

Medical Notes

InTown Veterinary Group is dedicated to providing clients with an unparalleled range of veterinary care options.

The doctors at Bulger Animal Hospital & Essex County Veterinary Referral Hospital are always on hand no matter how seemingly small the question. We care about you and your pets. No question is too small. If you're worried, call us.

Bulger Animal Hospital:

247 Chickering Road,
 N. Andover, MA 01845

Phone:

(978) 682-9905

24-Hr Emergency:

(978) 725-5544

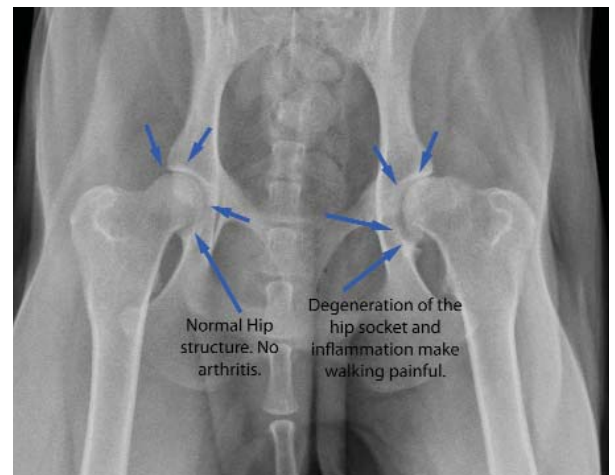
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Arthritis in Dogs and Cats

Arthritis (also known as degenerative joint disease) is one of the most common diseases affecting dogs and cats of all ages. Osteoarthritis is a condition in which the joints become inflamed, swollen and painful. Joint mobility is reduced and changes are often progressive.

Signs of Arthritis

The most common sign of arthritis in both dogs and cats is a reduced activity level. In dogs, this might mean decreased play activity, less enthusiasm for walks, or turning around to come home earlier than usual. Cats may have a decreased ability or desire to jump, run, or play.



Other Signs Include:

- Limping or an altered gait, especially upon rising from rest.
- Soreness.
- Behavioral changes such as aggression.
- Change in normal eating habits.

Causes of Arthritis

In many pets, it is difficult to determine a single cause of arthritis. However, there are known factors that, individually or combined, can make a pet more prone to degenerative joint disease.

- Obesity.
- Age, particularly in breeds predisposed to arthritis.
- Developmental abnormalities such as hip dysplasia or osteochondrosis dissecans.
- Injury such as fractures or cranial cruciate ligament tear.
- Genetic predisposition.

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For more information, feel free to use the medical index on our website. www.InTownBulger.com, then click "Medical Index".

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Management of Arthritis

Arthritis is a disease that can be managed, but not cured. Changes in the joint are permanent and progressive, so the goal in treatment is to maintain joint mobility, reduce strain on the joints, and reduce inflammation.

1. **Weight management** is the single most important factor in maintaining the health of the joints. Obese dogs and cats place excessive strain on inflamed joints. Without weight management, no other therapies will be completely effective. An overweight pet with signs of arthritis should be started on a strict regimen of diet and gentle exercise to produce gradual weight loss.

2. **Physical therapy**, either in a formal setting (sessions with a physical therapist certified for animals) or performed at home, can help to improve joint mobility. Starting slow with regular exercise (daily or twice daily short walks, gradually increasing the distance) can keep dogs moving, aid in weight management and serve as a bonding opportunity for you and your pet. A physical therapist will also often show owners how to perform exercises and massage at home.



The underwater treadmill at Mass Vet Referral Hospital in Woburn.

3. **Acupuncture** is an alternative modality which has gained in popularity and availability. It can significantly improve a pet's quality of life, and is described in greater detail in the next article in this newsletter.

4. **Change the home environment**, making it easier for your pet to do his or her daily activities. This may consist of ramps to help pets get up and down from desired sleeping spaces or outdoor locations or changing the height of food and water bowls. Be creative!

