

Back and leg problems

Dogs with trouble getting around pose special problems. When it's hard for them to get up and I have trouble walking, the commonly used term is "arthritis". However, in just about *any* dog over 10 years old it's actually a combination of five factors

1. Pain (Highly treatable)
2. Agility (Not directly treatable)
3. Nerve compression (Only surgically treatable)
4. Mechanics (Not treatable)
5. Weakness (Treatment via Physical Therapy)

As you can see, we can address ***less than half*** of the factors in that kind of case.

The **mechanics** of walking have to do with the condition of the joints and the weight of the dog. It is *mechanically* difficult for a dog to get up when its joints are *literally* stuck together by arthritis. It just makes those joints physically difficult to move. More importantly, conditions of overweight put a load on a skeleton and nervous system that are no longer fully competent to carry much weight at all.

Speaking briefly of **agility**, we know that old people just *aren't as nimble* as young people so you may realize that your older dogs face a *similar* decline in their agility and that is not something that can be medicated.

Nerve compression is also something that we have a very hard time straightening out. When nerve compression becomes a serious thing there are surgeries that can be done to decompress the nerves. However, this kind of thing usually happens very late in life and so nerve compression usually exists in the older dog who falls just short of being a surgical candidate. Nerve compression causes inflammation in the nerves, we *can* do something about that.

Weakness is another factor in dogs not being able to get around. It's a simple fact that muscles are not as strong in older people and older animals as they are in younger and it is possible to provide physical therapy to build up strength, however that is quite expensive and is relies on hydro-therapy and other exercises to build strength, led by a professional therapist.

At the corner of therapy is **pain**. There are excellent pain protocols, some of which I have designed and I am getting very good results with. However as you can see, pain is not the whole enchilada. Pain is basically caused by inflammation in the joints and nerve channels from arthritis after a lifetime of wear and tear. Arthritis contributes to a decline in the mechanical capacity of joints as well as *creating pain* in the exercise of such joints. When we reduce pain, we make it easier for an animal to use the joints comfortably and this provides an increase in range of motion without pain. In other words, ***the pet just walks better***. If using the legs in a wider range of motion, it contributes to perceived agility.

The only other thing you can do is try and minimize the impact of **mechanical** and **agility** and **strength** issues by **reducing the loading burden on the dog skeleton**. In other words, I will give you medicine which is for two of the factors and **you need to regard weight loss as the most potent "medicine" of all.**