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Osteoarthritis Hurts... ...But you can help!

Osteoarthritis is a chronic, degenerative disease which affects both the soft tissues and bones of a joint causing pain and decreased flexibility. OA can affect any joint in your dog's body and can be caused by a range of factors including trauma, inflammation, infection, age and obesity. It is estimated that OA affects up to 1 in 5 adult dogs.



Osteoarthritis is a debilitating condition which causes pain and lethargy.

Limping is often one of the last signs that you will see and generally indicates moderate to severe pain.

The early signs of pain are often more subtle and can be misinterpreted as old age. They include stiffness, reduced activity or 'slowing down' and changes in habit or behaviour such as depression, anxiety, fear and aggression.

If we diagnose OA when these first symptoms appear, we can start treatment earlier in the disease process.

Although we cannot cure the condition, we can slow down disease progression and help keep your pet active and comfortable for longer.

What are the treatment options for OA?

Osteoarthritis is a progressive degenerative condition which we are currently unable to cure, however there are a wide range of treatments available to effectively manage the disease. These are aimed at improving your dog's quality of life by reducing pain and increasing mobility.

Treating pain is an important part of managing osteoarthritis. As well as making your pet feel more comfortable, treating pain early can help reduce muscle loss and joint damage. Pain management also facilitates a return to exercise and hence aids weight control.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as PREVICOX® are commonly used to treat pain and inflammation in dogs.

Once pain is under control, there are a number of other modalities that can help including:

- Other medications
- Dietary management and weight control
- Exercise and physical therapy





Human Pet Bond - Health Benefits of Pet Ownership

The company of a pet relaxes and entertains people, but the benefits of pet ownership go beyond simple joy. Studies have shown that keeping a pet improves the health and well-being of the people in the household. During stressful times, the comfort of a pet protects against depression and loneliness. People of all ages, both healthy and ill, benefit from living with a pet. In other studies, college-age women living with pets were less lonely than if they lived alone, and elderly women living with only a pet had better mental health than those who lived alone. Animal companions, both cats and dogs, help ward off depression and loneliness among people. Stressful situations have less of an impact on elderly pet owners than on those who do not own pets—the pet owners visit the doctor less frequently during such times.



Pets allow their owners to feel needed as caregivers and nurturers, while also nurturing their owner. An owner's mood or physical capabilities do not change a pet's affection. An animal's unconditional affection often increases its owner's ability to cope with personal setbacks and depression. Pets reduce loneliness in a number of ways. Individuals who live "alone" with a pet are actually part of a family; they can look forward to being greeted and recognized when they walk in the door. The simple acts of feeding and caring for a pet can make its owner feel needed and provide another reason for living and staying healthy.

Pets also motivate people to be more active and social. A pet is a powerful ally for starting conversations and making new acquaintances. Walking the dog provides not only physical exercise but also an opportunity to interact with humans, such as other dog owners and curious children. Many people are inspired by walking their dogs,

using their pets as volunteers in nursing homes, or even just actively grooming, training, and pampering their pet. Without this bond, they would be less involved and engaged in living and more vulnerable to depression. Walking the dog and being outdoors where social contact is possible are only some of the health benefits of living with a canine companion.

The daily comfort, social interaction, and motivation provided by pets improve cardiovascular health and lower blood pressure. Even relaxing with, talking to, or simply watching an animal can lower a person's blood pressure. One study of patients with high blood pressure showed that those who were given pets handled stressful tasks better than those who relied on blood pressure medication alone. Additionally, research shows people are more likely to survive the year after a heart attack if they have both a companion dog and a human social support network. Animal companionship is commonly linked to lower death rates and better longterm health.

Source: http://www.merckmanuals.com/pethealth/special_subjects/health_and_the_humananimal_bond/health_benefits_of_pet_ownership.html

Travelling by Car with Pets

Dogs shouldn't roam in the car

The safest way for your dog to travel in a vehicle is in a crate that has been anchored to the vehicle using a seatbelt or other secure means. Dog restraints or seatbelts are useful for preventing your dog from moving freely around the car and being a distraction, but they haven't been shown to reliably protect dogs during an accident.



Cats belong in carriers

Most cats don't feel comfortable traveling in cars, so for their safety as well as yours keep them in a cat carrier. It's important to restrain these carriers in the car so that they don't bounce around and cause harm to your cat. You can secure the carrier by using a seat belt around the front as if putting one around your own waist.

Leave the front seat for humans.

Keep your pet in the back seat of the car. If an airbag deployed while your pet was in the passenger seat (even in a crate), it might injure your pet.

Dogs and cats should always be kept safely inside the car. Pets who are allowed to stick their heads out the window can





be injured by particles of debris or made sick by having cold air forced into their lungs. Never transport a pet in the back of an open Ute.

Stop frequently

This will allow your pet exercise and go to the toilet if need be. Please note to never allow your pet to leave the car without a collar, ID tag and leash.

Whenever possible, share the driving and pet caretaking duties with a friend or family member. You'll be able to get food or use the facilities at rest stops knowing that someone you trust is keeping a close eye on your pets.



Don't leave animals in the car

For you a quick pit stop may feel like no time at all, but any length of time is too long to leave your pet in a car by themselves. One of the hazards they face is heat; on a 29 degree day, even with the windows open slightly the temperature inside your car can reach 38 degrees in just 10 minutes. If you've left your car for 30 minutes, you may return to a car that's about 48 degrees inside and a pet suffering irreversible organ damage or even death. Another possible hazard is the possibility of pet (and/or car) thieves any time you leave your cat or dog unattended in your vehicle.

