

Dogs Lead Way in Arthritis Research

COLUMBIA - University of Missouri researchers are finding new ways to diagnose and treat arthritis before it becomes a pain. When it comes to arthritis, man's best friend is just like man himself.

"They are the best model for humans because of their activities, because they get the same types of arthritis for the same reasons as we do," explained James Cook, professor of veterinary medicine.



And, it's easier to use dogs as test subjects because they develop arthritis faster than people. Cook has found genetic signs for arthritis, genes that can increase the likelihood of developing the disease as well as providing a possible breakthrough in prevention.

"There are indicators that aren't that specific right now, you know, that says what the likelihood is of your getting arthritis," he said. "But, what we want is very specific ones that are 95%-plus accurate."

Cook and research partner Aaron Stoker induced arthritis in test dogs, then looked at signs and indicators that appeared as the disease became worse.

"If we identify which genes and which proteins are the most problematic, then we can direct therapies towards those," said Cook.

There is no routine screening for arthritis, and techniques often are inconclusive. Cook hopes his research will make testing as routine as prostate exams or mammograms. To prevent arthritis, doctors recommend keeping fit and active, and having a joint exam when you reach 40 years old.

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Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2006 at 4:13 PM

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