5. **Dietary supplements** and foods containing glucosamine can help to supplement the joints, sometimes significantly reducing pain. These supplements often do not have a reliable effect – some pets show no visible changes and some derive significant benefits from glucosamine. There are almost no adverse effects, so they may be worth a try.

6. **Medical management** with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin, Rimadyl, Deramaxx, Metacam, or others, should be used judiciously, with veterinary supervision, and only in addition to all of the above therapies.

NSAIDs reduce pain by controlling inflammation. With long-term usage there can be significant side effects, and regular examinations and bloodwork are recommended. This is why it is important to reduce a pet's needs for these drugs with the other changes recommended above. Other pain medications are available in addition to NSAIDs that may provide relief.

Unfortunately, there is no "quick" treatment for arthritis, but the pain and inflammation can be managed with appropriate care.

Acupuncture for Dogs & Cats

Acupuncture is a method of medical treatment that has been used to treat humans and animals for more than 3,000 years. The body of research showing its scientific effects is steadily growing. Acupuncture is carried out by our certified veterinary acupuncturist as an adjunct to traditional veterinary treatment.

Acupuncture is available to clients of Bulger Animal Hospital. Our practitioners will work with your regular veterinarian to provide the comprehensive care your pet needs. Bethany Innis, DVM, CVA, CCRT is a veterinarian with an additional certification in veterinary acupuncture (CVA). She has extensive training in the field of acupuncture and uses an integrative approach combining traditional veterinary and complementary medicine to treat patients.



Dr. Bethany Innis, administering acupuncture. As you can see, the patient is more interested in the camera than the needles.

Different methods for treating a patient include:

- **Dry needling:** This method involves placing needles in special acupuncture points with or without manual stimulation.
- **Electroacupuncture:** This method incorporates electrical current into treatment.
- **Aquapuncture:** This method entails injecting a small amount of liquid (commonly saline or B vitamin solution) into acupuncture points.
- **Acupressure:** This is the simple act of putting manual pressure on an acupuncture point (this can be done by you for your pet at home).

Common Diagnoses that Respond to Acupuncture:

- Arthritis
- Hip Dysplasia
- Post-operative pain control
- Intervertebral disk disease
- Skin Allergies
- Lick Granulomas
- Epilepsy
- Traumatic nerve injury
- Asthma
- Irritable bowel disease
- Constipation

Benefits of Acupuncture:

- Pain Control for acute and chronic conditions
- Reduction of Inflammation
- Increased Circulation
- Enhanced Immunity
- Relaxation
- Increased Energy
- Minimal Side Effects
- Helps to speed recovery and strength in combination with Physical Therapy.
- Provides additional analgesia (pain control) in combination with general anesthesia

How does Acupuncture work?

In Western medicine, research has shown that the placement of fine, sterile needles under the surface of the skin stimulates the body's nervous system. Acupuncture can work on the local area, the spinal cord and the brain to change the blood flow, inflammation, and pain patterns of the body.

In traditional Chinese medicine, an energy force called "qi" (also called "chi") flows throughout the body via channels or "meridians". This Qi can become unbalanced and lead to many disease conditions. Acupuncture needles can be placed in specific points to help stimulate, dampen or unblock the Qi flowing in the channels.

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Things to Consider:



Dogs are considered to be seniors at different ages based on size:
Small breeds: 9 years
Med - large breeds: 7 years
Giant Breeds: 5 years



The oldest dog on record lived to be 29 years old.



Cataracts are the result of a breakdown in the fibers which make up the lens (of the eye). They can be genetic, or the result of a disease process (such as diabetes). Surgical replacement of the lens can be carried out by a veterinary ophthalmologist.



Dogs & Cats

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Does Acupuncture hurt?

Most pets have a minimal response to acupuncture. Some points may be more sensitive than others, and these points may be used only if they are tolerated by the pet. Our goal is to have a successful and relaxing treatment for the animal.

Will my pet stay still for acupuncture?

Most pets become a little drowsy during their treatment and don't have a problem staying still. It isn't a problem however if they do move around.

What does an acupuncture treatment entail?

