

Massage for arthritic dogs

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Does your canine companion have osteoarthritis?

Massage therapy helps ease the pain and stiffness.

Audrey Rose is an 11-year-old poodle with osteoarthritis. “If she moves her head around too much she will yelp,” her “mom” says, pointing at the dog’s upper back to indicate the arthritic area. Usually hesitant with strangers, Audrey Rose is a bit reluctant to sit for a massage. But once she feels a pair of warm hands on her, slowly and gently massaging her tight neck muscles, she allows herself to slip into a prone position. Her eyes begin to close, all resistance melts away, and she seems to smile.

Massage improves quality of life

There is no cure for osteoarthritis — once the cartilage is affected, the change is permanent. But there are many therapeutic treatments that can slow the progression of arthritis and keep the affected dog ambulatory with reduced pain.

Canine rehabilitation facilities can be found nationwide, offering physical therapy exercises, hydrotherapy, laser treatment, chiropractic care and acupuncture, all of which have been shown to greatly improve mobility. Massage therapy can work hand-in-hand with these modalities to minimize the degenerative effects of OA.

For example, Lady is a 13-year-old Lab mix who was diagnosed last year with severe osteoarthritis in her hips and knees. Her walking deteriorated to the point where she required assistance, she was unable to get up without help, and her brown eyes looked worried. Lady was taken to a canine rehabilitation facility where she began to swim, walk on an underwater treadmill, receive acupuncture and chiropractic adjustments, and participate in a physical therapy exercise program tailored to her needs.

Massage therapy and stretching treatments were also provided, giving relief to sore muscles that had been working hard, and helping increase her flexibility and mobility. With the combined treatments, Lady is now able to rise on her own, can walk independently, and has regained the sparkle in her eyes.

Why massage therapy works



**At 16 years old, Redford has severe arthritis in his hips and knees.
Massage helps relieve the discomfort and stiffness.**

Canine massage therapy is getting more recognition as an effective healing tool, and is one treatment that can really enhance an arthritic dog's quality of life. Although any dog is a candidate for massage, it can play an especially therapeutic role for those with osteoarthritis.

- Massage increases circulation, which is very important because it feeds tissues and muscles that have been damaged by joint degeneration.
- It breaks up adhesions that tend to form in the connective tissues of a stiff, arthritic dog.
- Gentle manipulation of the tissues and muscles reduces pain, inflammation, muscle spasms and stiffness.
- Constricted muscles and tissues around the joints are loosened, allowing further

reach when stretching the limbs, plus increased range of motion, flexibility and mobility.

This all translates to less stiffness, better walking ability — and a happier dog.

You can learn how to do canine massage yourself or hire a certified animal massage therapist to treat your dog. A massage session usually lasts about one hour, giving the therapist plenty of time to investigate all the dog's tight and tender spots and to stretch each limb, including the toes. Your dog may not immediately relax with the therapist, but give it time. Usually after 15 minutes or so, he will be persuaded by the therapist's gentle hands to just relax and enjoy the treatment. Once the message is received that massage feels good, you can bet there will be a wagging tail and smiling dog the next time the therapist comes to visit.

Along with massage – what else you can do

1. One of the best things you can do is make sure your dog is not carrying extra **weight**, which is hard on the joints.
2. Good **nutrition** is critical – after all, what your dog is eating is what's feeding the tissues and muscles of the compromised joint.
3. It very important to give the arthritic dog regular **exercise**, but switch from a long walk to more frequent shorter walks.
4. Helpful **nutraceuticals** include Omega-3 fatty acids, glucosamine and chondroitin, to slow joint degeneration and cut inflammation and pain. Turmeric and hyaluronic acid also decrease pain and inflammation.

Audrey Rose had almost fallen asleep by the end of her massage. An easy stretch was given to each limb, resulting in a big sigh and a release of gas, both good signs indicating utter relaxation. Later that day, her mom reported that Audrey Rose wanted to go on two walks instead of the usual one. "She has been so active — I can't believe her energy. She is even running. It's amazing!"