

Study shows drug comes up short in osteoarthritis pain relief

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Morris Animal Foundation-funded researchers from the University of Georgia, have found that tramadol was ineffective in alleviating signs of pain associated with osteoarthritis in dogs. The research team published their results in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.

"The data shows conclusively that tramadol is not an effective drug in treating the [pain](#) associated with arthritis in the dog, despite its common recommendation," said Dr. Steven Budsberg, Professor of Surgery and Director of Clinical Research at the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine. "This use of tramadol is a classic example of failing to acknowledge and control for bias when evaluating a potential treatment."

Osteoarthritis is a common and progressive condition of dogs, affecting approximately 14 million adult dogs in the United States alone. Osteoarthritis causes pain and discomfort, limiting mobility as well as negatively impacting the quality of life. Numerous options are available to treat osteoarthritis, with drug therapy to alleviate pain a cornerstone of treatment. However, there are still questions regarding which therapies are most effective.

The team at University of Georgia, led by Budsberg, studied the problem by comparing the commonly used medication tramadol against both placebo and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in client-owned [dogs](#) in a randomized, blinded, placebo and positive-controlled crossover

study.

Dogs with [osteoarthritis](#) of the elbow or knee were assigned to receive each of three treatments in a random order. Each treatment arm lasted for 10 days. Improvement was measured using a battery of tests that evaluated a dog's gait and pain. The results showed no improvement when [tramadol](#) was given compared to either baseline or placebo. The study results highlight the need for carefully controlled studies when evaluating drug effectiveness.

"Recognition and alleviation of pain in [animals](#) has been a priority for Morris Animal Foundation since our founding," said Dr. Kelly Diehl, Senior Scientific and Communications Adviser at Morris Animal Foundation. "This study reinforces the need to carefully and systematically evaluate a [pain medication](#)'s effectiveness before it becomes commonly prescribed, no matter what the species."

More information: Steven C. Budsberg et al, Lack of effectiveness of tramadol hydrochloride for the treatment of pain and joint dysfunction in dogs with chronic osteoarthritis, *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (2018). [DOI: 10.2460/javma.252.4.427](https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.252.4.427)

Provided by Morris Animal Foundation

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