

## Arthritis in Cats

Our veterinary surgeons have diagnosed that your cat is suffering from arthritis. Arthritis is the term given to an inflammation of the joints, and there are several different forms of the disease. By far the commonest is degenerative osteoarthritis, a chronic condition characterized by the breakdown of the soft cartilage that lines the joint. As cartilage cushions the ends of the bones, its loss causes them to rub directly against each other, resulting in swelling, pain and loss of movement of the joint. This then sparks off changes in the bones themselves, causing bony spurs and thickening to develop.

Degenerative osteoarthritis can result from a variety of causes such as hereditary deformations of the bones or physical injury, but very often it is simply due to long term wear and tear in older animals. In cats it most commonly affects the elbows, hips and lower back.

Other rarer causes of arthritis include septic arthritis, due to infection that settles in one or more joints either due to a penetrating wound or by circulating in the bloodstream from another site in the body, and auto-immune disease such as rheumatoid arthritis.

### Diagnosing Arthritis in Cats

Arthritis in cats is a common problem but the signs associated with it can be quite subtle. By the time a cat starts to limp the condition is usually very advanced, and there are other earlier signs that can be detected, which include: a poor coat due to reduced grooming activity, changes in behaviour such as reduced jumping up or down, a preference for different sleeping places, increased sleeping and less time going out. Radiography (xrays) is useful in confirming the diagnosis, and also to rule out other more rare causes of joint and bone pain such as bone tumours and small fractures.

### Managing Arthritis

Arthritis is a painful and debilitating condition that needs addressing. Unfortunately there is no cure, but there are lots of way to reduce the pain and suffering associated with it, and also slow down the progression of the disease.

- ❖ Weight control: if your cat is overweight then weight reduction is the most effective way to help reduce stress on the joints.
- ❖ Medication: There is one licenced effective pain killer and anti inflammatory liquid that can really help reduce the pain in the joints, it is given daily with the food. In most cases it is suitable for long term use, and for cats we advise checking their kidney function prior to starting the liquid.
- ❖ Diet: There is now excellent data to support the benefits of specially formulated arthritis diets. These diets have been proven to have an anti inflammatory effect within joints, and

also can slow down the progression of the disease. In some cases it allows the dose of medication to be reduced. Supplements containing glucosamine and chondroitin sulphate can also be used to help provide the building blocks for healthy joints.

- ❖ **Environmental adaptation:** If you have lots of wooden or tiled floors then putting some rugs or carpet down will help your cat feel confident and maintain good grip whilst moving about the house. A nice warm bed that is well padded will keep the pressure of the joints.
- ❖ **Complementary treatment:** As arthritis is a long term problem, many owners are keen to try complementary treatments for their pets. Only licensed veterinary products that are known to be safe in cat should be used, and after a vet has given the all-clear to do so. Acupuncture can help in some cases (in our experience particularly for arthritis in the spine), and we do work with a specialist veterinary acupuncturist, please ask for details.
- ❖ **Surgery:** In the most advanced and severe cases of arthritis there are some surgical options to manage the condition, but these are best discussed on a case by case basis

In summary arthritis is a common and painful condition in cats, but with early diagnosis there are lots of options available to manage the condition and really improve your cat's quality of life and longevity.

Please feel free to contact the surgery should you have any further questions about your cat's condition. We are always happy to discuss and advise on all the treatment options available.