

Up to 90% of cats may have some degree of degenerative joint disease, or arthritis, even though they do not typically limp or show outward signs of pain. One of the best ways to diagnose arthritis is for you to monitor and recognize behavioral and lifestyle changes at home. This early identification and diagnosis is essential to your cat's health and welfare. Early intervention to manage or improve both pain and illness helps to strengthen the human-animal bond often creating a more sociable and happier cat.

What to observe

These symptoms can be very subtle and easily missed. The changes can be gradual.

- **Mobility**
 - Reluctance or inability to jump as high as they once could
 - Change in ability to go up or down stairs
 - Reluctance to jump down or landing difficultly/ungracefully
 - Soil outside litter box
 - Difficulty in rising or stretching
 - Change in walking or running
 - Stiff gait or lameness
- **Activity**
 - Unusual sleep patterns
 - Decrease or change in play
- **Grooming**
 - Dislike of being stroked or brushed
 - Decreased grooming
 - Decreased scratching
- **Temperament**
 - Hiding
 - Avoiding interaction with people or other pets in household
 - Change in appetite

Most common locations for arthritis in cats:

- Hip
- Knee
- Spine
- Ankle
- Elbow
- Wrist
- Shoulder

Diagnosis

1. Exam may reveal pain, grating of bone, and/or swelling in the joints
 - Pain can be difficult to interpret in cats during an exam
 - Rule out other medical conditions that can be causing pain or symptoms
2. Radiographs show changes in the bony structures of the joints
 - May need sedation if painful
 - There can be cartilage changes that can not be seen on radiographs
3. General blood panel to determine if any problems are contributing to symptoms

Treatment

Nutrition

- Weight loss if overweight. We can calculate calories needed and monitor weight loss with regular progress exams.
- Hills j/d or Royal Canine Mobility
- Canned food to increase fatty acids and moisture levels

Supplements

- Glucosamine/chondroitin
 - Promotes the health of the cartilage and joint fluid
 - Capsules mixed with food
- Adequan (polysulfated glycosaminoglycan)
 - Injections under the skin weekly at first then monthly
- Fatty Acids

Therapeutic Laser

- An initial series of six treatments
- 10-15 minute treatments monthly at clinic

Medications

- Anti-inflammatory medications
 - Control inflammation in the joints providing pain relief
 - NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs eg. Metacam)
 - FDA warning due to reports of damage to the kidneys
 - Side effects rare with low doses
 - Steroids
 - Generally well tolerated in cats but can have long term side effects
- Analgesics (pain medications)
 - Good for breakthrough pain
 - Can cause sedation
- Regular medical progress exams, blood panels, and communication with your veterinarian are needed.
- Stop giving any medications if any side effects develop such as vomiting, diarrhea, decreased appetite, and lethargy and contact the clinic.

Environmental modifications

Environmental enrichment can serve to encourage increased mobility and physical activity, which may be beneficial in the rehabilitation process, may increase calorie expenditure where weight control is an issue, and may reduce stress and maintain mental stimulation.

- Low sides on litter box, mound of litter on one side to help defecation position, larger box to reduce urinating over side
- Ramps or steps to get onto beds, couches, windows, favorite place or provide alternate perching sites
 - Access to height is important to cats
- Easy access to food and water
- Stimulate movement with gentle play, hiding treats for them to find, cat towers
- Some behaviors become learned and will not resolve with reduction in pain
 - Other advanced behavioral treatment or medications may be needed

Reduction of pain should improve or resolve most of the behavioral signs. Monitoring these signs helps to confirm the diagnosis and determine response to therapy.