

Arthritis in Cats

By Dr. Jean Hofve

Studies have shown that 30% of cats over 8 years of age, and a stunning 90% of cats over 12 years of age, have arthritis. These figures should give the veterinary community, which doesn't give nearly as much thought to arthritis in cats as it does to dogs, something to think about. What is generally perceived as "slowing down" or "a little stiff" may be a sign of significant joint deterioration, and probably causes some degree of discomfort in most older cats.

Arthritic cats often gradually stop jumping up as high as they once did, and may be reluctant to use the stairs. (Arthritis can cause litterbox problems if there is not a box on every level of the home!) Providing "steps" (a box or stool, for instance) up to a bed, chair, or other favorite high spots may be greatly appreciated by an older cat.

Cats cannot adequately metabolize many of the arthritis and pain medications commonly given to dogs, such as carprofen (Rimadyl). Moreover, ibuprofen (Advil), naproxyn (Aleve), and acetaminophen (Tylenol) are all highly toxic to both cats and dogs. Meloxicam (Metacam) is a newer NSAID that is commonly used for post-operative pain but only for a short time. Some experts claim it can be given long-term at a very low dose, but others are wary of the significant potential for kidney damage in cats. Aspirin can be used, but the dose and schedule are extremely limited; never give your cat aspirin without your vet's advice.

The good news is that there are simple, inexpensive nutritional supplements that are very effective and, most important, very safe. Supplements for arthritis include: glucosamine sulfate (250 mg per day), and MSM (methyl-sulfonyl-methane) (200 mg per day). Both of these supplements have anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

Glucosamine supplies the basic building blocks of cartilage and helps maintain the fluid that cushions and nourishes the joints, and MSM provides elemental sulfur for the body to make certain amino acids and other compounds. But they are not quick fixes—it may take 3-5 weeks for improvement to be noticeable (MSM may take less or more time), and they must be given daily without fail to prevent return of pain. They may not work in all cats. But many guardians notice significant improvement in their cat's activity and flexibility. Glucosamine is often packaged together with chondroitin, another cartilage compound. However, the evidence is less clear that chondroitin is effective, and it is much more expensive. Plain glucosamine (sulfate only, not hydrochloride) appears to be adequate in most cases.

Another cartilage building block, hyaluronic acid, is also available in oral form. This is the basic ingredient of Adequan, a drug commonly injected directly into affected joints. However, these injections need to be repeated regularly and there is always a risk of infection. Hyaluronic acid now comes in oral capsules, but the most effective form appears to be a saline-based liquid called "Hyalun." The best deal we've found is www.horsewarehouse.com, but it is a large bottle and quite

expensive. A cat would need at most a few drops per day, although if you also have dogs (or if you have joint problems yourself!) it is a good way to go.

Some herbs, such as *Boswellia* (frankincense), appear to be effective anti-inflammatories, but few herbs have been thoroughly studied for safety in cats. *Boswellia* is traditionally used in combination with other herbs in Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine. Since some herbs can be extremely toxic to cats, it's best to consult with a veterinarian trained in the use of western or Chinese herbs (see below).

The antioxidant algae blend, **BioSuperfood** may also minimize the inflammation and pain of arthritic joints. Omega-3 fatty acids also have excellent anti-inflammatory properties; we recommend **Nordic Naturals** pet products for their purity and safety.

From a holistic viewpoint, no physical condition is simply physical. In energetic terms, disease, including arthritis, starts on the energetic plane and progresses through the mental and emotional spheres before manifesting itself in the physical body. One way to address this is through the use of flower essences, which can heal the imbalances on the mental and emotional planes. Another way to look at this is that mental "stiffness" ultimately contributes to stiffening of the physical joints. Our sister company, Spirit Essences, has developed an essence remedy called "**Creak-Away**" that's designed to keep the animal mentally and emotionally "flexible" and minimize the energetic stresses that contribute to the development of arthritis.

Acupuncture, chiropractic, herbs, homeopathy, specific nutritional strategies and other holistic treatments may also be helpful for arthritic cats. For a practitioner in your area, visit www.holisticvetlist.com or call the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association at (410) 569-0795.