

# *Willowbark Newsletter*

## Does your dog have arthritis?

Issue 3, September 2014



This is the third of three articles on canine arthritis.

This time we focus on medications designed for arthritic dogs.

### When are medications needed?

As I'm sure you're all aware, no two dogs are alike – the same can be said for cases of arthritis. As vets, we generally look to start medications for arthritis when your pet's quality of life is being affected by the discomfort (e.g. reluctant to walk, pain on rising etc).

Dogs that are diagnosed with arthritis generally have sore joints, which may be noticed at home, picked up during physical examination or diagnosed/confirmed with x-rays. Initially, a trial on good quality joint supplements and joint foods (please see previous newsletters for discussion on these) may be useful if the lameness or pain is not too bad. If this does not significantly improve the problem however, medications are typically introduced to alleviate the discomfort. The nature of the medication will vary from case to case and dog to dog.

It is usually a good idea to continue the use of the supplements and joint foods where possible because they should allow less of the medications to be used in the long run.

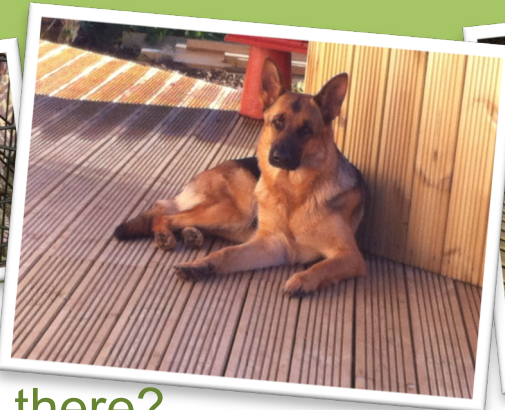


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## What medicines are there?

The medicines that are regularly used are in the group known as NSAIDs (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs). These come as tablets, liquids and injections and act on the inflamed tissues surrounding the joints to reduce swelling, inflammation and pain.

Tablets that are commonly used include Rimadyl, Metacam, Trocoxil, and Previcox and are mostly palatable to make dosing easier. They vary from daily dosing (Rimadyl, Metacam, Previcox) to monthly dosing (Trocoxil). A small percentage of patients will show side effects from NSAIDs, which are typically vomiting, diarrhoea and loss of appetite.

Liquid forms of the same drugs (like Metacam and Loxicom) can mean easier daily dosing for some patients where tableting is difficult. Side effects are similar to tablet forms.

Injectable drugs like Cartrophen are usually given at your vets and generally need repeating periodically (frequency will be determined by your vet).

They all generally work very well and most dogs are very well catered for, even the fussiest! They can all be used alongside Hills J/D food and joint supplements like Synoquin.

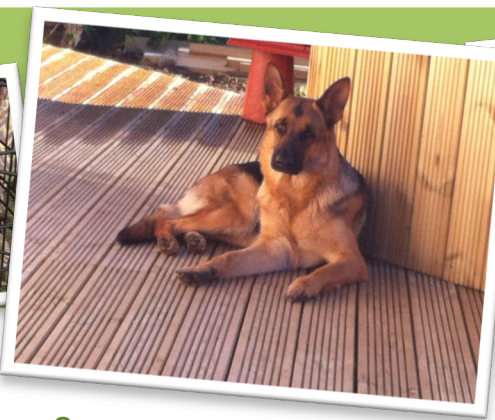
More serious side effects include kidney damage or a worsening of a pre-existing kidney problem, so care should be taken

Unless your vet directs you, please don't be tempted to give human medications because they are often inappropriate or even dangerous. For those that can be used, the dog dose is likely to be much less.

### Medication Safety:

1. **Always give with food** – this helps to prevent upset stomachs
2. **Dose carefully** – Stick to the recommended doses, please don't be tempted to increase the dose without talking to your vet.
3. **Keep plenty of water available** – keep your pet well hydrated to help protect their kidneys.
4. **Missed a dose?** – don't be tempted to double up the dose, just start again from the next dose.
5. **If your dog has an upset stomach** – if persistent, please discontinue the medication and contact your vet.





## Worried about giving medicines?

Many people worry about giving medications long term but NSAIDs are generally well tolerated by most dogs and their use improves quality of life. Your vet should have explained the pros and cons of using medications.

Things to bear in mind:

- Safety margins are generally high
- Regular checkups as required by your vet (including laboratory tests for kidneys & liver)
- Use supplements as well to help reduce the amount of medication
- Keep to the correct dose and dose accurately
- Watch out for side-effects (vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite) – Call your vet if concerned
- May seem to become “less effective” but usually due to a worsening problem

## Arthritis in a nutshell

Getting older is a fact of life and does mean that pets are more prone to problems. Arthritis is one of the most common problems affecting older dogs and unfortunately, once a joint starts to degenerate and is arthritic, the joint cannot be returned to normal.

However, there is plenty that you can do to help your aging pet's sore joints. If, as pet owners, you keep an eye out for the early signs of joint problems, especially in predisposed breeds, there is a good chance of slowing its progress and preserving the healthy joint for longer.

The options for dogs with arthritis, as discussed previously, range from weight loss, joint supplements and diets through to various medications for pain relief. Based on an examination, your vet will be able to tell you the best course of action for your pet, which may include one or more of the above.

Hopefully this series of newsletters has helped you become more familiar with this very common problem and, in turn, helps preserve you dog's good quality of life for longer.

In the next edition...

Keeping safe over the holidays and Christmas.