Following a physical examination and a discussion of the pet's condition, needles are placed in various parts of the pet's body. Needles may be left in anywhere from a few seconds to 45 minutes. You will be present with your pet the entire time.

How many times will my pet be treated?

Depending on the condition, your pet may be treated once or on a regular basis. It is a common practice to start out with more frequent visits, and then taper to an effective interval.



Acupuncture needles being placed in a fully alert, yet completely disinterested patient.

How long will it take to see effects?

Some animals show improvement after one session, while others take several treatments to show improvement. More chronic conditions tend to take longer to show improvement.

How do I know acupuncture is helping?

This will be discussed at length at your acupuncture consult. We will evaluate our treatment success with physical exams and your observations at home.

Can I use acupuncture in conjunction with my traditional veterinary treatment?

Absolutely! Acupuncture can be used as a stand alone treatment in some cases, but is often very helpful in addition to treatments and medications prescribed by your regular veterinarian or veterinary specialist.

Please feel free to ask us for more information; our certified veterinary acupuncturist, Dr. Beth Innis, DVM, CVA, CCRT will be happy to consult with you on whether acupuncture may be of benefit to your pet!

Things to Consider:



The oldest cat on record lived to be 36 years old.



A cat is considered to be a senior at around 9 years of age.



Frequent brushing in older cats helps control the problem of hairballs.



In older cats the digestive process slows down. Feeding your cat a diet specific to seniors is important to ensure they receive appropriate nutrition.

Your Reptile & You

Bearded Dragons

Bearded Dragons are a species of lizard that comes from Australia. They are found in a variety of environments including desert, woodlands and scrub brush. They have become a popular pet because of their docile and outgoing nature and most will look to be taken out and carried around by their owners. They tend to be hardy and do not have intricate housing and husbandry needs. Be aware that they can live up to ten years (some have been known to live longer) if given proper care.

Habitat

Creating a habitat can be a rewarding part of owning any reptile. The components of a habitat includes the enclosure, the substrate (material on the bottom of the enclosure), the lighting, water container, and “cage furniture” which includes plants, rocks, branches, hides, etc.

The size of an enclosure can make a big difference in the enrichment of your dragon. Typically a 20 gallon aquarium is used for a baby, which may be as small as 3 inches long, and by the end of the first year, a 40-55 gallon tank will be needed for your adult, which may be 15-18 inches long. You can find a wide array of enclosures at pet stores and on the internet, but picking up an aquarium at a yard sale will also do the trick. The rule of thumb is to get the largest enclosure that you can afford and fit into your living space. A screen lid is also needed as they get older, especially if they are going to have climbing areas.

The substrate is the material placed on the bottom of the enclosure. The simplest and easiest to clean are paper towels or newspaper as it is easy to change as needed. There are many products available including sands and mulches, but besides the difficulty of cleaning and changing these substrates, there is the potential problem of accidental ingestion of these materials when grabbing food.

Most bearded dragons will not drink from a bowl, but one should be provided to allow for soaking. A shallow bowl should be sufficient. To keep your beardie hydrated, you will need to bring him out for a bath twice a week, as well as mist him twice daily. He will often lick water that

collects on the tip of his nose, and some will learn to tell you they are thirsty by repeatedly sticking out the tip of the tongue. Bathing can be done by filling a plastic bin with several inches of warm water and placing your beardie in for 20 minutes or so. This will allow him to drink if so inclined, and many will use the opportunity to eliminate in the water, saving you the need to clean his cage!



Lighting and heat are especially key in caring for any reptile. Nearly all reptiles require a heat gradient, which means a range of temperatures so that they can position themselves in the temperature zone that is optimal for them. This is usually created by placing a heat source at one end,

above the enclosure

Heat Gradient

Providing a heat gradient is a crucial aspect of reptile care. You are giving your pet a simulated environment and are trying to create conditions, if not exactly like his natural habitat, to provide as many positive aspects as you can. Because reptiles are cold blooded, they have no means to regulate their temperature from within. They cannot shiver, and getting under a blanket doesn't keep them warm. They absorb heat from their environment: from the air, the sun, and from warmed earth. Their bodies have the ability to direct them to move to warmer or cooler conditions to provide what they need to be at an optimum temperature. Imagine that you are in a glass room with a bright light shining on you. You will probably be grateful for a cooler area to retreat to, or something to provide shade. This is similar to the variety of conditions you need to provide your pet in order to give him the opportunity to get warmer or cooler.

