

Caring for cats with

Arthritis



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What is arthritis?

Whilst arthritis is widely recognised in older dogs, the condition is often overlooked in cats. Arthritis is a painful inflammatory disease of the joints that will often cause a reduction in your cat's normal range of mobility. As the disease develops, subsequent degeneration of a joint results in cartilage destruction. It is this damage that is ultimately responsible for the chronic pain and restricted joint function that can significantly impact your cat's quality of life.

There are three key types of arthritis that may affect your cat;

- **Osteoarthritis** - Also known as degenerative joint disease (DJD), osteoarthritis is by far the most common type of arthritis. It is the result of excessive wear and tear on the joints that can be caused by a number of factors.
- **Rheumatoid arthritis** - Arthritis caused by an abnormality in your cat's immune system resulting in the body attacking its own joints.
- **Infective OR septic arthritis** - Arthritis caused by a bacterial infection of the fluid and tissues of a joint, making them painful and swollen.

60-90% of radiographed (X-rayed) cats over 12 years old display evidence of affected arthritic joints¹.

Osteoarthritis, once established, is a chronic disease that will affect your cat for the rest of its life. The good news is that there are many effective treatments and therapies that can relieve the symptoms of arthritis, significantly increasing mobility and quality of life for your cat.

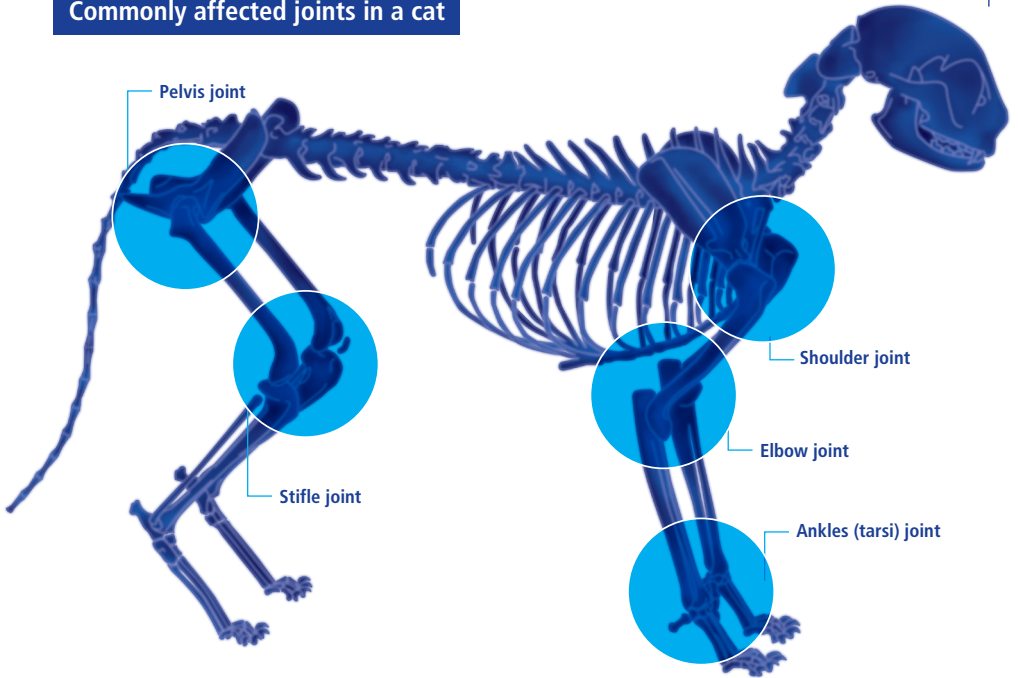
Prevalence of arthritis

Arthritis in feline patients is far more common than most people would expect. Similar to human medicine, arthritis will be more common and often more severe, in older cats. In fact, recent studies have shown 60-90% of radiographed (X-rayed) cats over 12 years old display evidence of affected arthritic joints¹. The shoulders, hips, elbows, knees (stifles) and ankles (tarsi) are the most commonly affected joints^{1,3}.

