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The treatments discussed in this guide are those that I have used successfully in my clinic over the last ten years. There are many products and therapies on the market, but those listed here are the ones with which I have seen best results. I sincerely hope that you find this guide helpful and that your pets will feel the difference in ease of movement and overall well-being.

Dr Megan Kelly
Managing arthritis in pets

An arthritic pet is unhappy, uncomfortable and a source of worry to a concerned owner, yet many people remain unaware of the simple things they can do to alleviate pain and suffering. You can make a big difference to your pet’s quality of life simply by paying attention to the following factors:

- **Diet and supplements**
  - Weight loss
  - Fatty acids
  - Joint supplements

- **Environmental changes to assist your arthritic pet**

- **Products to assist arthritic pets**

- **Exercise, hydrotherapy and rehabilitation**

- **Magnetic therapy**

- **Acupuncture and acupressure**

- **Massage therapy**

- **Herbal and homeopathic preparations**

My goal is to give you the knowledge to take control of your pet’s health and to improve your pet’s overall comfort and happiness. Before adding any diets or supplements to your pets’ diet, please always consult with your veterinary surgeon.
Diet and supplements

Weight loss

One in five adult dogs suffer from osteoarthritis (OA), and obesity is directly related to the onset and aggravation of OA.

Obesity is what we call a pain enhancer. Being overweight not only loads extra weight on your pet’s joints and bones; white fat actually secretes hormones and proteins that cause low-grade inflammation. So the fatter your pet is, the more inflammation he or she will have.

I have seen major reductions in pets’ pain levels just by getting them to lose weight. So much so that pets that were on painkillers and anti-inflammatories every day were able to stop taking their medication completely after losing the excess weight.

Obesity is also linked to diabetes, heart disease and increased blood pressure, and puts your pet at risk for anesthetic complications. If your pet is overweight you need to do something about it!

Weight loss regimes usually incorporate a number of different components and do not revolve around one aspect only. In order for
an animal to lose weight, we need to look at diet, supplements and exercise, as well as overall environment.

There are a few factors we consider when choosing the correct diet for a pet:

- **Promote weight loss or maintain weight**
- **Help manage pain and inflammation**
- **Support the joints and muscles to prevent degradation and muscle wastage**

The first step is to determine if your pet is overweight. I have included a body score condition chart which scores your pet as 1 – 5, with 1 and 2 underweight, 3 ideal and 4 and 5 overweight and obese.

I normally say you should be able to feel your dog’s ribs; as you run your hand along the rib cage, it should feel like a xylophone.

If your pet scores either a 4 or 5 you need to do something about your pet’s weight. Most vet practices have weight loss clinics and I would suggest that you enroll your pet in one of these. They will weigh and take trunk measurements of your pet on a weekly basis, ensur-
ing that your pet loses weight at the correct rate. We normally suggest losing 1% of body weight weekly. If your pet loses weight too quickly, protein in the body starts to break down and there is muscle loss instead of fat loss. In an arthritic pet this is disastrous because the muscles are needed to support the joints.

Basically the treatment of obesity involves

- reducing the caloric intake

- exercise to increase caloric usage. Remember increasing muscle mass will speed up your pet’s metabolism.

I would suggest a specific weight loss food as these usually contain all the correct nutrients needed for health, as well as a controlled balance of fat and protein, which maximises weight loss. Foods specifically for weight loss make your pet feel full, yet are low in calories. Diet foods are a better option than reducing the amounts of normal food your pet is eating, as this just results in a grumpy, hungry pup.

Whatever food you choose, always remember to check the ingredients to see if the food contains whole proteins, e.g. whole chicken. You should avoid foods with cereal-based proteins, e.g. corn gluten meal. We need a good quality protein, comprising at the absolute minimum 28% of total food, to help prevent muscle wastage.

The saying, “You are what you eat” goes for pets too. When calculating your pet’s daily food allowance, always take into account treats, as these can add to the calories. Instead of giving cereal-based biscuits and fatty, meaty treats, why not give some apple, carrot or cucumber? If you have to give your pet a biscuit or meaty treat, break it into very small portions. It is often not about how much is eaten, but about the act of eating something, and of course the smell and taste.

