

# HOW'S HIS QI?

Is Spot stiff? Find out how Chinese herbs can get to the root of his arthritis pain.

BY JEAN SCHERWENKA

Lily was trained for agility work. “She was my performance pooch, and also herded my sheep,” says Certified Pet Dog Trainer Jan Blue. “She did a lot of fast stopping and starting.” When she was less than seven years old, the Australian shepherd started limping occasionally. Jan gave her oral MSM and glucosamine, along with liquid glucosamine injections, but the limp continued. The vet diagnosed arthritis in Lily’s front limbs, curtailed her activities, and prescribed a Chinese herbal formula. Soon, Lily stopped limping, and Jan chose to discontinue the glucosamine shots.

If you love an animal that suffers from arthritis, you’ve got lots of company. “I would say probably 60% to 70% of the

dogs in my practice have arthritis of some form,” says holistic veterinarian and Herbsmith Inc. founder Chris Bessent, DVM, who also uses Chinese herbs for these patients.

As more of us seek natural healthcare for our animals, an understanding of Chinese herbs can help give our companions the long, healthy lives they deserve.

## THE TCVM APPROACH

Western medicine sees arthritis as decreased range of motion, pain, creaking in the joints, decreased viscosity of joint fluid, deterioration of bone and cartilage, and development of calcium deposits. A Western vet recognizes signs that your dog or cat is becoming arthritic – limping, decreased range of motion, swelling or heat around joints – and will typically treat these symptoms with some combination of pain relievers, anti-inflammatories, glucosamine or chondroitin.

Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) focuses on resolving the root of an animal’s problem, which then naturally relieves the symptoms. In addition to seeing the same symptoms recognized by Western medicine, TCVM sees arthritis or joint pain as a local obstruction in the flow of Qi (pronounced “chee”), the life energy that circulates through the body.

## QI AND ARTHRITIS

The life energy or Qi moves along meridians in the body, similar to power lines. These meridians form a network for Qi to travel along and direct blood and other bodily fluids. A cat or dog has 12 meridians on each side of his body, with a liver meridian on the left and one on the right, both traveling up the insides of his hind legs and connecting deeply with the liver itself.

The animal may experience an obstruction of Qi due to injury, overuse, or genetic pre-disposition. This Qi blockage will always cause a health problem, and when it’s at a joint, the problem is arthritis. “A joint is the hinge-like meeting place



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between two bones that provides a smooth and lubricated surface for rotating or moving sideways, up or down,” writes holistic vet Dr. Cheryl Schwartz in her book *Four Paws Five Directions: A Guide To Chinese Medicine for Cats and Dogs*. “Joints include bone, cartilage, ligaments and sometimes tendons.”

The two bone endings come together in a joint capsule filled with joint fluid. Ideally, the joint fluid is thick and viscous, and provides a nice cushion between the bones to prevent them from touching. The cartilage of the bone endings is filled with nerve fibers, so if those bones do touch, there is pain. When you see Spot run, he’s pushing off on his hind leg, and that pushing tends to bring those two bone endings in his joint capsule closer together.

A joint inflamed with arthritis (where an obstruction of Qi has occurred), releases enzymes that decrease the thickness and viscosity of the joint fluid. Spot’s thin and watery joint fluid can no longer provide that great protective cushion, so his bone endings may touch and rub and cause pain along with joint deterioration.

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If you’re considering **Chinese herbs for your companion, consult a veterinarian trained in Chinese medicine.**

Choose formulas containing only pure botanicals.

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How it develops can determine when it shows up. If it’s a genetic issue, arthritis could show up as early as two or three years of age. If arthritis develops from an unresolved trauma, it would depend on when the animal suffered the injury. Dogs who lead really active lifestyles – herding, obedience, agility, sled or hunting dogs – will probably show signs by the time they’re seven to nine.

### HOW CHINESE HERBS HELP

Slowly but surely, Lily regained her ability to enjoy a lot of her favorite activities. But how did the Chinese herbs heal her pain?

- Chinese herbal formulas can relieve the symptoms of arthritis recognized by Western medicine, while also getting to the root of the problem.
- Western herbs are usually used singly, but Chinese herbs are always used in a combination in which several herbs work in synergy with one another.
- Each individual herb is not as strong as the sum of the parts, but together they can resolve problems without any negative side effects.

The formula given to Lily (Herbsmith Soothe Arthritis) combines the Chinese herbs listed in the accompanying table to relieve arthritis from both perspectives. From a Chinese perspective, the herbs worked in combination to resolve the root of her problem by moving blood and Qi; from a Western perspective,

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they resolved her symptoms by relieving pain and decreasing inflammation. For example, Angelica du huo moves blood and Qi from the Chinese perspective and is considered anti-inflammatory from the Western perspective; either way, it's beneficial in relieving joint pain. In addition, the herbs performed their work without causing any damage to Lily's GI tract, liver, or kidneys.

Though more than ten years old, Lily's still catching Frisbees and balls and working the sheep. "We walk through the woods for a couple of hours, and she's fine," says Jan. "She's definitely not the same girl she was when she was three or four, but then I'm not either!"

## CHINESE HERBS FOR ARTHRITIS

HERBS	BENEFITS
Notopterygii	Moves blood and Qi; pain relieving and anti-inflammatory
Angelica du huo	Moves blood and Qi; anti-inflammatory
Gentiana	Benefits joints; anti-inflammatory
Mulberry twig	Benefits joints
Kadsura stem	Alleviates pain; inhibits nitric oxide production
Angelica dang gui	Moves blood, stops pain; anti-inflammatory and antioxidant
Ligusticum	Moves blood, alleviates pain; anti-inflammatory and antioxidant
Frankincense	Moves blood, relieves pain; anti-inflammatory and pain relieving
Aucklandia	Moves fluids; anti-inflammatory and anti-arthritis
Achyranthes	Directs action to limbs; anti-inflammatory and anti-arthritis
Cinnamon	Warms and directs action to limbs; antioxidant and anti-arthritis
Licorice	Harmonizes; antioxidant