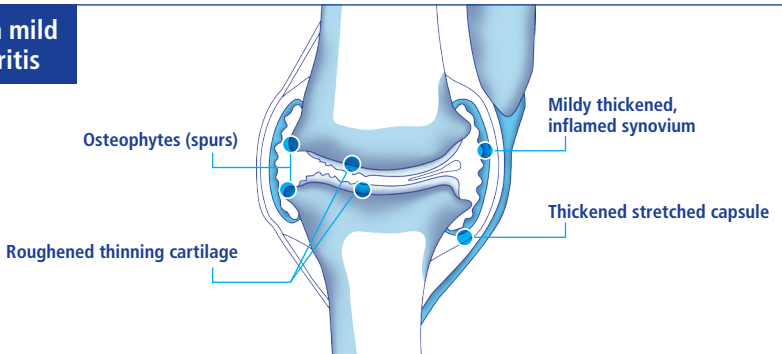
What causes arthritis in your cat?

Osteoarthritis (OA) can be a result of either primary mechanical wear and tear damage, or secondary to trauma related damage to the cartilage and ligaments that cushions and stabilises the joint³. If the cartilage is damaged severely enough, the hard surface of the bones that are normally protected by cartilage will be forced to rub against one another leading to pain, as well as the development of bony deformities in and around the joint. These bony projections or spurs are termed osteophytes. In addition to the bony changes, excess synovial fluid and a thickened synovial capsule can cause joint swelling. Finally, in response to all of this, the capsule and ligaments within the joint, thicken and contract in an effort to make the joint more stable. The combination of all these changes makes the joint inflamed and painful, as well as greatly reducing the range of movement.

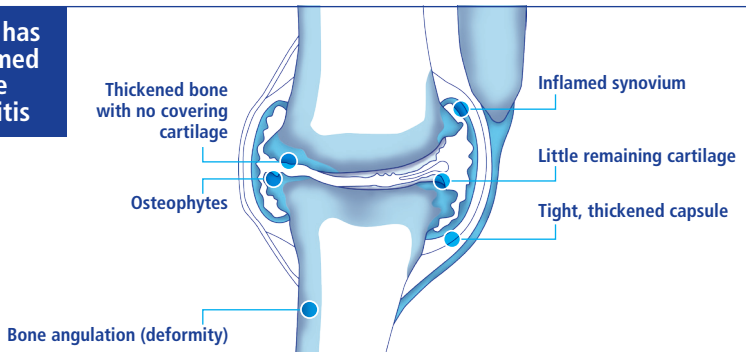
Commonly affected joints in a cat



A joint with mild osteoarthritis



A joint that has been deformed by severe osteoarthritis



Risk factors

To further improve our understanding of arthritis in cats it is worth considering the contributing risk factors;

- **Old Age** - Just like you and I, as your pet approaches old age the chances of suffering from arthritis will increase. Older animals are more prone to arthritis caused by years of wear and tear on their joints.

How old is your cat and when to think about arthritis?

Life stage	Age of cat	Human equivalent
Kitten birth-6 months	0-1 month	0-1 year
	2 months	2 years
	3 months	4 years
	4 months	6 years
	5 months	8 years
	6 months	10 years
Junior 7 months-2 years	7 months	12 years
	12 months	15 years
	18 months	21 years
	2 years	24 years
Adult 3-6 years	3 years	28 years
	4 years	32 years
	5 years	36 years
	6 years	40 years
Mature 7-10 years	7 years	44 years
	8 years	48 years
	9 years	52 years
	10 years	56 years
Senior 10-15 years	11 years	60 years
	12 years	64 years
	13 years	68 years
	14 years	72 years
Super senior 15 years +	15 years	76 years
	16 years	80 years
	17 years	84 years
	18 years	88 years
	19 years	92 years
	20 years	96 years
	21 years	100 years
	22 years	104 years
	23 years	108 years
	24 years	112 years
25 years	116 years	

Time to
think about
arthritis



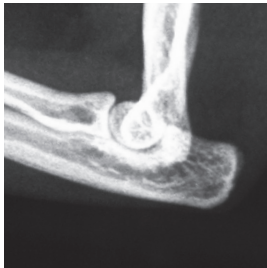
- **Obesity** - Obesity has been shown to be a risk factor for OA in most species. As many as 1 in 5 of the older cat population is estimated to be obese². That said, being overweight will increase the chances of your pet developing arthritis at an earlier age because of the extra strain on their joints.
- **Genetics** - Certain breeds of cat have increased risk of osteoarthritis due to underlying joint issues. These can include;
 - Hip dysplasia (abnormal development of the hip joints): can be seen in Maine Coon cats, Persians, Siamese and some other breeds.
 - Patella luxation (dislocation of the knee cap): common in Abyssinian and Devon Rex cats.
 - Scottish Folds are predisposed to multiple joint issues due to abnormalities in their cartilage
- **Injuries** - Any injuries to the bone, joints or ligaments, especially if not properly treated, can increase the chances of your cat developing arthritis. Perhaps the most common example of this type of trauma would be that associated with road traffic accidents.
- **Acromegaly** - A condition in which a tumour in the pituitary gland secretes too much growth hormone. Most of these cats develop diabetes mellitus, however some may also develop secondary arthritis.