Once you have settled on a healthy diet that keeps your pet satisfied while enabling weight loss, you can look at supplements. Some foods include supplements in their composition; others require that supplements be added.
Supplements

There are many supplements that can benefit arthritic pets. Remember that all these products are part of the management of arthritis. I would suggest you use products specifically made for pets, normally sold at your veterinary practice. They will have the correct dose of the nutrient for your pet.

There is no single wonder product that is going to “cure” your pet. We also often see different results in different dogs using the same product, so I would suggest you try a few out and see which ones work best for you and your pet.

The supplements I suggest for arthritic dogs are:

**Omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids**

The body uses fatty acids to form hormones which have various effects on the body. Fatty acids, mainly omega 3 in the form of EPA and DHA, have anti-inflammatory properties at cellular level. I would recommend a good quality omega 3, usually of fish origin.

**Sources of omega 3:** Oils from cold water fish such as herring and salmon, and flaxseed oil.

Omega 6, on the other hand, tends to increase inflammation. Inflammation at times can be important, for example when the immune system is fighting infection. So both are essential to the functions of the body but a balance between the two is optimum. It is recommended that your pet eats a ratio of omega 6:3 as close to 5:1 as possible.

**Sources of omega 6:** Canola oil, sunflower oil, evening primrose oil.

Omega 3 oxidises very easily and so it can be difficult to incorporate into pet foods, whereas the more stable omega 6 is already prevalent in most pet foods and treats. For that reason I would recommend supplementing only omega 3 fatty acids. Flax seeds or flax seed oil are often promoted as an alternative to fish oil as a source of omega 3. Flax seeds contain a substance called ALA which needs to be converted to EPA and DHA, and for this reason its power as an omega is nowhere near as strong as fish oils. This is the reason I prefer omega 3 of fish origin.
Joint supplements

There are a number of good veterinary joint supplements. Check that the ones you use contain the following:

• **Chondroitin sulphate and glucosamine**

These substances provide the building blocks for the synthesis of cartilage. Supplements containing these ingredients come in different forms, including powders and liquids, and are sometime incorporated into foods. Make sure the chondroitin is of a low molecular size; human products often contain chondroitin that animals cannot absorb. The packaging should state this.

• **Green-lipped mussel extract**

This extract is from the New Zealand green-lipped mussel. The mussels contain large amounts of active substances which decrease inflammation, for example, omega 3 fatty acids, chondroitin, glutamine, vitamin E and C as well as the trace elements zinc, copper and manganese. I have seen some pets respond really well to this product. Be careful if your pet has any skin allergies as I have seen some skin flare-ups with green-lipped mussel extract. Cats respond really well to this product.

• **Pentosan polysulphate**

This is not a natural supplement, but I have had great success using this product. It is actually an anticoagulant for humans; in animals we use it in very low doses. I have never seen a side effect from using this drug in the ten years that I have been in rehabilitation practice.

Pentosan polysulfate is an injectable that provides protective and anti-inflammatory properties. The treatment plan is normally four injections, each five to seven days apart, which may be repeated in two to three months’ time. I have, however, used this in chronic arthritis cases on a weekly basis as a long-term treatment with great success. The product can only be administered by a veterinarian. Please discuss it with your vet as an option for your pet.
Environment

Once you have looked at diet and supplements, consider, too, environmental aspects of your home that may be making life difficult for your arthritic pet. The average house and garden contains many hazards which we may not see as hazards at all. A few simple changes can make a big difference to your pet’s daily experiences of moving about the home.

Block the stairs

We would not expect an 80-year old arthritic grandmother to walk up and down the stairs on a daily basis, and the same goes for our pets.

Our pets like to be with us all the time. They will follow us when we go upstairs to fetch something we left behind. Going up and down the stairs in a controlled fashion is one of the exercises which we do to help build muscle strength, but excessive step climbing can cause tight muscles and inflammation flare-up of joints. Pets also may slip or fall, causing other injuries.

I am not saying a caring owner with stairs needs to sell his or her home. Simply blocking off the stairs with a child gate so the pet doesn’t make unnecessary trips up and down will suffice.

