

ARTHRITIS IN DOGS & CATS

Have you ever noticed a groaning dog as he slowly struggles to stand after a nap? Or a cat who is no longer interested in boisterous physical activity? These could be signs of arthritis, which results in a deterioration of the cartilage (cushion) between the joints and bones, which results in pain and limited movement. But there are actions you can take to help prevent this degenerative joint disease and preserve your pet's quality of life.



Causes

Aging and health are two factors that can contribute to arthritis in cats and dogs. Similar to humans, as pets mature their cartilage can begin to slowly deteriorate. Injuries to ligaments, tendons, or muscles, as well as trauma or joint infections, especially hip dysplasia in canines, can increase the risk of arthritis. Obesity, although not a direct cause, will greatly influence the chances of arthritis because of the excess strain placed on the joints.

Signs

Because cats often hide their discomfort, signs of arthritis and other health conditions can be difficult to detect. But, when observable, the signs of arthritis are similar for dogs and cats. These include:

- An aversion to being handled or appearing to be in pain when touched in certain areas
- Hesitation to run, jump, or climb (cats)
- Favoring certain limbs when moving
- Groaning (in dogs) after getting up from a long rest, followed by obvious stiffness and difficulty walking
- For cats, house soiling may become an issue due to difficulty climbing in and out of the litter box
- Stiffness or swelling of the joints

Prevention

Arthritis can be hereditary. In these cases, you cannot prevent the disease, but you can decrease the effect it has on your pet. Since obesity greatly exacerbates arthritis, exercise and a healthy diet go a long way in preventing the condition from affecting your pet. Walk and play with your

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dog daily. Purchase toys and scratching posts to keep your cat moving. Feed your pet the appropriate amount of calories each day, and avoid giving her too many treats.

Treatment

If your pet is diagnosed with arthritis, there are some things you can do to ease his discomfort. Provide soft bedding that can be easily accessed without having to jump. Elevate your dog's food and water bowls to avoid strain on the neck. Once arthritis has advanced, walking and other forms of exercise for your dog may be more difficult. Swimming, however, is a low-impact exercise that many dogs enjoy—look for certified canine rehabilitation practitioners (CCRP) in your area who provide water therapy treatment. If you have stairs in your home, help your pet get up or down them when necessary. You could even build a ramp to your cat's favorite window sill if jumping to it is no longer a safe or comfortable option.

Always discuss available medical treatments with your veterinarian. Never give your pet human medication to relieve pain—doing so could result in death. Together with your veterinarian, you can create a plan that will ease your pet's pain without diminishing his quality of life.