

FELINE ARTHRITIS

What is Arthritis?

Osteoarthritis is the inflammation of the joint lining and the deterioration of cartilage. Cartilage is eroded from the ends of the bones making up the joint, and bony spurs and thickening occur in bones adjacent to the joint. Bone on bone grinding worsens this cycle.

Arthritis is a painful condition that should always be taken seriously.

How Do I Know If My Cat Has Arthritis?

Even if your cat is not obviously symptomatic, they may be arthritic. The conditions (cold weather, rainy days, etc.) that trigger arthritis flare-ups in humans also cause them in cats.

Senior cats can be given an arthritis supplement. You may notice a stiff gait and difficulty getting around their own home, or a pet that cannot jump like they used to. You may also notice inappropriate urination if the struggle to get in to their litter box. Some cats show no symptoms, but since arthritis is present in many cats over ten years of age, it is important to slow down the degeneration of joints. If in doubt, start supplements.

Some signs that your cat may be suffering from arthritis are:

- Difficulty climbing stairs or jumping
- Increased stiffness or limping
- Difficulty lying down or getting up
- Inappropriate litter box usage
- Inability to groom or be groomed, resulting in poor coat condition or matting, especially back half of the body
- Heat-seeking behavior, such as lying by heat vents, coffee pots, sunny locations

What Treatments Are Available For Feline Arthritis?

Glucosamine and chondroitin – Glucosamine is a major component of cartilage, and chondroitin aids the formation of cartilage and inhibits enzymes in the joint that tend to break down cartilage. Dasuquin is a tuna/chicken flavored powder which comes in a capsule that can be given orally or sprinkled over food. Arthrimaxx is a liquid form of this dietary supplement.

Antioxidants – Antioxidants can help with many inflammatory processes associated with aging throughout the body. This supplement may be taken along with other arthritis medications for more effective treatment. It is available in a tablet or a capsule that can be given orally or sprinkled on food. Science Diet now includes antioxidants in it's Advanced Protection line of food.

Metacam – Limited application. A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) that offers highly effective pain control. Cats lack a liver enzyme that make them very sensitive to NSAIDs. Cats with compromised kidney function should not use Metacam. It comes in liquid form, and is usually administered in 5 day cycles. Long term use is not recommended.

MSM Methylsulfonylmethane – provides sulfur, a vital building block of joints, cartilage, skin, hair and nails. MSM can be taken alone or in combination with other joint supplements, such as glucosamine and chondroitin.

Elderly cats can suffer from a variety of medical conditions but it is important not to overlook arthritis, which is easily managed. Talk with your veterinarian about which treatments would be best for your cat.

What Else Can I Do About Feline Arthritis?

Excess **weight** can overburden already painful joints and also has been shown to contribute to cartilage deterioration. If your cat is overweight, talk with your vet about the best way to safely reduce the cat's weight. Usually this involves feeding more canned food and less dry.

Exercise provides a two-fold benefit: it aids in weight loss and it helps keep arthritic joints from becoming stiff by increasing synovial fluid.

Warmth provides comfort for stiff, painful joints. You might provide a heated or thermal pet bed, or use a Snuggle Safe disk to supply safe warmth without electricity. We strongly recommend the use of Snuggle Safes over traditional electric heating pads. Even more appropriate would be radiant heat, like a reptile basking spot. We recommend ceramic heat elements (or bulbs) which emit no light, only heat. You can create a microenvironment.

Large-breed dog **beds** usually provide thicker cushioning than cat beds, making them an excellent resting spot for your arthritic cat.

Be mindful of your cat's changing needs. Perhaps you can add a litter box closer to the cat's favorite napping spot, or add a feeding station on each floor so the cat doesn't have to climb the stairs to eat or get a drink.

With a little special care, your arthritic cats can enjoy their senior years.