

# Willowbark Newsletter

## Does your dog have arthritis?

Issue 2, August 2014



This is the second of three articles on canine arthritis.

We focus on weight management, diet and exercise regimes.

### Why is my dog's weight important?

Your dog's weight is extremely important especially if they are showing signs of arthritis or is a breed that is prone to arthritis. This is because carrying extra weight puts excessive pressure on their joints. Having your pet at his or her ideal body condition not only reduces joint wear and tear but also helps reduce pain and improve mobility. It is therefore one of the most important things you can do for your arthritic pet.

Your pet's ideal or **target weight** is based on his or her body condition, rather than their breed. You can either ask your vet or vet nurse to assess this or alternatively you may find the link below helpful.

<http://www.royalcanin.co.nz/products/products/dog-products/dog-s-body-condition/dog-body-condition>

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## If it's time for a diet:

- If you don't want to change your pet's diet straight away, you could start by cutting out treats and feeding the recommended amount for their **target weight** (see the back of the food pack).
- Measuring out your dog's daily allowance in the morning can really help – then anyone can feed them during the day without giving too much.
- Feeding **weight loss or reduced calorie food** (e.g. Hills R/D, Royal Canin Obesity and Hills Metabolic) is the most effective way to lose those unwanted kilos – whilst both diet and exercise are important, diet plays a bigger role in canine weight loss.

These foods are complete, balanced and lower in calories but higher in fibre and protein so your pet will still feel full. For weight loss, you do need to be strict and follow the feeding guidelines on the pack. Remember to feed for your dogs **target weight**, not his/her current weight. Although diet foods vary, we should aim for a safe weight loss of about 5% a month – a monthly 'weigh-in' will allow you to track progress and adjust food/exercise as needed.

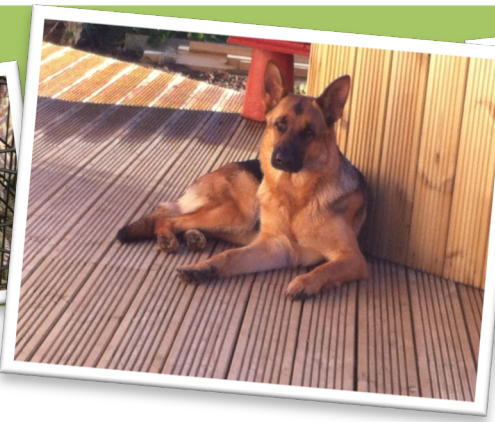
- Specific **Joint foods** (e.g. Hills J/D) are available and are an excellent way of helping dogs with sore joints.

These are also complete, balance foods but focus more on joint health. They're formulated to nourish the cartilage and help to maintain a healthy bodyweight. It's beneficial and recommended to lose the excess weight with weight loss foods prior to using joint foods.

### Some quick tips for weight loss:

1. **Cut down on treats** – dogs don't mind the size of the treat so try quartering those chews
2. **Change to low calorie treats** – most dogs like crunchy veg or even ice cubes! If not, try using their normal food as a treat
3. **Brush their teeth** – rather than rely on calorific dental chews
4. **Exercise regularly** – build up slowly if your dog is not used to it
5. **Weight loss diets** – they really do work
6. **Measure out their food daily** – it's surprising how easy it is to overfeed, especially when they beg!





## Walkies!

### Did you know?

- It is estimated that 50% of our pet population is overweight!
- Significantly cutting down on a dog's normal food can result in nutrient deficiencies, hunger and scavenging
- Dogs can have underactive thyroids making weight loss difficult-see your vet if concerned
- Certain breeds (e.g. labs) are prone to weight problems and arthritis
- It's much easier to prevent weight gain than to lose it
- Lameness, hobbling and limping are all symptoms of pain. Dogs don't always vocalise when in pain!

Most dogs love to go out for a walk, which is great because regular exercise does help to keep them fit and healthy. If your dog is overweight, it's a good idea to build up the exercise over time alongside a weight loss diet (see above).

As dogs get a bit older and/or have joint problems, try to avoid overdoing their exercise. There are no hard and fast rules for walk duration, because individuals and problems vary but you will get the feel for what your dog can do over time. A few shorter walks tend to be better tolerated than one long walk (e.g. two or three 15 minute walks rather than a 45 minute walk). Jumping, sudden turns and sustained running tend to put more stress on the joints and make them sore.

If your dog does seem sore after their walk, they could do with taking it easy for a day or two to let everything calm down.

Finally, swimming or hydrotherapy are great forms of exercise for dogs that are overweight or have joint problems because it uses a lot of calories and is very low impact.

### In the next edition...

We look at prescription medications for canine arthritis

