

Osteoarthritis in cats

What causes Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a type of arthritis in which the normal cartilage that cushions the joint is worn away, exposing the bone and resulting in discomfort. OA can be primary or secondary to a joint injury or abnormally, as described below. Primary OA occurs in previously normal joints that have not suffered a specific injury and is the most common form seen in older cats, the cause of which is not clearly understood.

There are some factors that can contribute to the development of OA, these include:

- 1) Genetics - certain breeds appear to be predisposed to developing arthritis due to various underlying joint problems, for example hip dysplasia in Maine Coons and patella (knee cap) luxation in the Abyssinian. Scottish Folds are particularly prone to OA affecting multiple joints and Burmese cats are thought to suffer with elbow arthritis more than other breeds.
- 2) Injury causing abnormal joint loading: fractures, dislocations and other injuries can cause the joint to be used differently and result in secondary OA of the affected joint.
- 3) **Obesity - obesity does not cause arthritis but it will exacerbate the condition.**
- 4) Acromegaly - this unusual hormonal disease results in diabetes mellitus and some cats also develop arthritic joints.

What are the signs of Osteoarthritis?

The most obvious sign of arthritis is joint pain, with the most commonly affected joints being the elbows, stifles (knees) and hips. However, this is where the problem arises; cats are the masters of hiding discomfort and do not demonstrate the obvious signs of pain. They are not taken for walks like dogs and restrict their own activity to minimise the use of the sore joints. They also tend not to show the same obvious signs of pain as other species (e.g. vocalising), exhibiting more 'passive' behaviour to disguise pain.

Signs of pain in cats that owners may observe and report to the vet include the following:

1) **Reduced mobility**

- Reluctance to jump up or down from furniture
- Sleeping in different, easier to access sites
- Difficulty using the cat flap
- Lameness or stiff/stilted gait - this is relatively uncommon as often multiple joints are affected and so the lameness is disguised
- Litter tray accidents, missing the tray, reluctance to climb into high-sided trays

2) **Changes in grooming behaviour**

- Matted and scurfy coat
- Over grooming painful joints

3) Temperament changes

- Reduced interaction, e.g. lack of response to petting
- Lack of tolerance of handling, children, other pets

4) Changes in activity level

- Playing and going outside less frequently
- Not hunting or exploring the outdoor environment as frequently
- Overgrown claws due to lack of activity

Management of the arthritic cat

Treating arthritis in cats doesn't start and finish with a pill or a potion. Home comforts and management adjustments are vital to improving the cat's quality of life and can be just as important as medications.

Easy home and management adjustments for the arthritic cat:

- Provide soft beds for sore joints in easily accessible, quiet places
- Place beds in quiet, draft free areas of the house
- Igloo beds or cardboard boxes can make an older cat feel warm and secure
- Provide 'steps' up to higher sites, e.g. the sofa, the cat flap
- Tie the cat flap open so the cat doesn't need to push through
- Always have a litter tray inside and use a low-sided version or cut out the sides to make it easy for arthritic cats to climb in
- Use different types of litter that are softer for sore feet
- Make sure food and water are easily accessible, at floor level or with steps up to higher levels
- Put food, water and litter trays on one level to avoid the cat having to go up and down stairs
- Radiator beds are popular but arthritic cats will need help to get into them, other warming devices such as wheat bags can help but electrical devices should be used only when the cat is monitored
- Arthritic cats may need extra grooming and help cleaning eyes and their bottom region
- Overgrown claws need regular cutting



Nutritional Management

Obesity will exacerbate OA and so should be avoided. Obese cats need careful diet changes supervised by a veterinary surgeon. Overweight cats need to lose weight slowly and changes may take several months. Rapid weight loss can result in metabolic problems such as hepatic lipidosis when a large amount of fat accumulates in the liver.

Nutraceuticals

Containing the highest quality natural ingredients, Yumove® Cat from Lintbells is significantly free of phosphates for cats with kidney problems. It will aid stiff joints, promote mobility and support joint structure. Yumove® Cat contains key natural ingredients including natural Chondroitin found in Green Lipped Mussel, which helps to slow the breakdown of cartilage in a cat's joints. The Green Lipped Mussel also provides concentrated sources of Omega 3 to help soothe stiffness. Yumove® Cat is sold as a tasty sprinkle capsule, with one capsule per day being the recommended dose for most cats. The capsule should be split and the contents sprinkled on its regular food. A single pack will provide 2 months support for an average size cat.