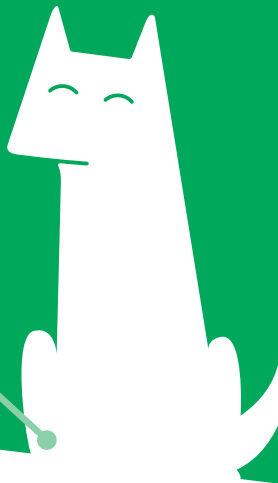


# Arthritis



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**VETERINARY GUIDE 1**



Arthritis causes inflammation of the joint and the condition is extremely common in cats. Unfortunately, it often goes unnoticed as owners think the cat is just slowing down with age, when it is actually a very painful condition.

## What causes arthritis?

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

It is more commonly seen in elderly cats who suffer mainly from a type of arthritis 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, bone fracture or torn ligament. Even young cats can suffer with arthritis if they have experienced a traumatic injury in the past.

More than 80 per cent of cats aged over 10 years old will have some degree of arthritis detectable on x-rays. It is worth getting your cat checked regularly as treating chronic problems like arthritis will make a huge difference to their quality of life.

## What are the signs?

Cats are very good at hiding the signs of arthritis and, unlike dogs, are unlikely to alert their owners to a problem by limping or becoming lame. However, 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 a time.

The main signs shown in cats are:

- stiffness, reduced mobility and lameness, often displayed as an unwillingness to jump or climb
- difficulty grooming, especially the middle of the back and tail
- your cat may show a change in behaviour, for example:
  - grumpiness including reduced interaction with and tolerance of people – the discomfort associated with arthritis can be a cause of aggression in cats
  - not using the litter tray if the sides are too high for your cat to easily get into it
  - reduced interest in play
- 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 these signs during cold or damp weather

## How is it diagnosed?

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

X-rays may be taken, 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 to alleviate this pain. 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 – including glucosamine, chondroitin sulphate and green-lipped mussel extract – that are thought to help repair damaged cartilage and may have some anti-inflammatory properties. These can be used at the same time as anti-inflammatory drugs and have the advantage of having no known side-effects, but should only be used under veterinary advice. If your cat's arthritis is severe, these supplements are unlikely to be sufficient to control the condition on their own. However, recent research has shown that arthritic cats fed specialist diets containing nutritional supplements can become more active.

## 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 as it puts more stress on the joints. It is very important to ensure your cat maintains a healthy weight. Regular, moderate exercise will also help – active play is the best way to achieve this.

## Considerations for your cat's home

- allow your cat to reach their favourite places easily, by strategically placing boxes or items of furniture as launch pads
- make sure your cat has a cosy, well-padded bed in a safe, warm place that can be readily accessed
- ensure your cat can reach their toileting site easily and that the sides of their litter tray aren't too tall

## What does the future hold?

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

For more advice on the care of elderly cats, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Elderly cats*.

### Learn more about your cat online!

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>

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