

# Understanding Joint Disease in Dogs and Cats

Joint disease affects pets of all ages and breeds, and it is one of the leading causes of pain and reduced mobility in companion animals.

Some conditions are inherited, while others develop from injury, obesity, or age-related wear and tear. Early recognition and management can greatly improve comfort, slow disease progression, and preserve quality of life.

# Common Causes and Predispositions

## 1 DEVELOPMENTAL CONDITIONS



### OR HEREDITARY CONDITIONS

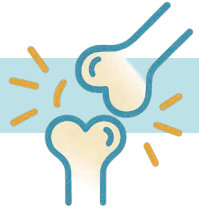
Certain breeds are genetically predisposed to joint problems due to abnormal joint formation or misalignment, which can lead to early-onset arthritis. Common examples include:

- **Hip Dysplasia:** Common in large breeds such as Golden Retrievers, Labradors, German Shepherds, Rottweilers, Chows, and Akitas.
- **Elbow Dysplasia:** Frequently seen in growing large-breed dogs including Golden Retrievers, Labradors, German Shepherds, Rottweilers, Chows, Akitas, and Great Danes.
- **Patellar Luxation:** More common in small breeds such as Poodles, Pugs, French Bulldogs, Pomeranians, and Shih Tzus.



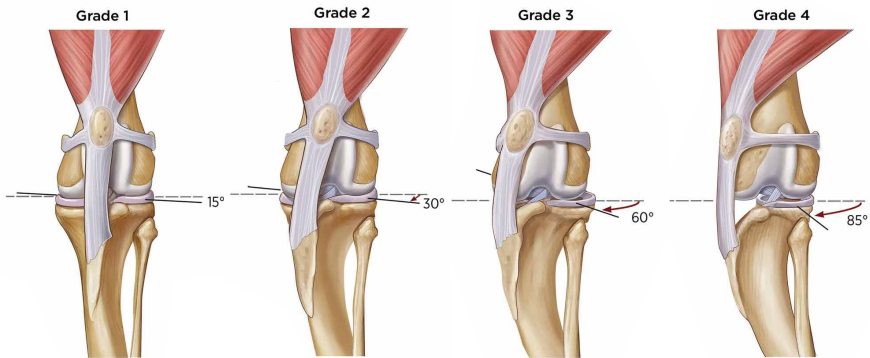
This predisposition often arises from unchecked breeding practices, indicating poor breeding standards commonly associated with illegal or backyard breeding.

# 2 OSTEOARTHRITIS

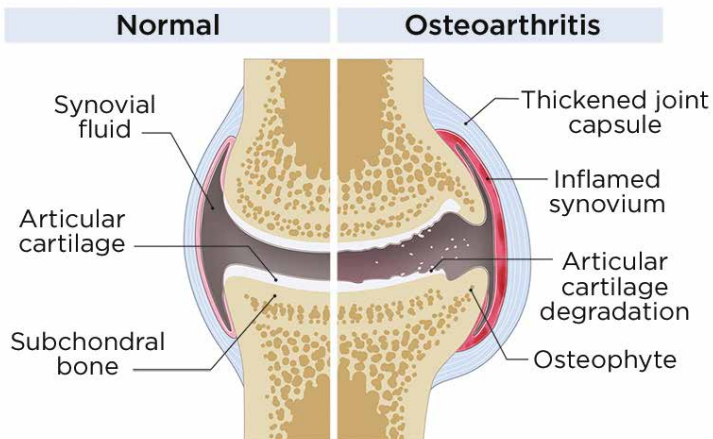


## DEGENERATIVE JOINT DISEASE

Occurs due to aging, chronic instability, or previous trauma. It is a progressive and irreversible condition, but with proper management, pain and inflammation can be minimized and function maintained.



### Synovial Joint



## 3 SECONDARY CAUSES

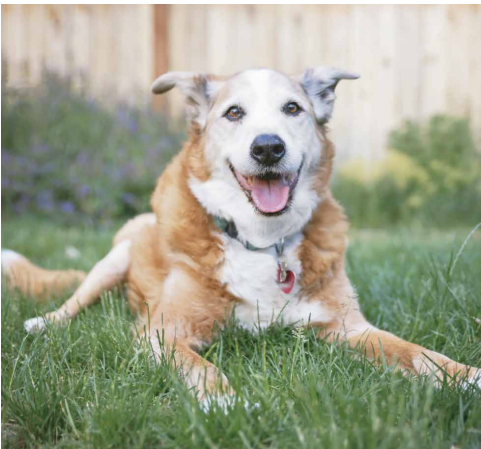


Obesity, poor nutrition, over-exercise in young dogs, and untreated injuries can all accelerate joint wear and tear.