Help with slippery floors

Wooden and tiled floors can sometimes be hazardous for our four–legged friends, especially if they are weak or already compromised, e.g. suffering from hip dysplasia or arthritis. Arthritic dogs do not have the strength to pull their legs together when they start slipping outwards, and often end up falling with their legs splayed apart. This can cause severe pain, injuries and the flare up of arthritis, so for this reason it is really important to minimize slipping and splaying.
Ways in which to minimize slipping:

**Rubber socks:** Sticky Pawz are rubber socks which help promote traction and prevent slipping. They are biodegradable, reusable and sold in packs of four. They are thin enough to allow your pet to feel the ground through them, making walking much easier, especially for the pet that has a neurological condition or is very weak.

**Boots or shoes:** These usually come with a suede or rubber sole which also help with grip and traction. They are heavier and more cumbersome than the rubber socks, which can make them harder to walk in. I would not recommend these for very weak dogs; rather use the Sticky Pawz.

**Mats or rugs:** Sometime pet owners have small areas of tiled or wooden flooring, and if this is the case, one can use mats, rugs or rubber matting to enable a pet to walk more easily. I would recommend putting a mat where your pet lies and where your pet eats. It is very difficult to eat when your front legs are continually slipping outwards. Some pets compensate by eating lying down, which is not ideal for digestion.

**Trim long haired pets’ fur:** The hair between the paws can interfere with paw-to-ground contact. When the hair gets between the paw pads and the floor, it causes slipping, especially in poodles or dogs with silky, smooth coats.

**Trim long nails:** Your pet’s nails should just touch the ground when your pet is standing. Any longer and they will interfere with the way they walk, making it especially challenging on slippery floors.
Raise your pet’s food and water bowls: We want to make it as easy as possible for dogs to eat; they should not have to counter slipping or try and balance when they are eating. So remember the mat or non-slip surface for all four limbs, and in addition, if practicable, raise the surface on which the food and water is placed.

Stairs for climbing onto couches or beds

Climbing onto a couch or bed (if they are allowed to do this) can be tricky for small dogs, especially those with arthritis – even if the floor is not slippery. Try to provide a small set of steps or footstool to enable easy access.

Beds for arthritic pets

We all think a big, soft bed is going to be the best and most comfortable for a pet. In fact it may not be. Climbing in and out of a soft bed is more challenging and strenuous than getting onto and off a firmer bed. Movement on a firmer bed is more controlled and your pet doesn’t need to keep correcting as the body moves; this makes it easier to activate certain muscle groups.

I recommend a bed slightly off the ground, which is firm yet soft enough to offer some comfort.

A slightly raised bed makes it easier for especially large dogs, as they find it easier to stand up from a raised surface than straight from the floor.
Products to assist arthritic pets

Harnesses

There are different types of harnesses available:

- Full-body harness
- Back only harnesses

Most arthritic pets will struggle with weak hindquarters, but this will depend on where your pet is arthritic. For large breeds I recommend a full-body harness.

The harness allows you to help your pet get up from a lying position, walk up and down the stairs, and get into and out of the car. I like the type of harness illustrated on the top right as it provides support and stability for the front and hind limbs with minimal stress on the body and organs. They are specifically designed to take into account the dog’s centre of gravity which is just behind the shoulders. Handles on the front and back allow the owner to give a helping hand when needed. They are also padded and cushioned for ultimate comfort so that they can be worn for extended periods of time.

You should avoid using a towel or an abdominal sling. These cause pressure on the abdominal organs, especially the bladder, and can cause strain on the lumbar vertebrae, particularly the lumbosacral joint, which is where the spine meets the pelvis.

Other options include the more simple back harness, which can easily be slipped through the back legs and used on walks, when one knows one’s old pet may get a bit tired and need a helping hand. These are small enough to carry in your pocket, and are reassuring to have when out walking, as a pet may slip down an embankment, or simply lie down, requiring help to get up. The disadvantage of this harness is that you cannot leave it on. So if your pet needs assistance getting up from a lying position it may be too late as you will still need to put the harness on.
Booties and rubber socks

As discussed above, slippery floors such as tiles and wooden floors can make it difficult for pets to move around the house with ease, especially when they have weak hind limbs. Booties with rubber or suede soles can help increase traction, protect the paws and allow them the confidence to walk on these slippery surfaces. It also helps build muscle as they are able to use their legs more effectively.