How to help a pet left inside a hot car

If you find a dog or cat left inside a car and they appear to be suffering from heat stroke, you get them out of that car and into an air-conditioned vehicle and get that animal to the closest vet.

If you are unable to take the dog or cat yourself, take them to an air-conditioned building and call your local vet for advice; make sure you tell them it's an emergency. You can also help try and cool down the animal by placing wet towels to places like the animal's stomach, chest, paws and groin

area; however do not use iced or cold water as you don't want to over cool the animal and cause additional problems.

Source: <http://www.rspcavic.org/health-and-behaviour/dogs/dogs-in-hot-cars/>

Could your cat be in pain?

Arthritis is commonly encountered in cats, particularly in older cats. However, the signs of feline arthritis are often subtle and difficult to spot, even for the most dedicated of cat owners.

What Causes Arthritis in Cats?

Arthritis occurs when the cartilage within the joint becomes damaged. In a normal cat, each joint contains cartilage that acts as a buffer between the bony surfaces. The cartilage creates a "cushion" between the bones that form the joint.

When the cartilage within a joint becomes damaged, a cascade of events is unleashed which eventually leads to the destruction of the cartilage. Once the cartilage within the joint is destroyed, the two bones will rub together because there is no longer a cushion between them. When this occurs, the bones will become damaged resulting in arthritis.

What Are the Risk Factors for Feline Arthritis?

There are a number of factors that make arthritis more likely for your cat.

- Feline arthritis is more common in middle-aged and older cats.
- Cats that are obese are more likely to be affected by the signs of arthritis than a cat that is lean.
- Joints that have been injured in the past are also more prone to becoming arthritic later in life.
- Congenital abnormalities that result in abnormalities within a particular joint can make your cat more likely to suffer the effects of arthritis. Hip dysplasia is an example of a congenital abnormality that can lead to arthritis.

What Are the Signs of Arthritis in a Cat?

A cat that is arthritic may show many different symptoms. Essentially, arthritis causes pain. The symptoms that result from arthritis are a result of that pain.

Any change in your cat's behavior may be a result of pain. Each cat reacts to pain in a different manner. These are some examples.

- Some cats become less active and may sleep more than normal.
- Other cats may become anxious and restless.
- Some cats have difficulty finding a comfortable place to rest or a comfortable position in which to sleep.
- Some cats become irritable and begin to avoid contact with family members.



- Other cats become more social, seeking out more interaction with family members.
- Cats with arthritis may be painful when handled.
- Arthritic cats may have difficulty accessing the litter box and may urinate or defecate outside of the litter box.
- Some cats with arthritis will stop grooming themselves, resulting in an unkempt haircoat.
- The pain resulting from arthritis may cause a decreased appetite for some cats. This in turn may result in weight loss.
- Lameness may be present but is often difficult or even impossible to notice. Some cats become quite good at hiding the symptoms of their pain.

The symptoms of arthritis in cats can be gradual and insidious in onset. However, knowing the behaviours that are normal for your cat and monitoring for changes in those behaviours will provide a good base for determining whether your cat is painful.



If in doubt about whether your cat is painful, it is advisable to assume that pain is present and act accordingly. Cats that are painful as a result of arthritis need to be treated to relieve their pain.

What Should You Do if You Suspect Your Cat Has Arthritis?

If you suspect that your cat has arthritis, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will be able to determine whether your cat has arthritis by

performing a physical examination on your cat and by taking radiographs (x-rays).

In some situations, your veterinarian may also want to evaluate joint fluid from your cat to help rule out joint infections

Once arthritis is diagnosed, there are a number of feline arthritis treatment options that will help keep your cat comfortable and pain-free.

If your pet is showing any signs of illness, please consult a veterinarian as quickly as possible.

Source: <http://vetmedicine.about.com/od/diseasesand-conditions/a/CW-CatArthritisSigns.htm>

Case Study – Spooky King

Spooky came to PKVH with a history of breathing problems, and difficulty eating and drinking. On close examination an abscess under Spooky’s tongue was discovered. There was significant swelling and necrosis of tissues in this location and puncture wounds were discovered under her neck. The abscess was most likely a result from a cat fight.

Blood tests indicated evidence of infection and dehydration since Spooky had been unable to eat and drink due to extensive swelling and pain. Spooky received pain relief, antibiotics and intravenous fluid therapy then under a general anaesthetic her mouth was examined and the abscess was opened to allow for drainage.

In order to support Spooky during her road to recovery, and ensure she received the nutrition and hydration her body urgently needed, a feeding tube was placed. The feeding tube is known as an oesophagostomy tube – it is placed under a general anaesthetic via a small incision made on the left side of



the neck and through the wall of the oesophagus (food pipe) where it is inserted travelling down the oesophagus. The feeding tube is sutured to the skin and a bandage placed around the patient’s neck. The feeding tube allows for food, water and medications to be syringed into the patient bypassing Spooky’s painful mouth.

There was extensive damage and infection associated with Spooky’s tongue and mouth. Spooky experienced neurological deficits and loss of sensation in her tongue. She developed vomiting, coughing and had a persistent swelling and signs of infection despite treatment so blood tests and a CT scan of her head and chest was performed.

The scan revealed a fracture to her zygomatic bone (cheek-bone), severe cellulitis (infection of the skin) and aspiration pneumonia, which was resolving. Gastrointestinal protectants and further antibiotics were added to Spooky’s medication and nutrition delivered through the feeding tube.

After 3 months with a feeding tube and ongoing care in hospital and at home Spooky recovered with only slight scarring to her tongue as evidence of her ordeal. Spooky is now back to spending quality time with her family at home.