

ANIMAL Physiotherapy Services

Arthritis Physiotherapy Information Sheet

Animals can suffer from arthritis just as people can and referral to physiotherapy means your pet will receive the same standard of care that any other member of your family would receive in a human hospital.

This is because it takes 8 years to qualify as an Animal Physiotherapist, and our team is one of the most qualified and experienced in the world in working with small animals who need physiotherapy—Helen teaches Canine Physiotherapy courses overseas each year and recently wrote a textbook chapter on the subject. If you're anything like we are with our own pets, you'll have lots of questions about your pet's care, so please read the following and feel welcome to contact us should you have any further questions. (Email Helen Nicholson on info@k9physio.com or phone (02) 4739 4557)

Arthritis requires a multifaceted treatment approach, with the aim of reducing pain; maximising comfortable range of motion; promoting repair of damaged tissue where possible; and improving balance, co-ordination and strength to maximise quality of life.



Research shows that reducing weight by 11-18% significantly improves arthritic lameness, but it's hard to lose weight when it hurts to move! Animal physios help reduce weight through controlled exercise programs that address the physical restrictions of the individual patient. A typical cardio-vascular program may be inadequate to an arthritis patient's needs, as they may also require their joint-supporting muscles to be strengthened and their affected joints gently mobilised to increase their ability to comfortably exercise.

Correctly done, weight-bearing exercise also helps stimulate cartilage and joint nutrition. Many physiotherapy exercises therefore aim to improve the delivery of glucosamine and chondroitin, whilst protecting the joint from overload. Physiotherapists design exercises to increase the strength of the muscles that support the joints, improving the balance between these and the muscles that move the joints, which has been shown in people to reduce pain and improve function. Specific exercises to improve balance and co-ordination also help the patient learn when and how much to contract their muscles to protect their joints from injury.



The appropriate use of warmth or cold can also be very beneficial to arthritic patients and animal physios have been carefully trained in the safe, effective use of these modalities. Additionally, special machines such as TENS units or muscle stimulators can be safely employed by your animal physio to relieve pain or improve muscle strength.

Massage can be very beneficial to arthritis patients, but it must be done gently and to the right body parts. Properly done, it can relieve pain, improve circulation and prevent delayed onset muscle soreness after activity (that feeling of "muscles you never knew you had" which in turn leads to stiffness).



Additionally, physiotherapists are well trained in movement analysis and in suggesting alternate ways of performing tasks to reduce pain and strain for owner and pet alike. Sometimes an orthotic or aide can also be used to make movement more comfortable.

Research shows that it is vital that physiotherapy is commenced as soon after diagnosis as possible, and that the exercises are performed correctly and frequently enough to have the desired effect. Depending on the severity of your pet's condition, you may need to initially do between one and three batches of Physiotherapy "homework" a day to ensure the best possible results—whilst physio can't cure arthritis, it can certainly improve comfort and quality of life when done correctly.

But most importantly, researchers recommend maintaining the improvements made by physiotherapy through once or twice-weekly exercises for the duration of the animal's life, but don't panic! Five or 10 minutes incorporated into your daily interactions with your pet (for example, some balance exercises for food rewards at dinner time) is usually all it takes, and you will therefore be given a "maintenance homework plan" to work on upon discharge from regular physiotherapy appointments.

Wishing your pet comfort and happiness.