

As seen in

THE POST

News & Entertainment Magazine

community | news | letters | living | sports | entertainment | opinion

## Maintaining joint health in athletic dogs

ELIZABETH BORGMANN  
special to the post

Last week we talked about the importance of gradually conditioning your dog for summer activities. This week we'll discuss how to maximize the health of the joints in active dogs and maximize the mobility of older dogs.

If your dog is highly active, you need to be proactive in joint care.

If your dog is older, you need to provide as much joint comfort and mobility as possible. Many of the same items can be used in both cases.

The most commonly known compounds for joint support are glucosamine, chondroitin and MSM.

The verdict is still out on how effective these are in people and pets. However, many pets have experienced increased comfort when these are added to the diet.

Many commercial diets have preventive levels of glucosamine. But don't be fooled. They do not have therapeutic levels of glucosamine.

That means they are good for the young active dog but are not enough for the older arthritic pet.

Adding glucosamine at therapeutic levels would make commercial diets very expensive. Food companies don't want to scare away consumers with high prices.

For foods with therapeutic glucosamine levels, see your veteri-

narian. Omega 3 fatty acids are very beneficial for joint health (as well as brain function and skin). You need the right Omega 3s and in adequate amounts to be effective. The doses are surprisingly high.

Green-lipped mussel extract is receiving a lot of interest. It's a unique Omega 3 fatty acid that is very effective for arthritic pets.

There are several exceptional prescription diets available through your veterinarian if your pet is very active or has a history of arthritis.

The diets can be used to minimize the effect of hard work and activity. In fact, at least four police forces in the Lower Mainland have their dogs on these diets.

Be careful when giving human nutraceuticals (such as glucosamine) to your pet. The nutraceutical industry is not strictly regulated in North America and tests have shown that products may contain between 30 and 150 per cent of the amount stated on the bottle. Buyer beware!

The above nutraceuticals are great for the active dog but the dog with arthritis needs these and more.

For starters, the older arthritic dog should be kept in lean body condition. The joints don't need to carry extra weight.

Exercise is important. The muscles support the joints. Non-weight bearing exercise, such as swimming, is excellent. Being active also helps with the mental well-being of the pet.

Cartrophen injections can help a dog greatly. Cartrophen is injected under the skin and is taken up by affected joints. It works in several ways to increase joint-fluid formation.

A decrease in joint fluid volume is part of the reason we become more 'creaky' as we get older.

Anti-inflammatory drugs are the last step to be added to the arthritic pet's treatment.

There are several very effective medications available. Some dogs respond better to one than the other.

If your pet is on an anti-inflammatory drug, be very careful not to combine these medications with any others unless you have discussed this with your veterinarian.

If you are giving your pet any supplements when they are on anti-inflammatories, review them with your veterinarian.

Some human supplements contain willow bark and other ingredients that should not be combined with anti-inflammatory medications.

If you have a sporting dog, are very active in the outdoors, or have concerns about joint stress or arthritis in your dog, you need to discuss this with your veterinarian. They can work with you to develop a plan for preventive health.

*Next time, we'll discuss weight loss in dogs and cats. Reducing excess weight reduces stress on the joints and increases mobility. Add that to a great many other health benefits of a proper body weight!*