Wheelchairs

Adjustable and custom-made wheelchairs are available in all sizes. These are not only reserved for paralyzed dogs, but can be used for arthritic dogs too, to give them assistance with that daily walk that they so loved to do when they were younger. I recommend renting adjustable wheels initially if possible, and if the wheels suit you and your pet I would recommend having a set of wheels custom made. The custom-made wheels are much lighter and more maneuverable and they are made to fit your pet perfectly.

There are a few important differences between using wheelchairs for pets and for people:

- Pets are in their wheelchairs standing up and not sitting down, so they can only be in them for short periods of time.
- They cannot get in and out of them by themselves.
- They cannot be left unsupervised in a wheelchair.
- Initially they can only walk in the wheels for a few minutes before they tire. If your pet has been dragging himself along the floor, he will have been using different muscles to those that he would use in the wheelchair. It takes a few weeks for those muscles to strengthen.

One of the biggest misconceptions about wheelchairs in pets is that you can go off to work and leave your pet in his wheelchair all day while he runs around the house doing as he used to do when he was younger and more able-bodied. This is quite incorrect. Pets need to be...
supervised at all times when in the wheelchair. They cannot sit or lie down in the wheelchair, so when they get tired of standing they will try to sit, and possibly fall over, causing injury to an already weakened dog.

Before hiring or having a set made, consider the environment; some homes are just not suitable for this form of help, because of steep hills, stairs and split levels, which can all cause falls.

Make sure you buy a wheelchair from an approved supplier as it is not as simple as making a frame and adding some wheels. The wheelchair needs to be properly balanced so that it doesn’t cause strain or damage to the back.

A properly balanced and well-fitting wheelchair will make a huge difference to your arthritic pet’s well-being. Most pets adapt very well to them, and after a few training sessions master reversing and negotiating furniture and obstacles with ease. It is often worth the investment just to enable your pet to go for his daily walk, which means so much to a dog.

**Joint supports**

Arthritic joints are unstable joints and are often associated with lax ligaments. When weight bearing, the joint may be put under extreme pressure, causing the pet more pain. A brace to support the joint will help minimise pain, increase stability and assist in making one’s pet more mobile. These supports can also be used in times of increased load to prevent injury, e.g. to support overloaded joints in an amputee.

The pressure of the brace on the tissues around the joint also improves the pet’s joint position sense. In other words, the pet is more aware of where the joint is in space; this awareness stimulates the body to assist with joint stability through receptor nerves and muscles.
Orthotics

These are custom-made braces which offer very firm support for joints. They are often used post-operatively when there have been complications or poor surgical outcomes. Orthotics are used when the milder joint supports do not offer enough support, e.g. severe arthritis. There are companies around the world that manufacture orthotics. I like [www.orthopets.com](http://www.orthopets.com). If you don't have a company offering this service in your country, I would suggest finding a prosthetist at your local hospital. I am sure you will find one who is an animal lover and would be willing to make an orthotic for your pet. The principles are basically the same.

Prosthetics

Prosthetics are not normally used in arthritic pets but they can be, especially if there is severe arthritis due to an accident. Dogs can manage on three legs but they do much better on four. Walking on three legs has impacts on the rest of the body. The other limbs become overloaded, causing ligament strains, and the back and discs experience excessive tension.

Not all pets may be candidates for prosthetics, but if your pet is a candidate your vet will need to contact a rehabilitation therapist to check the level at which to amputate. This is why it is important to make contact with specialists before your vet does the amputation.
Exercise, hydrotherapy and rehabilitation

As dogs get older their joints become less flexible, which impacts on their mobility. While your pet may previously have been eager to play and run around, now he or she is content to lie and rest. This is often because of stiffness or pain in the joints.

Even younger dogs can be subjected to joint health problems. A dog may have been hit by a car, which leaves a legacy of joint problems, or the dog may be genetically predisposed to hip dysplasia, affecting flexibility and mobility. Labradors, for example, are particularly prone to hip dysplasia. Exercise, hydrotherapy and various forms of rehabilitation, if properly done, can support damaged joints by strengthening the muscles which support the joints. The key is to exercise appropriately.

