

Arthritis in Cats

Arthritis in Cats: Understanding and Managing This Common Condition

Arthritis in cats is quite common, yet it often flies under the radar. Let's dive into what it really means and how to recognise it in our feline friends.

What Is Arthritis?

At its core, arthritis is an inflammation of the joints. This inflammation can make movement painful and difficult for your cat. The most common form is osteoarthritis, where the joints gradually deteriorate, causing the surfaces to become rough and uneven. This condition can affect various joints in your cat's body, including the elbows, hips, knees, and ankles.



It's quite surprising, but over 90% of cats aged 12 and older show signs of arthritis when examined through X-rays. However, cats are natural masters at hiding their discomfort, so you might not notice any signs until the condition has progressed significantly.

How Can You Spot Arthritis in Your Cat?

Since arthritis develops gradually, it's essential to stay alert to any changes in your cat's behaviour. For instance, they might struggle to jump onto their favourite perch, avoid climbing stairs, or hesitate to use the cat flap. If your typically active kitty suddenly starts spending more time lounging around, it's time to consult your vet. Here are some common signs of arthritis:

- **Limping or Lameness:** Watch for any unusual limping or favouring of a leg.
- **Stiffness:** You might notice a stiff or awkward gait.
- **Fatigue:** Your cat may seem more tired than usual.
- **Weight Changes:** Weight loss or muscle wasting can occur as they become less active.

- **Grooming Difficulties:** Look for dirty or matted fur, especially around the back, hind legs, and tail. This might indicate they're struggling to groom themselves properly.
- **Sensitivity to Touch:** If your cat flinches when you touch certain areas, they may be in pain.
- **Irritability:** A grumpy demeanour can signal discomfort.
- **Overgrooming:** If you notice stained fur or hair loss, your cat might be overgrooming painful joints.



What Causes Arthritis in Cats?

Most often, arthritis is simply the result of wear and tear on the joints, which is a common issue in older cats. However, other factors can contribute to the development of arthritis, including:

- **Obesity:** Extra weight puts added pressure on joints.
- **Poor Body Structure:** The shape and structure of your cat's body can play a role.
- **Hip and Elbow Dysplasia:** These genetic conditions can lead to joint problems.
- **Previous Injuries:** Past muscle injuries, fractures, or ligament damage can also increase the risk.

How Is Arthritis Diagnosed?

When you take your cat to the vet, they will likely conduct a thorough physical examination, checking for stiffness, pain, or swelling in the joints. While X-rays can be helpful, they aren't always necessary for a diagnosis.

Managing Arthritis in Cats

Unfortunately, arthritis isn't something we can cure, but there are plenty of ways to help manage your cat's discomfort and maintain their quality of life:

- **Weight Management:** Keeping your cat at a healthy weight can significantly reduce stress on their joints. If your cat is overweight, consult your vet about a suitable diet.
- **Moderate Exercise:** Encouraging gentle play and daily movement helps keep their joints from getting stiff. Just be careful not to overdo it—keeping things low-key is key!
- **Environmental Adjustments:** Make sure your cat can comfortably reach their favourite spots and litter box. Consider ramps or steps to help them navigate, and a soft, cozy bed to ease joint pressure. If your floors are slippery, adding rugs can help prevent falls.
- **Medication:** Anti-inflammatories and painkillers can make a world of difference in your cat's mobility and comfort. Be sure to talk to your vet about the best options and never give your cat medication without their guidance.
- **Surgery:** In cases of traumatic injuries, surgery may help alleviate arthritis symptoms, but it's not usually necessary for arthritis on its own.



Can Arthritis Be Prevented?

While we can't stop age-related arthritis from happening, there are steps you can take to slow its development. Keeping your cat at a healthy weight is the most effective prevention method. Additionally, you can modify their environment to minimize injury risks. For instance, providing climbing trees with gentle landings can help them reach the ground safely.

In certain breeds, like Maine Coons, the risk of hip dysplasia is higher. Responsible breeding practices can help mitigate this risk.

What's the Prognosis for Cats with Arthritis?

With early treatment and proactive management, many cats with arthritis can enjoy a good quality of life for some time. However, since arthritis is progressive, it may worsen over the years. If your cat's mobility declines or their quality of life suffers, your vet may discuss euthanasia as a compassionate option.

If you suspect your cat is in pain or not responding to treatment like they used to, always reach out to your vet for advice. Your vigilance can make a significant difference in your cat's well-being!