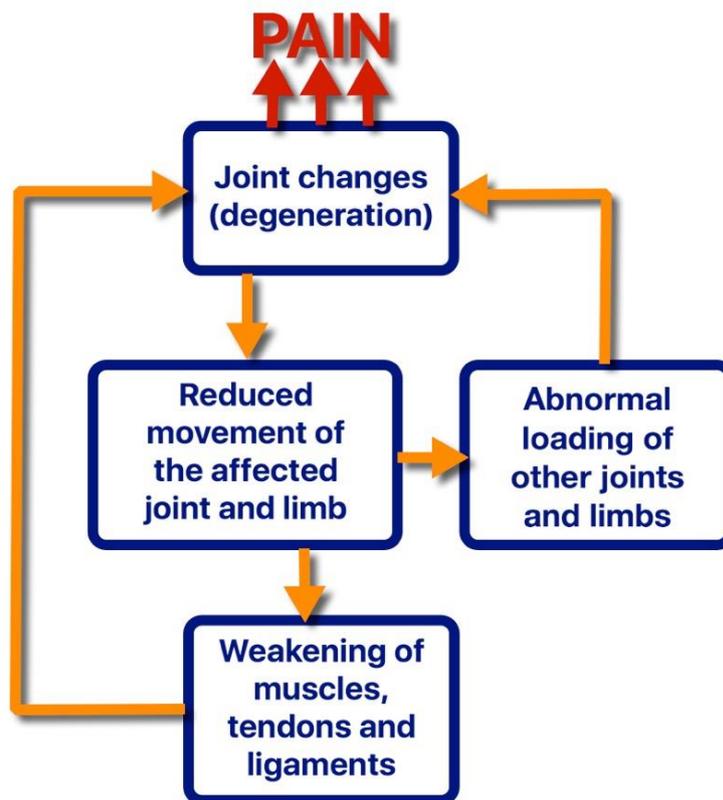


Canine and Feline Arthritis – What You Need to Know

Did you know? Arthritis is extremely common in companion animals. This condition affects four out of five older dogs and is the most common cause of chronic pain in dogs¹. More than 90% of cats over the age of 12 have some degree of arthritis detectable on x-rays². Arthritis cannot be cured and is a progressive disease, getting worse over time if it is not addressed. It can be managed though – meaning your pet can be made more comfortable.

What causes arthritis?

When we talk about arthritis, we are usually referring to osteoarthritis (OA). This is the cycle of continuing degeneration of the normal structures in the joint and increasing pain (see diagram below). It is caused by instability in the joints due to poor joint conformation, trauma or chronic wear and tear. Other types of arthritis do exist (i.e. immune-mediated and infectious) and although they are much less common these can also lead to OA.



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What are the signs of arthritis in pets?

Overt lameness is often the sign we associate most with OA. However, there can be subtle signs that a dog or cat is experiencing joint pain. This is especially the case in cats, with only 4% of cats with x-ray changes consistent with joint disease having any medical history of joint problems - meaning signs that anyone has noticed due to changes in mobility at home².

Signs of joint pain can include the following:

- Slower to rise, especially after rest
- Reduced jumping (dogs not able to jump into the car, and cats not jumping onto favoured high perches), and climbing (cats only!)
- Licking joints, especially in cold weather
- Reduced exercise tolerance; dogs not wanting to walk as far or play retrieval games for as long. Cats showing reduced hunting and roaming behaviour
- Change in gait; a shorter more stilted running gait, pacing (where front and hind limbs on the same side move simultaneously) rather than trotting (front and hind limbs on opposite sides move simultaneously).
- Withdrawal – wanting to be left alone or avoidance of stroking or playing.
- Aggression – especially when startled
- Reduced normal habits such as stretching, shaking and rolling
- Reduced tolerance of grooming, especially over affected joints e.g. hips.
- Overgrowth of claws due to reduced wear
- Hunched posture
- Difficulty toileting and accidents as animals find it harder to posture
- Unkempt, scurfy or matted coat due to reduced spinal mobility and discomfort when attempting to groom



Many of these behaviours are important elements of the human-animal bond between pet and owner. Activities such as play and grooming are times of bonding and improve the mental, as well as physical, health of both the animal and his or her human counterpart.

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What can be done?

People often put these subtle signs down to 'old age', and may not realise there is a treatable underlying problem. With appropriate management of arthritis, many of these signs of discomfort can be managed and often alleviated. If your dog or cat is showing these signs please speak to your vet.

Vets may recommend pain medications, supplements, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and other alternative therapies. Management changes around the home include:

- Modified exercise plans (e.g. little and often steady exercise, rather than sporadic, long, high energy exercise)
- Soft, warm, deep pile bedding where your pet can easily step in and out
- Raising feed and water bowls
- Ramps for dogs to get in and out of cars
- Ensuring easy access to sleeping, feeding and toileting areas
- Regular grooming and nail clip

With early intervention and professional advice, the rate of deterioration and progression of OA can be reduced. This means a happier life for longer for your pet, and for you to enjoy with them.



References:

1. <https://caninearthritis.co.uk/what-is-arthritis/>
2. Radiographic evidence of degenerative joint disease in geriatric cats: 100 cases (1994–1997). Hardie et al. JAVMA March 1, 2002, Vol. 220, No. 5, Pages 628-632
3. Arthritis in cats: diagnosis, management and treatment. Sarah Caney, Vet Times May 2, 2011

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