

## **How I Manage Osteoarthritis Pain in Cats**

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### **Introduction**

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a progressive degenerative joint disease that significantly impacts feline mobility and quality of life. Despite its prevalence, OA in cats often goes underdiagnosed due to their stoic nature and unique pain manifestations. Unlike dogs, cats rarely limp or vocalize discomfort, making identification challenging. Early recognition through validated metrology instruments and a multimodal pain management approach is essential in improving patient outcomes.

### **Identification and Clinical Assessment of Musculoskeletal Pain in Cats**

Diagnosing OA in cats requires a combination of clinical observation, caregiver-reported assessments, and objective pain measurement tools. Traditional examination methods may not always reveal pain, making metrology instruments invaluable in assessing functional limitations and discomfort.

### **Key Clinical Metrology Instruments**

1. Enomoto Checklist for Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD) Pain - Developed as an evidence-based screening tool, this checklist consists of six binary questions designed to identify cats likely experiencing DJD-associated pain. The checklist focuses on behavioral changes, including reluctance to climb stairs, difficulty jumping, and altered grooming habits.
2. Feline Musculoskeletal Pain Index (FMPI) – A validated caregiver questionnaire assessing mobility, activity level, and pain-related behaviors. It provides a structured approach to evaluating changes in movement, reluctance to jump, and overall activity decline.
3. Client-Specific Outcome Measures (CSOM) – A customized assessment tool where caregivers identify specific activities their cat struggles with due to OA. This approach allows for individualized pain tracking, making it highly effective in monitoring treatment response and disease progression.

Behavioral indicators, such as hesitation to jump, reduced grooming, reduced interest in chased objects, altered posture, and withdrawn behavior, often signal chronic musculoskeletal pain and should be actively assessed during veterinary evaluations.

### **House Adaptation for a Cat with Osteoarthritis**

Environmental modifications play a critical role in enhancing mobility and reducing discomfort for cats with OA. Key adaptations include:

- Accessible Resting Areas – Providing low-entry beds with orthopedic padding minimizes joint strain.
- Elevated Food & Water Bowls – Reducing the need for excessive bending helps cats maintain comfortable eating and drinking postures.
- Non-Slip Flooring – Rugs or textured mats prevent slipping and improve stability, particularly on hard surfaces.
- Ramps, Stairs and Steps – Placing ramps leading to windows, beds, or furniture accommodates cats who struggle with jumping.

- Litter Box Modifications – Low-sided litter boxes make entry and exit easier, preventing unnecessary strain on joints.

Home adaptations should align with the individual cat's mobility limitations, ensuring ease of movement and environmental accessibility to promote comfort and well-being.

### **NSAIDs and Cats**

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) remain the one of the cornerstones of OA pain management in cats, providing relief from inflammation and chronic discomfort.

#### **Common NSAIDs in Feline OA Management**

- Robenacoxib (approved for chronic use).
- Meloxicam (approved for short-term use in specific cases; in some countries, approved for long term use).

#### **Considerations and Contraindications:**

Cats have limited hepatic metabolism, making NSAID safety critical to prevent adverse effects such as renal injury or gastrointestinal upset. Long-term NSAID therapy requires close monitoring, including renal function tests, hydration status, gastrointestinal tolerance and correct drug calculations (based on lean body mass).

### **Gabapentinoids**

Gabapentin is a neuropathic pain modulator widely used in feline OA management. It works by inhibiting calcium channels in nerve pathways, reducing chronic pain perception, and hyperalgesia.

- Gabapentin in Feline OA.
- Used for chronic musculoskeletal pain and neuropathic pain.
- Adjunct therapy alongside NSAIDs.
- Improves mobility and reduces pain-related anxiety.
- Administered at low doses initially, gradually titrated.

Gabapentin is particularly beneficial for cats experiencing severe discomfort, central sensitization, or reduced response to NSAIDs alone.

### **Monoclonal Antibodies**

Recent advancements in feline OA management have introduced monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) targeting nerve growth factor (NGF), a key driver of chronic pain.

#### **Frunevetmab (anti-NGF mAb)**

- Specifically designed for feline osteoarthritis.
- Administered via monthly subcutaneous injection.
- Provides sustained pain relief with minimal systemic effects.

Monoclonal antibody therapy is revolutionizing chronic pain management by directly addressing OA-related pain at the molecular level.

## Non-Pharmacological Pain Management

A multimodal approach integrates non-drug therapies alongside pharmacological treatments, optimizing pain relief and mobility.

- Acupuncture stimulates endorphin release, reducing inflammation, and chronic pain.
- Therapeutic laser therapy promotes cellular repair, reduces inflammation, and enhances circulation, supporting OA management.

Combining pharmacological and non-pharmacological modalities ensures comprehensive pain control, allowing cats with OA to experience greater mobility and improved quality of life.

## Conclusion

Managing feline osteoarthritis pain requires a multifaceted approach combining early identification, validated metrology instruments, pharmacologic interventions, and non-drug therapies.

- NSAIDs and gabapentinoids provide effective pain modulation, reducing discomfort and inflammation.
- Monoclonal antibodies represent a breakthrough in feline pain relief, delivering sustained efficacy.
- Environmental modifications and non-pharmacological interventions optimize comfort and function, supporting long-term mobility.
- Implementing a multimodal strategy tailored to each patient's needs ensures effective osteoarthritis management, allowing cats to maintain mobility, improve comfort, and enhance overall well-being.

## References

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