavior due to arthritis could be indicated by stiffness that is most commonly present in the morning, difficulty getting up from a restful position, difficulty going up or down stairs, acting more withdrawn from the family, obsessively licking at a single joint, or vocalizing when you touch a sore area.

What Can You Do to Help Alleviate Your Pet's Arthritis?

Unfortunately, once the process of cartilage deterioration occurs in a joint there is very little that can be done to repair the damaged tissue. However, there are a number of things that can be done to alleviate the pain and inflammation that is associated with osteoarthritis. Ultimately, the most effective treatment includes a combination therapy involving

a change in lifestyle, joint supplements, and anti-inflammatory medications. A very important and often forgotten feature of this therapy is maintaining an ideal weight for your pet. A pet that has arthritis and is overweight experiences an excess amount of force through their damaged joint. This alone can generate a significant amount of pain and start an inflammatory process in the body. At an ideal weight, pain can be significantly decreased and life expectancy can be increased. A great diet for a pet with arthritis is one that consists of high levels of omega-3 fatty acids. This ingredient decreases inflammation and slows the breakdown of cartilage. Daily exercise that consists of low-impact movements such as swimming is extremely beneficial in alleviating pain due to arthritis.

Additional therapies for arthritis include daily supplements such as glucosamine chondroitin, and fatty acids, as well as, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication (NSAID). Often with a good diet, supplementation and maintaining an ideal weight, the use of anti-inflammatories may not be indicated. However, in many cases these medications are needed to decrease the clinical signs of arthritis. When NSAIDs are indicated it is also very important to ensure the liver and the kidneys can properly metabolize this medication. This is accomplished by checking your pet's blood work every six months. An important reminder is that human NSAIDs are not a substitute for treating your pet's arthritis as this can cause renal failure.

Alternative Therapies That Aid in Alleviating Pain

There are several alternative therapies that can be added to your pet's arthritis treatment regimen. These include acupuncture and cold laser therapy. Acupuncture is a specific therapy that should be completed by a licensed veterinary acupuncturist that understands the pathophysiology of your pet's disease as well as their anatomy. Cold laser therapy is a modern and effective approach in alleviating arthritis pain. Cold laser therapy decreases inflammation and promotes tissue healing. These alternative therapies are not sufficient by themselves and should always be used in conjunction with a standard treatment plan.

Let's Not Forget About Our Feline Friends

Cats are very good about hiding their ailments, especially when they are suffering from arthritis. Your cat may have arthritis if he is no longer willing to jump up onto items, or when jumping down, he is not willing to jump directly onto the floor. If your cat suffers from arthritis, you may want to evaluate your cat's litter box. A litter box that contains elevated sides may make it difficult for your cat to enter and exit the box thus causing them to urinate or defecate outside of their litter box. Unfortunately, there are no FDA approved medications for chronic pain in cats as there are for dogs, but there are other options that can be discussed with your veterinarian. Furthermore, the same principles of prevention and maintenance apply to cats with respect to maintaining an ideal body weight, and changing their diet to include essential fatty acids and glucosamine chondroitin to decrease pain associated with the presence of arthritis.

Slowing Down and Your Pet's Quality of Life

Ultimately, arthritis is a very common disease that occurs in a large percentage of our senior pets to some degree. It is important to be mindful of our pet's aging process and their overall quality of life. If you find your pet slowing down, please consult a veterinarian to discuss if arthritis may be present.