



Activity Management Protocol for Chronic Musculoskeletal Disease

Chronic musculoskeletal or orthopedic diseases are *very* common. Causes include degenerative joint disease/arthritis (DJD/OA), intervertebral disc disease (IVDD), joint malformation (dysplasia), muscle inflammation, and ligament and tendon inflammation. Nerve pain is commonly associated with orthopedic disease. Joint dysplasia and cruciate ligament disease are among the most common orthopedic conditions that lead to chronic back, neck pain and to the development of arthritis.

Signs of musculoskeletal pain include lameness, decreased activity, avoidance of activity, uneven weight bearing, shifting weight on limbs, lethargy, panting, restlessness, decreased appetite, excessive salivation, behavior changes including clinginess, and defensive, reactive or aggressive behaviors. Changes in gait and decreased fluidity in movement are also common. For example, hesitancy or gearing up to jump, a diagonal gait, stepping in the front limbs to rise and lay down are common.

The good news is that patients with chronic orthopedic disease have many treatment options available to them. ***The most effective treatment is multi-modal.*** Pain medications and anti-inflammatories can be very helpful in pain management and maintaining a good quality of life. In addition, therapies such as acupuncture, laser, and chiropractic therapy can be very beneficial in supporting joint, muscle, nerve health and healing. Good quality, reputable supplements can also help support joints and reduce inflammation.

Just as important as medications and therapies is reasonable *activity and weight management*. Weight management is essential in maintaining mobility and comfort. A lean body condition (4 out of 10) is ideal. Some degree of activity management is also a part of supporting patients with musculoskeletal conditions. Intense activity should be avoided, and it may be appropriate to prevent certain activities. Going for long walks, runs, intense play with other animals, and jumping up/down can be stressful, difficult, painful and can lead to further injury. Regulating or minimizing these types of activities and use of steps, ramps, harnesses and slings to assist mobility is helpful.

For front limb and spine conditions, elevate food and water bowls to lessen strain on the spine, muscles and joints. Use of a harness instead of a leash and collar is strongly recommended as well. Rough play should be avoided, especially tug play, rough wrestling, repetitive motions and jumping.

Please note that regular, low-impact exercise is important in maintaining joint and muscle health as movement stimulates blood flow, and nutrient and oxygen delivery to tissue, joints and nerves. Physical therapy is ideal for patients with chronic musculoskeletal conditions. Guided swimming and underwater treadmills, stretch exercises, and massage therapy can be very helpful.