

Arthritis in cats

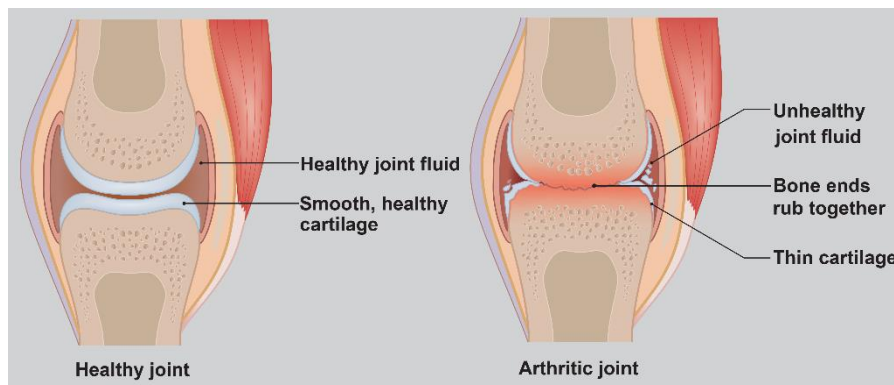
Overview

Arthritis (osteoarthritis) is a very common condition that causes painful, swollen joints and makes moving around uncomfortable. A reluctance to move can sometimes be mistaken for a cat naturally 'slowing down' due to old age.

Although there is no cure for arthritis, there are plenty of steps you can take to help your feline friend feel more comfortable.

Treatment for arthritis can make a big difference to your cat's quality of life.

It is important to contact your vet if you notice your cat slowing down or if you are suspicious that their joints are causing them pain.



What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a painful condition that causes joints to become inflamed and stiff. It can affect any joint in the body but is most common in the legs and spine. It is common in older cats due to natural wear and tear on the joints. Younger cats can develop arthritis if they have an injury, or their joints haven't developed properly.

The bones in a healthy joint have a smooth surface and healthy joint fluid. This allows your cat's bones to slide past each other easily as they move around.

In a joint with arthritis, the smooth surface is worn down and uneven. Instead of gliding past each other, the bones in the joint rub against each other like sandpaper. This causes swelling and pain.

Over time, arthritic joints become thickened and stiff because they produce extra bone that isn't needed. This extra bone gets in the way and is painful when your cat moves.

Symptoms of arthritis in cats

Signs of arthritis in cats can include:

- Difficulty jumping or using the stairs
- Limping
- Stiffness (all the time or every now and then)
- More prominent shoulder blades (due to muscle wastage around the shoulders making your cat appear thinner in this area)
- Hiding away or sleeping more than usual
- Over-grooming (licking a certain spot more than usual which can cause saliva staining - a pink/brown staining to the fur)
- Unkempt or matted fur especially along the back and around the bottom, because your cat will find it difficult or painful to twist to groom these areas
- Swollen or hot joints
- Being a bit more grumpy than usual, especially when you go to touch them.

Signs of arthritis can be hard to spot as they can be subtle and come on gradually. It can be helpful to think back to what your

cat was like a few months or even years ago when trying to think if they are showing any of these signs.

When to contact your vet

If you notice any of the above symptoms, you should book an appointment with your vet. Regular check-ups as your cat gets older can also help to pick up signs early.

You know your cat best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

How long will a cat with arthritis live?

Your cat's arthritis will continue to progress over time. Although there's no cure for arthritis, by working closely with your vet, there are lots of ways you can control the symptoms and keep your cat comfortable.

With long-term management, most cats will have a good quality of life for many years and for many cats, well controlled arthritis won't shorten their lives.

Causes of arthritis in cats

Arthritis in cats can develop for a number of reasons:

Wear and tear

Normal wear and tear of joints over time can lead to arthritis later in life.

Genetics

Some cats are more likely to develop arthritis due to their breed. This kind of arthritis is usually because of an inherited weakness in the cartilage.

Injuries

Joints that have been damaged (e.g. through a road traffic accident or dislocation) are more likely to develop arthritis later in life.

