**Arthritis Management**

As dogs and cats get older their joints start to degenerate, just like ours. The more proper term for “arthritis” is actually *Degenerative Joint Disease*. Even though it seems our pets “slow down” as they get older, they are actually showing signs of pain and discomfort due to this disease. Degenerative Joint Disease also affects younger pets that may have another underlying orthopedic problem, such as knee caps that pop in and out of place, or a history of a torn cruciate ligament or other old injury.

Diagnosing Degenerative Joint Disease:

Joint disease can be diagnosed by a combination of learning about the pet’s history, physical exam, and x-rays.

A common complaint from the owner is that the pet is “slowing down”, having difficulty getting up in the morning, having difficulty lying down, or that the pet is becoming more aggressive or sensitive to being touched.

On physical exam, the pet may be stiff in the affected joints and resist movement of those joints.

The definitive way to diagnose joint disease is taking x-rays, to make sure nothing else is causing the problems.

Management of Degenerative Joint Disease:

There is no *cure* for Degenerative Joint Disease. But it can be *managed* with a combination of different strategies. The primary goal is to maintain your pet’s quality of life and to make sure every day isn’t just a struggle to move.

Depending on the severity, one or a combination of the following approaches can be used:

* *Maintaining a healthy, ideal weight\*\**
* Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate joint supplements
* Omega-3 fatty acid supplements (fish oils)
* Anti-inflammatory pain medications (only ones safe for pets)
* Glycosaminoglycan injections (healthy for joint fluid)
* Laser therapy
* Physical therapy
* Water therapy
* Therapeutic Massage
* Chiropractic medicine
* Acupuncture