

Article 8

Good nutrition, healthy lifestyle important for man's best friend

Dear Gus,

I have a small dog with a weak back hip that he favors. It seems as though his cartilage is degenerated. I have seen supplements such as glucosamine and MSM advertised in many pet catalogues. Would these help his hip? I really hate to see him suffer.

Larry, Orange

Dear Larry,

First off, has this diagnosis been made by your veterinarian? If not, you should make an appointment for your canine companion to have a thorough physical. There are a wide variety of causes for limping or favoring a leg. If your dog does have a degenerated hip joint there are many ways you can make your dog more comfortable and long-lived.

I am a firm believer in supplementation. All four of my dogs take daily supplements, not only for the prevention of problems, but also for health management. Glucosamine is widely used as a joint protectant, and MSM a natural anti-inflammatory. Your vet can recommend appropriate supplements, and also review the best dietary plan for your dog. There are also a number of excellent prescription medications available that will reduce or eliminate joint pain.

Besides nutrition and medications as needed, the most important things you can do are weight management, activity management, and environmental changes. You should make sure that your dog maintains a proper weight for his size. A little underweight is always preferable to overweight. Don't let your dog over exert or run and play to the point of exhaustion. Even longer than usual walks may stress the joint further. And be careful that he doesn't run on slippery surfaces such as hardwood floors, where he can fall and injure the hip more. Also make sure that he has appropriate bedding that cushions him from the floor while he sleeps and rests. When going out in the car, lift him out, rather than have him jump from heights. If you allow your dog on the furniture, a ramp may also be useful to prevent the impact involved with jumping down.

Following these simple guidelines may reduce his pain enough that he doesn't need to routinely take any medications. Good luck! Gus.

Editor's note: Gus Marie!, of K-9 Communication in MiIfor4 is a Master Trainer and graduate of the United States K-9 Academy.

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