Exercise

Exercise is important for a number of reasons.

- It helps to keep weight under control.
- It helps the cardiovascular system to function properly.
- It maintains the nutrition of cartilage in the joints.
- It helps maintain muscle mass, which helps keep the joint aligned and more stable.

A few tips about exercise:

- Don’t be a weekend warrior! Many of us with full-time jobs and family commitments don’t have time to walk our pets during the week. We try to make up for it on weekends by doing an extra long walk. This is usually too much for the muscles and joints and your pet
ends up stiff and sore, with muscles in spasm. This worsens the joint pain as the spasm -
ing muscles pull the joints out of alignment. It can take them a few days to recover and
in this time they often do not move around a lot, which contributes to muscle wastage
and prevents blood flow through the body.

- Walk little and often. Ten minutes twice daily is better than one twenty minute walk.
  Short walks more frequently are always better than long ones. When your pet fatigues
  they start to use the wrong muscles and will compensate. This sets up a vicious cycle of
  pain, incorrect muscle usage and more pain. The length of your pet’s walk should be just
  enough so that your pet can still go for a few more minutes. If he or she needs to sit and
  rest more than three times on a walk, then the walk is too long. Allow rests whenever
  your pet needs them. Remember each and every dog will be different, depending on the
  severity of their condition, their size, breed, general health and their fitness.

- Promote non-weight-bearing exercises like swimming. This must always be done in a con-
trolled fashion. I will go into swimming in a home pool in more detail a little further on.

- Preventing injuries is extremely important and for this reason adequate rest time is cru-
cial. Downtime limits fatigue and will prevent injuries from overuse. Rest also gives the
  body a chance to repair tissues and replace energy.

Signs that your pet is finding your walk too long:

- limping
- sitting or lying down
- excessive panting and drooling
- dragging of limbs
- stumbling
- legs splaying or one leg slipping out to the side.

If you notice any of these symptoms, halve the length of your pet’s walk and start working
up to increasing the walk by one to two minutes every three days.

Terrain: Walking on hard or firm surfaces is much easier than walking on softer surfaces
such as loose sand. Walking in soft, thick sand over-challenges the muscles, especially the
hip flexors. They will often go into spasm and this keeps the hind limbs in a hip flexed posi-
tion, preventing the extension of the hind leg and therefore not allowing the extensor muscles
to be activated. The tight hip flexors also pull the hip and back joints out of alignment. So the beach is out, unless you can get your dog down to the hard sand straight away.

Other terrains that your arthritic pet might find difficult are:

- long grass
- uneven terrain
- rocky areas
- steep inclines
- steps

I recommend initially walking on a flattish area with hard sand, tar or short grass to walk your arthritic pet – unless your pet can already cope with the more difficult terrains. Remember to look out for the signs that your pet is not coping.

**Hydrotherapy**

The benefits of exercising in water have been recognized and used for a long time in humans and animals. Hydrotherapy improves strength, joint motion and cardiovascular fitness, activating lazy muscles and minimising pain. It also has psychological benefits.

Hydrotherapy or aquatic therapy is a term used to incorporate all the different types of water therapy. In animals we mainly use swimming in pools, whirlpools, hot tubs, lakes, rivers, the sea and underwater treadmills.

All these forms of aquatic therapy take place in a dynamic environment. This environment and the biological effects it has are all due to the principles of hydrodynamics. It is important for us to be familiar with these principles and to understand that movement and exercise performed in water differs considerably from that on land.

Buoyancy: This is the force experienced as an up-thrust, which acts in the opposite direction to the force of gravity. Buoyancy allows for gentler exercising, by decreasing the loads placed on the injured tissues compared to exercises performed on land.
Swimming

Swimming is something a pet owner can get a pet to do in a pool at home, and also in lakes or dams, if you access to these.

Important tips for swimming your pet at home:

• Dogs must be prevented from lunging or diving into water.

• Always supervise your pet and support them with a harness or life jacket until they are able to swim on their own.

• Always hold your pet so they are facing away from you. The swimming action of their front paws can result in severe scratches. One can also use booties on a pet’s front paws if this is a problem.

• Getting in and out of the pool or lake is where most injuries occur. Make sure you are able to assist.