This is most commonly provided by creating a gradient. As you move in different directions, the temperature changes. A heating light above one end will give you the warm side, and a log that your reptile can climb on to bring him closer to the heat will provide a basking spot, a place where they can get really warm if they want to. When they have had enough heat, they can move to the other end of the tank, or climb under a rock that provides

Your Reptile & You

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shelter from the heat. Not only does this type of set up provide the necessary ability to regulate his own heat, it provides stimulation by allowing him to live on multiple levels, to climb and explore. In order to be certain that you are providing the proper heat gradient, you need to keep track of the actual temperature at the different sites, so multiple thermometers should be placed in the enclosure. One at the basking level, and one at the further end of the tank. This is the only way to be sure that your pet has a sufficient gradient in order to thermoregulate. Thermometers can be cheaply obtained at "megastores" in the home improvement departments. You are aiming to achieve 95-100 degrees in the basking spot (closest to the heat source) and 85-90 in the cool area. In most households, turning the heat source off at night will allow temperatures to drop to 65-70, which is adequate overnight. You must never use a heat rock. You will find many available and claims that they are great to have, but experienced reptile owners know that dangerous burn can occur, and there are so many better options for heating that you have no reason to need to provide a heat source on the bottom of the cage.

Ultraviolet light

Lack of calcium and proper lighting is the most common mistake in reptile husbandry. This leads to serious bone deformities and can be fatal. This is not an option!. The most efficient light currently available is a mercury vapor lamp (available at all reptiles supply sites on the web) which provides heat and ultraviolet (UV) light in the same unit. Other UV lights can be used with separate heat lamps such as a standard heat lamp or ceramic bulb. The bulb needs to be UVB and be rated as 10.0 to provide a high level of ultraviolet light. You can easily find suppliers on the internet by searching for reptile supplies.

Cage Furniture

Cage furniture is the really fun part of creating a habitat. The array of items is huge and there are logs, branches, caves, fancy bowls, etc. One source with good prices and selection is LLL Reptiles (lllreptiles.com). While you can go as fancy as you would like, there are many ways to

accessorize cheaply. Appropriately sized Tupperware turned over with an entrance hole cut out works well, broken flower pots that have an opening when turned over, large rocks from outside that have been soaked in a bleach solution, or a cinder block provide simple but useful additions to the enclosure.

There is a wealth of advice and experience out there on the web. A great source for ideas and examples from individuals that have worked out their own best enclosures can be found at redtailconnect.net, in the husbandry and enclosure information forum.

Feeding

Bearded dragons need a mixture of salad greens and a protein source, typically insects such as crickets. The breakdown should be 20 % greens and 80% protein for babies and the opposite for adults. For the salad greens, do not feed lettuce (little nutrition), but rather try dandelion greens, beet greens, and parsley. They also seem to like yellow and orange vegetables, cut up into bite-size pieces. Misting the veggies will help provide moisture. You will need a calcium powder to dust both crickets and veggies several times a week to provide a



Bearded Dragons of different colors sunbathing on a rock.

crucial source of calcium. Crickets are a common source of insect protein, as they can be fed cricket food to "gut load" the crickets with extra nutrition that is ingested with the insect. A great, inexpensive source of crickets is Carl's Crazy Cricket Farm (cccrickefarm.com). You can branch out to mealworms, phoenix worms, and roaches for variety as well.

The Bearded Dragon is considered a beginner reptile, especially if obtained as an adult (fewer problems with calcium), but attention to providing adequate heat and UVB light is crucial to being a responsible Beardie owner. You will find that the alertness and ease of handling makes these dragons super pets.