



Cecilia Ho, DVM

Dr. Ho is a graduate of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Michigan State University. She decided to specialize in feline medicine two years into private practice as she found feline medicine to be more challenging and rewarding. Dr. Ho opened Cat Care Hospital in 2003 in the Sedgfield area and welcomes new patients.

FELINE ARTHRITIS PAIN -

My older cat is moving in a stiff and painful fashion ever since the weather has turned colder. Could she have arthritis and if she does, what can I do to help?

How do you diagnose arthritis in cats?

The most common way of diagnosing arthritis in cats would be to take an x-ray of the affected joint. The x-rays may show excessive bone proliferation around the joint and even in some severe cases, changes in the shape of the bones forming the joint itself. Just like people who suffer from arthritis joint pain, chronic arthritis in cats may cause the affected joint to be more swollen, firm and painful to the touch.

What causes the pain from arthritis?

When arthritis is present, there is usually excessive bone buildup around the affected joint. Through chronic wear and tear during the course of the cat's life, there is loss of cartilage in joints. Cartilage acts as a shock absorber for the joints, when it wears thin, bone begins to grind on bone. The body regards this as an unstable joint and tries to correct it by depositing more bone around the joint, thereby aggravating the problem further. The process is further worsened by the fact that the joint fluid also becomes thicker and loses its lubricating properties once cartilage is lost. Because of the large number of nerve endings in bone, pain is triggered each time the joint is used and the bones in the joint grate against each other.

Is there any medical treatment for arthritis in cats?

Yes, there are several treatment options for arthritis in cats. Most importantly is, **never administer any human arthritis medications** to your cat. Most, if not all, of these medications are extremely toxic to cats and may lead to death.

You can try to correct cartilage loss by starting your cat on glucosamine supplements. Glucosamine is a building block for cartilage formation and over time it is possible to help rebuild some of the cartilage that has been lost. There are human and veterinary formulations of glucosamine on the market. You may try using the human supplements but your cat may not be able to absorb all of the available glucosamine which will decrease its effectiveness.

If your cat is in extreme pain, there is an anti-inflammatory medication called Metacam that may be helpful. This medication, in its oral formulation, is currently licensed for use in dogs only, but it has been used in cats successfully to control arthritis pain. It is very important to use this medication **only** under the direct supervision of your veterinarian. Metacam has been shown to cause severe kidney and liver problems in cats and should be used cautiously and only as needed.

Various prescription diets target joint pain specifically. All of these diets are supplemented with naturally derived anti-inflammatory agents and have been shown to be effective in alleviating joint pain.

The latest treatment option for arthritis pain in cats is laser therapy. The laser treatment helps by decreasing inflammation in the joints, stimulating cell regeneration and decreasing the viscosity of the joint fluid. Several treatments are initially required, spaced within the span of three to four weeks, followed by maintenance treatments. There is no pain or discomfort associated with this treatment and cats are very tolerant and accepting of the laser therapy.

Finally acupuncture is also a safe and effective treatment option for arthritis pain. The only disadvantage is the availability and accessibility of this treatment in certain areas.

What can I do for my cat at home to make it more comfortable?

Firstly, try to provide a heavily cushioned surface for the cat to sleep on. A small orthopedic dog bed is ideal as the foam padding in the bed provides excellent cushioning for the cat's joints. There are also slumber pads available at pet stores and online that contain a heat reflective layer within the bed that help reflect the cat's own body heat while it's sleeping. Heating pads may be used, but exercise extreme caution to prevent the cat from burning itself while sleeping. A safer alternative is a product called "snuggle safe". This is a microwaveable gel pack that will retain its heat for about twelve hours once it's heated and can be tucked next to your cat while it is sleeping.

In short, even though your cat may be suffering from arthritis pain, there are many options to help treat and alleviate its discomfort. Have your cat examined regularly by your veterinarian and be alert for the first signs of arthritis. Treating your cat early in the course of the disease will help ensure your cat stays comfortable and pain free.

CAT CARE HOSPITAL

Cat Friendly - Dog Free



- Needle-Free Vaccinations
- Dentistry
- Behavioral Consultations

■ Laser Therapy for Pain

November is Diabetes Month.
**Concerned owners may drop off their cats
for diabetes testing.**

Monday-Friday 7:30am - 6pm
Saturday 8:00am - 12pm, Sunday Closed
Daily drop-off appointments available.

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