• Start off by doing 30 seconds of swimming with one minute rests three times in the first week. Increase to four times in the following weeks. Remember your pet will be using muscles they have not used before. Always allow them to be able to get to a step to have a rest if needed.

• Increase this by 15 seconds each week, until you are on two minutes of swimming with one minute of rest. Make any changes very slowly, even if your pet appears to be swimming with ease. You will only know the real effects the following day when they are stiff and sore – and this is exactly what we want to avoid.

• Heated pools are ideal as they help to increase the blood flow to the muscles. Never have them warmer than 30 degrees Celsius.

• Always speak to your vet about whether your pet can do home swimming, as it can be dangerous for a dog that is cardiovascularly compromised to swim. This is because of the hydrostatic pressure on the chest and vasodilation from the heated water.
You may have a veterinary rehab therapist or vet practice close by that has an underwater treadmill. I like these machines as one can change the water level depending on which joint’s range of motion needs to be improved. For example, if a dog needs to improve flexion (bending) of the elbows in a case of elbow dysplasia, then one would have the water level at or higher than the elbow joint. This would encourage the dog to try and lift its legs out of the water, increasing its range of motion and flexibility.

The advantage of the underwater treadmill is that exercise done on it is partially weight bearing, so we are stimulating active muscle contraction with minimal load on the joints and bones. This strengthens the primary weight-bearing muscles that will be needed for walking, standing or running.

In times of pain, trauma, injury or neurological weakness, animals will shift their weight to one of their other limbs. As a result their gait changes, and the muscles they use change. The brain sends a message for a muscle to contract, but the muscle does not respond immediately, so the other muscles take over and perform a function they should not be performing. This is known as compensation. If compensation remains uncorrected, it becomes habitual, and no amount of exercise on land will correct it. In fact, it only makes it worse. Compensatory patterns create altered alignments in joints, which lead to instabilities and abnormal wear on joint surfaces, resulting in pain and worsening arthritis.

The underwater treadmill activates the unused muscles, stimulating them to contract in a way that is controlled and not too demanding. Gradually, muscle strength is regained, and proper patterns of walking are re-established.
Rehabilitation

Qualified professionals trained in physiotherapy and rehabilitation can treat your pet to help control pain, muscle tension and mobility.

They will use tools and machines such as:

- Laser
- Pulsed magnetic field therapy
- Massage
- Acupuncture
- Ultrasound
- Tens (transcutaneous electro nerve stimulation)
- Therapeutic exercise

Ask your vet to refer your dog to a therapist if your dog is continually in discomfort.

There are many natural medications and supplements on the market today but many of us are unaware of the hands-on approach to holistic healing.

Some of these modalities will need to be performed by qualified therapists or veterinary surgeons, but with guidance, some can be learned and practised by a pet owner at home. Examples are massage, therapeutic exercise, magnetic therapy and acupressure.

Please do not attempt any of the therapies listed below before speaking to your vet. Certain therapies are contraindicated in certain conditions.

Benefits of rehabilitation:

- Reduces pain.
- Increases muscle strength, flexibility, and range of motion.
- Improves circulation.
- Reduces muscle tension and spasms.
- Regains or retains function.
- Reduces anxiety and stress.
- Weight loss.
Magnetic therapy

The reaction of the body to injury, pain or illness is swelling and inflammation, producing a low oxygen, acid environment. Magnetic therapy counteracts this effect, dilating blood vessels, oxygenating tissues and restoring correct pH.

The process involves the use of a mat called the Bemer mat. The animal simply relaxes on the mat, while magnetic energy is absorbed into its blood due to the iron content in haemoglobin. This magnetic energy travels through the blood stream, causing blood vessels to dilate, increasing blood flow, increasing oxygenation and eliminating toxins, thereby restoring the pH levels of the blood cells and tissues. This allows the body’s natural healing mechanisms to work at optimum levels.

Magnets work by means of lines of force, measured and quantified in units called Gauss. There are two classifications of magnets: static or permanent and pulsed electromagnetic field magnets. The Bemer mat makes use of pulsed magnetic energy, and has an effect on the whole body, irrespective of the area to which it is applied. The positive effect is retained in the body for several hours after the magnetic field is removed.

