



Heal Better. Play Better.

OA Checklist to aid early identification and treatment

At least 20%-50% of our canine patients suffer from osteoarthritis (OA), and OA is the leading cause of chronic pain in dogs. The first step in managing OA is catching it as early as possible or identifying dogs that are at risk of developing OA. Patients will have better outcomes the sooner they start a comprehensive treatment program.

But too often, clients don't mention signs of pain until their dog has been suffering for some time, and it can be hard to make the time to discuss OA when it wasn't the primary reason for the appointment.

To help start the conversation around OA management as early as possible, pay attention to some of the biggest OA risk factors, including:

- Developmental orthopedic disease (hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, patella luxation)
- Cranial cruciate ligament injury
- Joint trauma/ fracture
- Angular limb deformity
- Overweight or obese
- Chronic high-impact activity

Once OA has been identified, create a customized, comprehensive treatment plan, tailored to the individual dog.



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Use this checklist to make sure you're ticking all the boxes for your patient's OA Plan.

- Owner education:** To get owner buy-in to the treatment plan, they need to understand what OA is, why it's important to take a multi-modal approach, and what pain in their dog looks like.
- Weight loss/ management plan:** This includes specific diet and daily calorie count recommendations per day to help the dog reach or maintain ideal weight.
- NSAIDs:** Make sure to mention that regular monitoring of blood work is needed and provide written and verbal instructions for NSAID use.
- Adequan:** You don't have to wait until end-stage OA to start patients on Adequan!
- Omega 3 fatty acids:** This can be in the form of supplements or diet. Make sure you provide specific product recommendation, dose, and instructions for supplementing.
- Oral supplements:** Pick at least one product that you support or recommend, because your clients will be looking for this information. If you don't recommend something, your clients will find one on their own that could be of lesser quality and effectiveness.
- Activity recommendations:** Make sure you let your clients know both what to do and what NOT to do with their dog.
- Home environment modifications:** This can include treads on stairs, steps or ramps to get up on beds and couches, yoga mats on slippery floors for better traction, and more.
- Therapeutic exercises:** Building strength and muscle can help manage pain and keep dogs active. Start with the basics, such as Shake, Play Bow, and Walking Backward. Make sure your clients understand not to overdo the exercises with their dog!
- Plan for regular rechecks to ensure compliance and modify the treatment plan as needed.**

Sometimes despite all the recommendations above, additional therapies may be needed to manage OA. Please see the handout, ***When to Refer to ASOC and When to refer to SOUND*** for additional help for your patients.



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