



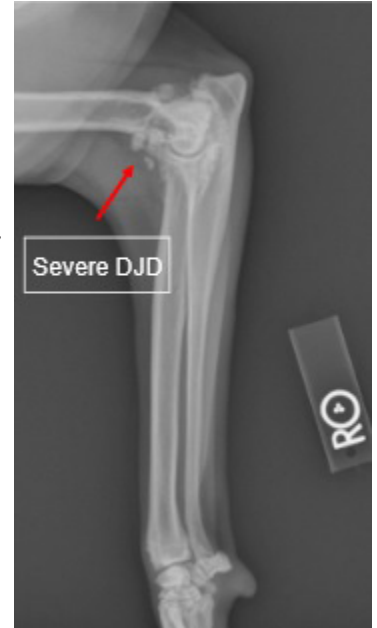
Degenerative joint disease (DJD), commonly known as arthritis, affects many dogs and cats at some time in their lives. DJD usually begins because of joint imperfections, instability, or trauma and is not related to age as it tends to be in people. These problems lead to joint inflammation and cartilage damage. Younger dogs can get DJD from congenital joint imperfections. Dogs and cats of any age can get DJD from joint instability—like cranial cruciate ligament rupture—or trauma. Older or overweight pets may also exhibit DJD due to joint “wear and tear.”

Surgery can help many pets with congenital joint imperfections, instability due to ligament rupture, or trauma. Pets that have undergone surgery may still develop some degree of DJD at some time postoperatively. There are also many non-surgical ways to manage DJD in dogs and cats.

The mainstays of long-term DJD management are weight control, consistent and controlled activity, and various medications. Slimmer pets bear less weight on their joints, and this generally decreases the inflammation associated with DJD. Studies have shown, in people and in pets, that a 10% decrease in weight improves mobility in patients with DJD. Regular and controlled activity keeps pets and their joints mobile. Shorter walks performed more frequently throughout the day are preferable to one long walk or sustained activity. Overactivity exacerbates the inflammation associated with DJD.

Medications come in many types and forms. Joint health may be supported by daily oral supplements or intermittent intramuscular or joint injections that provide the “building blocks” of cartilage and/or joint fluid. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications are given orally, and they may be used on an “as needed” or consistent basis. Pain medications and drugs that alter the way that pain is transmitted through the spinal cord are also available.

Physical rehabilitation can be very helpful for pets with DJD. A rehabilitation specialist generally works to increase a pet’s mobility by improving joint range of motion, rebuilding muscle mass, and improving balance. Non-traditional medical therapies may also be of benefit to pets with DJD. Acupuncture can help relieve joint pain. Stem cell therapy may decrease the inflammation associated with DJD. The key is that there are many avenues of treatment to control the signs associated with DJD and that combining them gives the best results – which combination varies from pet to pet. Unfortunately we cannot cure the disease, but we can often control it to allow your pet to maintain mobility and comfort over a long period of time.



X-ray of a dog elbow with severe DJD.



Dog undergoing hydrotherapy treatment on an underwater treadmill.