



# Arthritis in Cats

Arthritis can be a painful and debilitating condition caused by inflammation of one or multiple joints.

Cats can develop arthritis in any joint, at any time, although elderly and overweight animals are most at risk.

Unlike dogs, cats don't tend to limp – instead they show just a few subtle signs, which are easily missed, and often blamed on 'old age'.

## What are the signs of arthritis?

Any of the following may be seen:

- Reluctance to jump up or hesitancy when jumping down from a raised surface. Some cats may climb instead.
- Reduced activity or willingness to play.
- Longer periods spent sleeping, often in one place.
- Reduced use of scratch posts and overgrown claws.
- Muscle wastage, particularly over the hips and spine.
- Struggling to get into the litter tray, or through the cat flap.
- Reduced grooming due to stiffness, leading to a scurfy or matted coat.
- Altered attitude such as swiping or hissing when the back is stroked.

## How do we diagnose arthritis?

As with humans, an X-ray is the best way to diagnose arthritis. This is important because some tendon and ligament injuries may present with the same signs, but require different management. Most cats will require a sedative or general anaesthetic to allow good quality X-rays to be taken from particular angles.

Depending on the X-ray results, some cats may require further tests such as analysis of fluid within the joint or muscle scans.

## How can we prevent arthritis?

The most important factor in preventing arthritis is weight control. Overweight pets put more force on their joints, causing them to age more rapidly. Weight control relies both on exercise and dietary management. If you think your cat may be overweight, please contact your local branch to arrange a free weight check.

Although increasing exercise in cats may not be as easy as taking them for a walk, many things can be done such as encouraging play, particularly tempting them to run up and down the stairs.

## How can we treat arthritis?

**Weight control** – as above, keeping your cat at their optimum weight will reduce unnecessary force on their painful joints.

**Exercise** – regular exercise little and often helps maintain muscle tone and reduce stiffness.

**Joint Supplements** – These help joint cartilage to regenerate, usually taking 4-6 weeks to reach peak effect. Numerous joint supplements are available, most commonly containing glucosamine and chondroitin. We recommend the use of Veterinary formulations which have undergone rigorous testing to prove they are both safe and effective. Most are available in sprinkle capsules to aid administration.

**Diet** – both Royal Canin and Hills Pet Foods have developed diets containing joint supplements. These have been proven to reduce requirement for pain killers, and are available in reduced calorie versions to also aid weight loss.

**Anti-inflammatories** – A range of medications are available to help reduce inflammation, therefore relieving pain. Many animals receive anti-inflammatories at some point in their lives; often a short course following an injury or operation. Occasionally, anti-inflammatories are used to help arthritic animals, given daily in liquid form that is tolerated well by the majority of cats. These medications are highly effective and often significantly improve mobility and quality of life; however there is a small risk of side effects such as stomach irritation. Care must be taken if your pet suffers from liver or kidney disease, therefore screening blood tests are recommended periodically for all pets on long term treatment.

**Physiotherapy** – We offer physiotherapy sessions with Polly Hutson, a Chartered Animal Physiotherapist based at Drove Hospital. Treatments include massages to relieve muscle spasms, and specially designed exercises to help increase mobility.

**Acupuncture** – this ancient technique, offered at Drove Hospital, has been used successfully in a range of patients. Please see our Acupuncture leaflet for more details.

If you would like to discuss any of the subjects raised in the leaflet, or have any questions about your pet, please contact your local branch.

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