### RECOGNISING THE SIGNS

- Stiffness after rest or reluctance to jump, climb stairs, or play.
- Limping or favouring one leg.
- “Bunny hopping” gait in small breeds (suggestive of patellar luxation).
- Difficulty rising or lying down.
- Decreased interest in walks or play.
- Muscle loss over hips or thighs.
- Behavioural changes or unexpected aggression, anxiety (pain is not a happy feeling!)

Untreated joint pain often leads to chronic inflammation and irreversible cartilage damage.



Poor coat condition in cats  
(self grooming becomes difficult)



## WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR VET VISIT

Your veterinarian will begin with a detailed orthopaedic examination and gait assessment to check for pain, instability, or reduced range of motion. Depending on findings, X-rays (radiographs) may be taken to evaluate joint shape, alignment, and the degree of degeneration. In some cases, advanced imaging (CT or MRI) is recommended for surgical planning, and blood tests may be performed to rule out metabolic or infectious causes of lameness.

Based on the results, your vet will create a pain-scoring and individualised management plan, including diet and supplement recommendations, and schedule regular rechecks to monitor progress and adjust treatment as needed.





# EVIDENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT

## 1. WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Maintaining an ideal body weight is the single most effective way to reduce joint stress.

- Use a **Body Condition Score (BCS)** chart to monitor progress.
- Controlled calorie intake and regular, gentle exercise (e.g. leash walks).

## 2. EXERCISE AND PHYSIOTHERAPY

- Low-impact, regular exercise improves joint lubrication and muscle tone.
- Avoid sudden, intense activity or high jumps.
- Physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, and laser therapy can significantly aid mobility.

## 3. NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT

- **Omega-3 fatty acids (EPA/DHA)**: anti-inflammatory properties.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin sulfate**: supports cartilage metabolism.
- **Green-Lipped Mussel Extract**
- **Hyaluronic Acid, Collagen, Curcumin**: additional supportive supplements.

Note: Not all supplements are equal; always use **veterinary-grade formulations** with proven dosages and studies supporting efficacy.

## 4. MEDICAL MANAGEMENT

- **Disease-modifying osteoarthritis drugs (Pentosan injections):** improves cartilage health and synovial fluid quality.
- **NSAIDs (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs) or other appropriate pain relief:** to reduce pain and inflammation under veterinary supervision.
- **Adjunct therapies:** acupuncture, TENS, physiotherapy or Bowen therapy for chronic cases.

## 5. SURGICAL OPTIONS

For advanced or congenital issues (like hip replacement, femoral head ostectomy FHO, patellar realignment, cruciate ligament repair), surgical correction may restore function and prevent further deterioration.





## HOME MANAGEMENT

- Provide non-slip flooring and orthopaedic bedding.
  - Use raised food and water bowls to reduce joint strain
- Keep exercise consistent and moderate; regular movement helps prevent joint stiffness.
- Schedule regular vet check-ups for monitoring.

# Myth vs. Fact

## MYTH BUSTING SOME COMMON INACCURACIES



“Joint supplements work for every pet.”



“My dog will get fat if I restrict exercise.”



“Surgery is a last resort.”



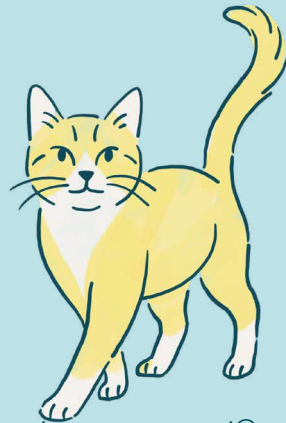
Supplements vary greatly; only evidence-based, medical grade products should be used.



Controlled exercise and proper diet maintain weight and improve fitness without overloading joints.



Early surgical intervention in some cases (like patellar luxation) can prevent lifelong pain and arthritis.





## SUMMARY CHECKLIST

### FOR PET PARENTS

- Keep your pet lean and fit.
- Exercise regularly but gently.
- Use prescribed supplements consistently.
- Follow pain management protocols strictly.
- Reassess every 3—6 months, or sooner if mobility declines.



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