Examples of arthritic damage

Elbow

The elbow is the most common area for OA in cats. 59% of OA cases seen by vets will be in the elbow. Common areas of elbow OA for the cat are the inside of the elbow joint (circled in arthritic elbow image below).



Normal elbow



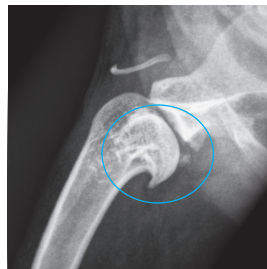
Arthritic elbow

Shoulder

Shoulder OA isn't as common in the cat as it can be in other species. Studies show only 5.5% of cats suffer from this condition⁴, generally there will be osteophyte formation (bony formations) along the joint and these will cause pain for the cat when jumping up or down.



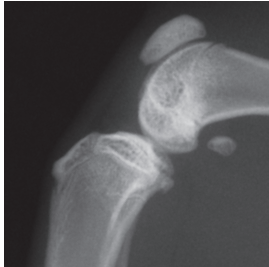
Normal shoulder



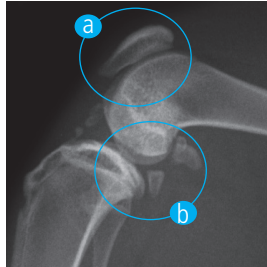
Arthritic shoulder

Stifle (Knee)

Luxating patella (dislocation of the knee cap) is more likely to exist in the Abyssinians and the Devon Rex (but can also be seen in non-pedigree breeds) and will often lead to secondary OA⁵. This condition often occurs in younger cats of around 3 years old, and can result in a reluctance to jump, stiffness, and lameness⁵. OA of the stifle can generally be characterised by bony formation on the knee cap (a) and on the edge of the tibia (b)⁴.



Normal stifle (knee) joint



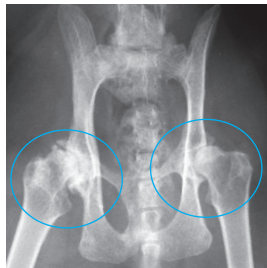
Arthritic stifle (knee) joint

Pelvis or Hip

Hip dysplasia is the most common cause of arthritis in the hip (32% shown in one study and only 19% for DJD⁶). Hip dysplasia is more common in purebred cats such as Maine Coon, Persians and Himalayans. In a hip joint affected by hip dysplasia, also called a dysplastic hip, the ball and the socket in the pelvis do not fit together snugly, causing instability and friction when the limb is moved. This is painful and further damage to the cartilage surface results in inflammation of the joint and therefore more pain. Hip and pelvis arthritis can vary from mild to severe and will often result in visible signs of lameness or discomfort. Most cats won't require surgical treatment, however lifestyle changes are recommended including weight reduction (if the cat is overweight).



Normal hip joints



Arthritic hip joints

Remember that if your cat has previously been involved in an road traffic accident or fall, damaged limbs/joints can become affected with arthritis due the previously sustained injuries.

Could your cat be in pain?

As many cats have a sedentary lifestyle, especially as they get older, it may be difficult for owners to know if they are suffering from having painful joints. Here are some of the more common symptoms that are often seen in cats with arthritis.

If your cat is displaying some of these symptoms or you have any concerns, please discuss them with your vet.

Reduced agility

Does your cat find it difficult to jump up onto a surface; and often needs to take several small jumps to compensate?

Limping

Does your cat struggle to walk without limping especially after long periods of rest?

Stiffness

Many cats suffering from joint pain often have difficulty rising from a resting position due to stiffness in their joints.



Reluctance to play

Does your cat have a reluctance to run up stairs or play with their favourite toys?

Irritability

Arthritic cats can become irritable and depressed and may avoid being stroked or fussed by their owners.

Reduced grooming

Has your pet stopped grooming properly, or even stopped grooming completely?



Diagnosis

From about six years of age arthritis becomes more common in the cat, if you notice any of the previously discussed signs then this is the time to see the vet (even if the cat is not quite six years old). After a full clinical examination, if there is still any uncertainty then your vet will often recommend X-rays of the joints in order to confirm diagnosis.

