

# 5 Ways To Ease Pet Arthritis (Part I)

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As discussed [recently](#), about 30% of cats and dogs are affected with arthritis. Let's discuss how we can help them. Please remember, arthritis cannot be assumed, it has to be proven (X-rays are one good way). Giving anti-inflammatory drugs to your pet just because somebody "thinks" (s)he is affected by arthritis is just not appropriate. There is no cure for arthritis, but it can be controlled. Let's go over five ways to ease the pain...

### 1. Weight loss or weight control

Carrying extra weight is especially tough on joints with arthritis. Losing weight is then critical. Your family vet can help your pet lose weight (with weight-loss food), or maintain the weight (with a "light" diet). One classic research study showed that "in overweight dogs, weight loss alone may improve lameness".

It is important to remember that the front legs support 60% of the weight, whereas back legs carry 40%. Therefore, weight loss is even more important with arthritis in the front legs (shoulder, elbow or wrist).

### 2. "Arthritis" diet

Once your pet has an ideal weight, you can switch to an arthritis diet. These diets are typically enriched in glucosamine, antioxidants (such as vitamins C and E) and omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil). Such diets are perfectly balanced, i.e. they have all the necessary nutrients, vitamins and minerals, so they can be fed for life. However they are not appropriate for a growing pet, so they should be used in adults only.

### 3. Joint supplements

Because there is never enough glucosamine in any pet food, it is important to give a supplement with glucosamine by mouth. They typically also contain chondroitin sulfate, and sometimes a supplement called MSM. Other supplements can be injected by your family

vet.

### 4. Controlled exercise

Lack of activity leads to muscle loss and a decreased range of motion in the joints.

Despite the discomfort, it is very important to continue exercising. Generally, slow leash walks are ideal. You can progressively increase their duration. For example, start with 5 minutes 2-3 times daily for one week, then increase that by 5 minutes each week. Such walks help keep muscles strong and joints flexible.

Supervised swimming is another great way of providing low impact exercise, as long as your dog doesn't struggle to get into or out of the water. Encouraging exercise in a cat can be challenging, but some owners are able to train their cat to walk on a leash!

### 5. Physical therapy (PT)

Done at home or at a physical therapy center, PT can make a dramatic difference. Most doggie physical therapists (officially called rehabilitation practitioners) will perform some exercises that can only be done at their facility, such as walking in an underwater treadmill, and will show you exercises to do at home. PT starts with a "warm up" and ends with a "cool down."

If you have ever needed PT for yourself, you may appreciate how dramatic a difference it can make in your pet's life. I have personally seen rehab practitioners perform small miracles on some patients!

In our next installment, we will discuss 5 more ways to help cats and dogs plagued with arthritis.

[Now, check out part 2 here >>](#)

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*