

Osteoarthritis (OA) in pets

Thanks to the marvels of modern veterinary medicine, our pets are living much longer lives. However, with age often comes chronic diseases such as osteoarthritis (OA). OA causes pain, is incurable and progressive and it can severely affect the quality of life of your pet. You may also hear osteoarthritis referred to as Degenerative joint disease (DJD).



What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a very common problem in small animals affecting 50% of dogs and possibly an even higher number in cats. It causes pain and it can severely affect the quality of life of your pet. In a healthy joint, cartilage acts as a cushion to allow the joint to move smoothly through its full range of motion. In osteoarthritis the normal cartilage cushion in the joints worn away and, eventually, the bones in the joint rub against each other. This causes pain, decreased joint movement, and sometimes the formation of bone spurs or other changes in and around the joint. While any joint in the body can develop osteoarthritis, the condition most commonly affects the hips and limbs.

How can you recognise OA in your cat?

Cats are masters of hiding discomfort and pain, so often do not demonstrate obvious signs that you might expect. They restrict their own activity to minimise the use of the sore joints and so tend not to show the same signs of arthritis as other animals. In particular, cats uncommonly show overt signs of limping or pain associated with arthritis. Some research indicates over 90% of cats over the age of 12 show some evidence of OA.

Things you may notice are;

- Reduced height of jump
- Reduced activity
- Sleeping more or in different areas
- Playing less
- Decreased grooming
- Less keen to interact with owner
- Seeks seclusion/hiding away
- Going to the toilet outside the litter tray/
difficulty using the litter tray
- Increased irritability when stroked
- Difficulty using the cat flap



These signs are not age related, they tend to be disease related so please do not ignore them.

If you come into a consultation because you suspect your cat may be exhibiting signs of osteoarthritis, we will perform a full physical examination, including palpating your cat's joints and assessing their range of motion. We may also recommend X-rays of the affected joints, in order to evaluate the degree of damage to the joint.



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Treatment

If we confirm the diagnosis of osteoarthritis there is a good range of treatment options for your pet:

- **Drug therapy:** We might advise to do blood tests before starting treatment as this will help us decide the right drug for your cat. Pain control is a mainstay of osteoarthritis treatment. Osteoarthritis can be painful, and so in some animals long term medication is needed. The most commonly used pain control medications are Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs have significant side effects with continued use, your veterinarian will discuss the risks and benefits and may recommend regular blood work. Drug therapy can come in many forms to include tablets, liquids and injections to suit the individual needs of your pet.
- **Dietary modulation:** these products include anti-inflammatory properties, cartilage regeneration and delayed cartilage degeneration with the potential to improve mobility and decrease stiffness in animals.
- **Weight management:** this is particularly important as the joints of an overweight cat will be under more pressure than those of a lean cat.
- **Physical therapy and controlled exercise:** an exercise plan can be provided so the muscles of your cats can be developed without causing issues to the joints
- **Environment modification:** small changes can help your cat's daily routine such as have a flat litter tray or have steps/ramp so your cat can easily get to his favourite higher place, soft bedding that is more comfortable.
- **Regular claw clipping.**

How can you recognise OA in your dog?

Osteoarthritis in dogs usually has a specific underlying cause and is therefore often seen earlier in life. Underlying causes can include developmental conditions such as hip dysplasia or cruciate ligament rupture and injuries to the joint.



- **Pain:** it may only show as slowing down, getting stiff, playing less, eating less or not wanting to chase their toys
- Lameness or stiffness, especially after rest
- Painful or swollen joints
- Restlessness or difficulty finding a comfortable position
- Licking their joints
- Lack of enthusiasm for walks
- Weight gain
- Difficulty getting into the car
- Difficulty walking up or down stairs
- Changes in behaviour



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These signs are not age related, they tend to be disease related so please do not ignore them,

If you come into a consultation because you suspect your dog may be exhibiting signs of osteoarthritis, we will perform a full physical examination, including palpating your dog's joints and assessing their range of motion. We may also recommend X-rays of the affected joints, in order to evaluate the degree of damage to the joint. X-rays are the most common method of diagnosing osteoarthritis and ruling out other possible causes of joint pain and lameness.

Treatment

- **Drug therapy:** pain control is a mainstay of osteoarthritis treatment. Osteoarthritis can be painful, and so in some animals long term medication is needed. The most commonly used pain control medications are Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs have significant side effects with continued use, your veterinarian will discuss the risks and benefits and may recommend regular blood work. Drug therapy can come in many forms to include tablets, liquids and injections to suit the individual needs of your pet.
- **Exercise and hydrotherapy:** They can be used to build muscle, improve joint use, and reduce muscle stiffness as well as being good exercise.
- **Weight management:** pets that are an ideal weight have fewer painful episodes and slower progression of osteoarthritis than overweight animals
- **Joint supplements ;** glucosamine, chondroitin and green lipped muscle extract have been proposed to help treat osteoarthritis. These are often prescribed to improve function, reduce inflammation, and slow the progression of joint damage. While the effect may not be dramatic, small improvements may be seen.
- **Dietary modulation:** diets containing omega-3-fatty acids may have a natural anti-inflammatory action which may help to relieve discomfort associated with osteoarthritis.



**If you're concerned your pet may be showing signs of Osteoarthritis,
call your local Scarsdale practice and speak to a vet or nurse**



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