

Degenerative Joint Disease in Cats

Feline Arthritis



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Feline arthritis, more correctly termed degenerative joint disease (DJD), is very common in cats. Cartilage within the joint is worn away, causing chronic pain, which can be debilitating and can lead to poor quality of life. Pain in cats with DJD occurs most commonly in the lower back, elbows, knees, hips, shoulders, and hocks (the equivalent of our ankles). Studies indicate that as many as 92% of cats may have DJD. Even young cats can get DJD, but it may not be as noticeable until it worsens with age.

SUBTLE SIGNS OF DJD

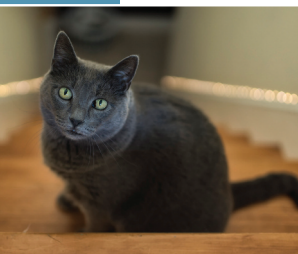
Pain often goes unnoticed in cats because the signs are subtle. This is because cats are solitary hunters—who must remain healthy and strong in order to hunt successfully, and to protect themselves from predators and perceived threats. Therefore, cats hide or mask signs of pain or weakness. You might think your cat does not need to worry about hunting or threats, but this protective instinct still occurs in all cats.



Cats with DJD rarely limp because the disease usually impacts the same joint on both sides (e.g., both knees). This differs greatly from arthritis in dogs, who may exhibit more pain in one leg so there is a noticeable limp. Discomfort with walking is also easier to recognize in dogs because they are usually taken on walks outdoors.

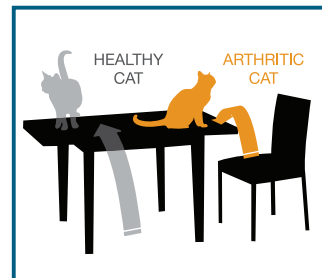
HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CAT HAS DJD?

You play a very important role in identifying the signs of DJD in your cat because you know better than anyone their normal temperament, routines, and activities. Any change in your cat's normal behavior can be a sign of pain. To identify changes, compare your cat's daily behaviors and reactions in various situations to when they were young adults. Any changes in your cat's normal behavior can mean that your cat is either in pain, sick, or stressed—all reasons to seek veterinary care.

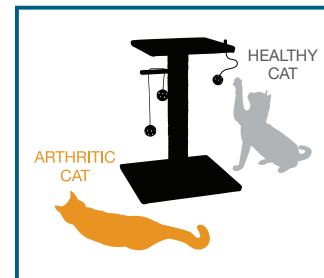


If your cat displays any of the following changes, contact your veterinarian immediately:

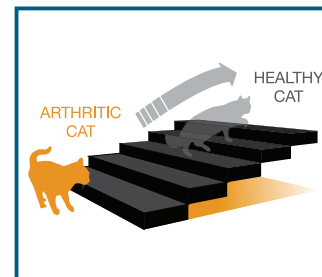
- Decreased jumping up or down, or not jumping as high as before
- Difficulty or hesitancy going up or down stairs; slower on stairs
- Stiffness
- Less active and playful
- Withdrawn, hiding, or increased “clinginess”
- Decreased grooming or over-grooming a painful area
- Protective when handled or toward another pet (e.g., hissing, swatting, biting)
- House-soiling (not using the litter box for urine and/or stool)



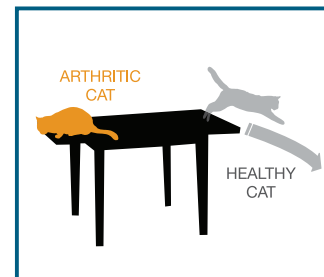
Arthritic cats might use a chair to help them jump onto a table.



Arthritic cats play less frequently and spend more time sleeping.



Arthritic cats may be hesitant to climb stairs.



Arthritic cats may be hesitant to jump off a table.

MANAGING THE PAIN OF DJD



There are excellent treatments for this condition, so contact your veterinary practice right away if you notice any signs. **NEVER give your cat any medication without direction from your veterinarian, including over-the-counter drugs such as ibuprofen (e.g., Advil or Motrin), acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol), or aspirin.** Many of these drugs can be deadly to cats.

Once a diagnosis is made, your veterinarian will help you develop a treatment plan for your cat. Treatment includes both medication and simple changes in the home to allow your cat to maintain their normal behaviors.

For more information on degenerative joint disease and pain management, visit catfriendly.com/djd.

**You are an important member of your cat's healthcare team.
You are instrumental in helping with the success of
treatments and healthcare for your cat.**

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This brochure was developed from the 2015 AAEP/AAHA Pain Management Guidelines for Dogs and Cats.
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