

# Arthritis



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**VETERINARY GUIDES**



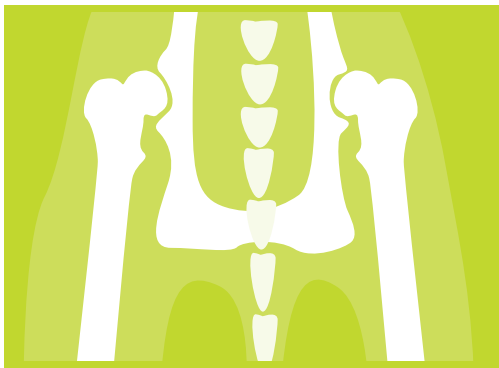
*The term 'arthritis' means inflammation of the joint; many animals suffer from it and cats are no exception.*

## What causes arthritis?

Arthritis occurs when there is damage to the moveable joints of bones. It can be caused by many things, including trauma, infection or wear and tear.

Arthritis is more commonly seen in elderly cats who mainly suffer from a type of arthritic condition called osteoarthritis or degenerative joint disease. Osteoarthritis can be caused by the repeated wear and tear of joints or can be secondary to a previous injury such as a dislocation, fracture or torn ligament.

Arthritis in cats often goes unnoticed as owners think the cat is just slowing down with age. It is worth getting your cat checked regularly as treating chronic problems like arthritis can make a huge difference to his quality of life.



## What are the signs?

Signs are usually long standing and will gradually get worse with time as the joint deteriorates further. The elbow, shoulders, hips and spine are the most common areas to be affected, and one or more may be affected at one time.

The main signs shown in cats are:

- stiffness, lameness and reduced mobility – an unwillingness to jump or climb
- difficulty grooming, especially the middle of the back and tail
- increased stiffness immediately after resting which gets better with movement
- swollen, enlarged or painful joints
- susceptibility to joint trauma, such as sprains
- a worsening of signs in cold or damp weather

## How is it diagnosed?

If your cat displays some of the above signs, your vet will perform a clinical examination to confirm arthritis as the cause. Your vet may manipulate the joint to check for stiffness, pain, grating and reduced movement.

Your vet may also take X-rays to check for changes to the bones and to monitor the progression of the disease. Sometimes, blood tests or analysis of the joint fluid are needed to rule out infections or immune-based arthritis.

## How is it treated?

The methods of treatment for arthritis include:

### Medication

The most common form of treatment is long-term, anti-inflammatory drugs. These can be very effective at reducing pain and increasing mobility, but can have side effects. It is natural to be concerned about these side effects, but as arthritis can cause chronic pain it is usually best to use some form of medical treatment under the guidance of your vet. It may be necessary to perform blood tests to find out which drugs, if any, will be tolerated best by your cat.

Never give your cat human anti-inflammatory drugs, even common ones such as aspirin, as they can be highly toxic and even fatal.

There are also some veterinary versions of supplements used by human arthritis sufferers available, such as glucosamine. These are thought to help repair damaged cartilage but are not anti-inflammatory. They can be used at the same time as anti-inflammatory drugs and have the advantage of having no known side effects. If your cat's arthritis is severe, these drugs are unlikely to be sufficient to control the condition on their own.

### Surgery

In certain cases, usually where there has been a traumatic injury in the past, surgery may be required.

### Acupuncture

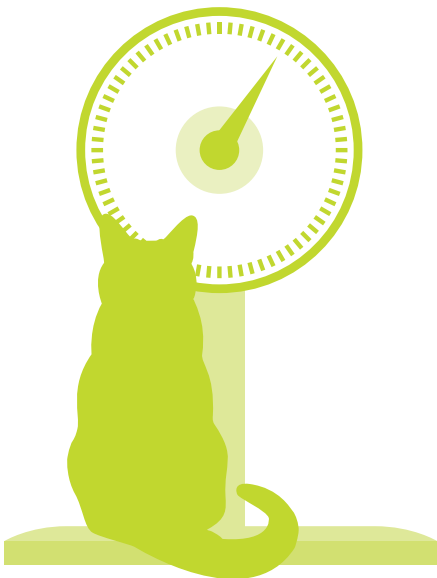
Acupuncture can be beneficial in some cases but must only be carried out by a veterinary acupuncturist.

## Weight control and exercise

If your cat is overweight, this can make arthritis worse so it is very important to ensure he maintains an ideal weight. Regular, moderate exercise will also help – active play is the best way to achieve this.

## What does the future hold?

Osteoarthritis is an ongoing problem and cannot be cured. However, in many cases it can be managed successfully allowing your cat to be mobile, pain-free and to lead a reasonably active life.



This leaflet is one of a range provided by Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**, **volunteering for us** or **making a donation**, visit **[www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)**



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Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)