There are no reported side effects of magnetic therapy, but it is contra-indicated for the following conditions:
- Pregnancy
- Epileptic fits
- Presence of pacemakers and internal defibrillators

Benefits of magnetic therapy:
- Increasing blood flow, thereby improving oxygenation.
- Changes in the migration of Ca²⁺ ions, facilitating healing of nerve tissue and bone.
- Reducing inflammation and swelling, therefore also relieving the pain associated with these.

Click here to purchase a recommended magnetic pet pad.
Also keep magnetic items away from computers, credit cards, video cases, battery operated watches, hearing aids and cell phones.

Please always check that the type of magnet used is the correct type. I have seen many companies using simple fridge magnets, claiming that they have therapeutic properties. In my experience the best magnets are neodymium magnets; when emitting at least 1500 Gauss, they have clear, observable healing properties.

The Bemer mat is expensive but there are less expensive options available for home use, such as pet pads or beds and collars. These are an easy way for a pet owner to treat a pet at home, and to maintain and extend the positive effects of the Bemer mat.

**Acupuncture and acupressure**

Acupuncture is the practice of inserting fine, solid needles into the body for pain relief or, in some cases, to help the body deal with other diseases.

The needles block the pain messages and encourage the brain and central nervous system to produce more of the body’s natural painkillers. In conditions that are not painful, acupuncture may help to reset the body’s normal functioning.

Acupuncture needles stimulate nerves that do not cause the unpleasant feelings of pain that we are trying to treat. They stimulate other nerves that send a more important message to the brain, which is how they block pain. Sometimes animals may react to this sensation as though they are expecting pain, but then relax because pain does not occur. Most of the time they accept the fine needles very well and often become relaxed and sleepy during the treatment.

The usual course for acupuncture is once a week for four to six weeks.
Acupuncture is very safe, in the right hands. Legally it must be performed by a veterinary surgeon. There have been no official reports of problems in animals, but there are some in humans; these can usually be avoided with care and a good knowledge of anatomy.

Pain is the most common indication for acupuncture. Usually this means pain associated with arthritis, but also muscle strains, pain secondary to disc disease and bony changes of the spine.

You may not be able to do acupuncture, but you can do acupressure, which has the same benefits. It involves stimulating the acupuncture points on the body with your fingers, and causes the same series of events in the body as acupuncture. If you would like to learn how to do acupressure please see my e-book on acupressure for pets.

**Massage therapy**

Massage therapy improves circulation and lymphatic flow, decreases pain, improves mobility and provides relaxation.

The majority of arthritic pets are in some degree of pain. This pain often results in muscle tension in the affected area as well as secondary compensatory muscle tension in other areas.
Increased muscle usage causes long periods of muscle contraction. The reduction in blood flow and a subsequent decrease in oxygenation results in metabolic waste and toxin build-up. This leads to a vicious circle of pain, muscle spasm and more pain.

The muscles then fatigue and are unable to function optimally. This results in weakness which is often evident as shaking or tremors.

If you are interested in learning how to massage your pet, please see my short course on pet massage.

Herbal and homeopathic preparations

The first medication most pets are given when they are diagnosed with arthritis is usually NSAIDS (Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs). Examples of these are Rimadyl, Metacam and Previcox. There is definitely a place for these tablets, but we do want to minimise their use as much as possible. Firstly, they have side effects on the kidney and stomach lining and secondly, while they remove pain and inflammation, they have no long-term effect on the arthritis.

**Herbal preparations:** These can contain many herbs which have anti-inflammatory and pain-killing properties. I would recommend using a product which is specifically formulated for dogs. Some examples of the herbs they may contain are licorice, turmeric, devil’s claw and dandelion root. Remember that herbs are like drugs and can be very powerful; they should always be used with care. I would not suggest buying your own herbs and making your own formulations.

**Homeopathic preparations:** There is a lot of controversy as to whether homeopathic preparations are effective or not. Some say that there are no conclusive scientific studies that prove any effect on the body whatsoever. Scientific studies or not, I use Arnica, Ruta and Rhus tox in combination, as I have seen definite benefits with these in my patients. Ask your vet or chemist where to get these.