Treatment for arthritis in cats

Your vet will help you to decide on the best treatment for your cat. Options they may recommend include:

Anti-inflammatory pain relief

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories help reduce pain and inflammation. This type of medication is often given every day.
- Never give your cat human medication without a discussion with your vet. Many human pain killers can be toxic to cats.

Additional pain relief

- Other types of pain relief medication might be prescribed alongside anti-inflammatory pain relief if your cat isn't comfortable.
- Your vet will be able to recommend what medications might be appropriate for your cat.

Joint supplements

- Joint supplements such as omega 3, glucosamine (and many others) can be used at the same time as other medicines to try and help slow down the progression of arthritis.
- Joint supplements aren't a replacement for medications, and don't work for all cats.
- There are many joint supplements of varying quality on the market. Your vet will be able to advise on a suitable product.

Additional therapies

- Most cats won't tolerate acupuncture due to stress. But it can sometimes be used to help with signs of arthritis. If you are interested in acupuncture, speak to your vet who will be able to recommend a qualified acupuncturist or arrange a referral for your cat. Try to find a therapist that will come to your home to reduce the stress for your cat.
- Hydrotherapy isn't a realistic option for most cats. Unless your cat loves water, forcing them into a pool will cause more stress than benefit given by this therapy.

Surgery

- If your cat's pain from arthritis is severe and uncontrollable, surgery might be considered. For example, surgical fusion of the joint means that it is no longer a source of pain.
- These surgeries are usually only available at specialist veterinary hospitals.

Home care for cats with arthritis

In addition to any treatment prescribed by your vet, there are plenty of ways you can help your cat at home:

Give your cat a comfortable bed

- Place a selection of beds around your home for your cat to choose from. Remember to put them at several at different heights, your cat may not be able to jump as high up as they used to.
- Orthopaedic memory foam beds can be really comfortable for cats with arthritis.
- A heated bed can naturally help sooth your cat's joints.

Use raised food bowls

- Make sure your cat's food and water bowls are somewhere they can easily get to.

- Raising food and water bowls can help because bending down can be painful when you have arthritis. You can buy special raised bowls, or alternatively just place something solid underneath your cat's bowl the lift it up to a height so they don't have to crouch to reach it. A pint glass full of water can be used as a water bowl.

Specialist diet

- Specialist joint diets can help your cat long-term, they contain ingredients which may help protect your cat's joints, but they might not work for all cats. Read how to safely change your cat from one food to another.

Keep your cat slim

- Even a little bit of extra weight puts more strain on your cat's sore joints. Overweight or obese cats will suffer much worse with arthritis than if they were slim.
- If you're worried about your cat's weight, speak to your vet about how to help them lose weight.
- Specialist weight-loss diets can help your cat to slim down safely.

Change your cat's litter tray

- A litter tray with low sides can make it much easier for your cat. A home-made solution would be to cut a lower entrance to the tray so that there's less of a big step for your arthritic cat.

Use ramps/steps around the home

- Many cats suffering with arthritis will be reluctant to jump up, but cats still like to watch the world from up high. Help your cat reach their favourite places by using carefully placed ramps or steps, or moving furniture to offer them a path they can use without jumping.

Keep your cat warm

- Cold, wet joints will be more uncomfortable. Make sure your cat's bed is away from draughts.
- If your cat has been out in wet weather, gently dry them off when they come back in.
- On cold winter days, you may also find a pet heat pad tucked under their bed will help to keep them cosy and allow the heat to soothe their joints.

Preventing arthritis

There are steps you can take to help reduce the chance of your cat developing arthritis.

Keep your cat's weight under control

- Keeping your cat slim is really important. Extra weight puts extra strain on joints.

Feed a life stage diet

- Feeding your cat a good quality food that is suitable for their life stage (e.g. kitten, adult, senior) will help support their growth and receive the right nutrients throughout their life.

Keep them active and healthy with regular playtime

- Keeping your cat active will help their muscles stay strong, which will naturally take some of the strain off their joints. Playtime is so much better with you involved, so find ways to keep them active with toys that mimic their natural behaviour.

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