Cats can be notoriously difficult to diagnose purely due to their secretive and potentially nervous nature. So it is important to watch your cat in the home environment and inform the vet of your observations

Management of OA

Medication Options

Your vet will advise you on the most appropriate medication for your cat. There is a wide range of drugs available for managing arthritic pain and inflammation which may significantly improve your cat's quality of life. The most common medicines used to relieve the pain associated with arthritis are known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). This medication comes in a variety of presentations, including injectable, tablets and oral suspension that can be given on the cat's food. It is important to ensure you keep up with any treatment your vet prescribes in order to achieve full, effective management of your cat's condition.

- **Injectable medication** - Your vet may administer an injection for rapid pain relief. This will normally be followed by a treatment you can give your cat at home.
- **Oral suspensions** - This preparation form can be administered directly into the mouth, or simply added to your cat's food. Oral suspensions are available in a range of strengths to match your cat's size and weight, and will usually come with a dosing syringe that makes administration simple, and accurate.

Never give your cat medication unless you have discussed with your vet first, this includes any human pain relief medication as these drugs can be deadly to cats

Possible Surgery

Surgery is occasionally an option to treat osteoarthritis, and can involve joint or ligament replacement or, in some cases, fusing the joint into a set position to relieve chronic pain by preventing movement. It is advised to speak to your vet about all the options to see if this would be appropriate for your cat.

Weight Management

To reduce the progression of arthritis, ensure your pet eats a healthy diet and exercises regularly. Putting your pet on a diet is often the most challenging part of arthritis treatment, but weight loss can dramatically improve their quality of life², as well as reduce the need for medication. Today many pet food brands offer specialised diet food ranges containing ingredients that are low in fat and that aid digestion; these will normally be available from your local veterinary clinic. Your veterinary surgeon or nurse will be able to advise on the ideal weight for your pet and put together an appropriate weight loss programme.

Nutraceuticals/Supplements

These can aid joint flexibility and may help reduce inflammation. These supplements usually contain glucosamine, a natural compound that is an essential component of joint cartilage and omega-3 fatty acids, which have also been shown to improve joint health. Studies have shown improved behaviour and movement from cats with naturally occurring OA that have been fed omega-3 fatty acids in their diets⁷.



Alternative Therapies

A number of complimentary therapies have been shown to relieve the symptoms of osteoarthritis in certain cases, these include electromagnetic collars, acupuncture and physiotherapy.

It is advisable to discuss the range of alternative therapies on offer with your veterinary surgeon to ensure you are providing the best solution to arthritis pain for your pet.

Home Improvements^{1,2}

Cold and damp can increase the discomfort caused by arthritis. When it's raining and chilly outdoors, ensure your home is warm and that your cat has a warm and comfortable bed to sleep in.



- Try an igloo style bed so the cat is draft free and this helps an older cat feel more secure, this is especially important if you have young children or boisterous animals
- You may wish to provide an orthopaedic foam bed to help distribute their weight evenly, this will reduce pressure on your cat's joints.
- Placing stools or ramps for your cat to use to reach its preferred sleeping/ observation areas can also help
- Make sure the cat flap is easy to open, you may even need to tie it open
- Ensure the cat has a low sided litter tray
- Make sure that food and water is at an accessible point for the cat, and that they do not have to go up a flight of stairs to reach it
- Older cats find it difficult to self groom, your vet can advise a suitable grooming brush which will need using daily
- The cat may also have overgrown claws as they aren't able to use a scratch post comfortably so they will need monitoring and regular cutting



References

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Veterinary Practice Details

Is your cat showing any of the below signs of arthritis?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does your cat sleep more and/or is it less active? | <input type="checkbox"/> Overall is your cat less agile? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is your cat less willing to jump onto or off raised objects? | <input type="checkbox"/> Does your cat show signs of lameness or limping? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Will your cat only jump up or down from lower heights? | <input type="checkbox"/> Does your cat have accidents outside the litter tray? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does your cat ever show signs of stiffness? | <input type="checkbox"/> Does your cat have difficulty getting in or out of the cat flap? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is your cat more reluctant to greet you or interact with you? | <input type="checkbox"/> Does your cat have difficulty going up or down stairs? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does your cat play with other animals or toys less? | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does your cat have a poor coat? Or spend less time grooming? | |

If so talk to your vet or vet nurse today about treatments and therapies available.



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