

Arthritis and degenerative joint disease in cats

Due to the challenges of diagnosing arthritis in cats, it can be difficult to tell how many cats are affected. This may be partly down to a cat's tendency to try and hide pain.



What causes arthritis in cats?

Osteoarthritis is a complicated type of arthritis where the normal cartilage that cushions the joint degenerates and is worn away. This results in inflammation, discomfort, ongoing damage and secondary changes in and around the joint. Osteoarthritis can develop without an obvious underlying cause, in part due to mechanical 'wear and tear' in the joints. It can also be secondary to a joint injury or abnormality.

What are the signs of arthritis in cats?

Cats often do not show signs of pain like other animals. They tend to hide discomfort until it is totally unbearable. They may not limp but often alter their normal activities and habits in order to minimise movements that cause pain.

Indications that a cat may have arthritis:

- Reluctance to jump up or down or use stairs
- Jumping up to lower surfaces than usual
- Stiffness in the legs, especially after sleeping or resting for a while
- Difficulty using the litter tray or cat flap
- Reduced physical activity
- Sleeping in different, easier to access sites
- Changes in grooming resulting in a matted or scruffy coat, or sometimes overgrooming around painful joints
- Overgrown claws due to lack of activity
- Temperament changes

Managing arthritis in cats:

- Medications can be very effective at controlling the pain and inflammation associated with arthritis, but should only be used under direct supervision by a vet, as drugs can have side-effects. Never use human medications for cats, many are toxic and even low doses can prove fatal.
- The most commonly used class of drugs for managing arthritic pain are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). To minimise the risk of side-effects, the drug should be chosen and used carefully. In some cats, alternative or supplemental analgesic (pain-killing) drugs may need to be used.
- Modifying a cat's environment can greatly help to maintain quality of life for an arthritic cat. Things to consider include:
 - Use of soft bedding out of any drafts.
 - Steps or ramps to enable cats to reach favourite spots, or food (if fed at a height) that may be difficult to access.
 - Check that the cat flap is easy to open and consider propping it open if the cat finds it difficult to push through.
 - Consider having a litter tray inside and use one with low sides if your cat finds it difficult to get in to the tray.
 - Groom regularly, especially areas that your cat finds difficult to reach and keep an eye out for overly long nails.
 - Careful weight management is very important. A cat carrying unnecessary weight will struggle and reduced activity could result in weight gain in a cat that was previously a healthy weight. Speak to our vets if you would like advice on a suitable diet for weight loss or weight management.

Over Grooming in Cats

Over grooming is a term used when a cat becomes obsessive about their grooming regime causing thinning hair, broken hair shafts and bald patches. A hypersensitivity to flea saliva can trigger over grooming as can allergies to environmental substances or food intolerance.

Cats are very susceptible to stress and anxiety which can also be triggers. Some cats can cause sore areas and can cause injury or infection to areas such as feet and tails. If you think that your cat is over grooming, please book an appointment as soon as possible as once this habit is established, it can be hard to break.



The Socialisation Game

The term socialisation very simply means the learning process a puppy must go through in order to learn key life skills. This ensures that a puppy is happy and confident in all environments and has the skills to be able to communicate effectively within its social group.

There are 3 main socialisation groups puppies and dogs will fall into, but only one will give you a well-balanced easy going dog.

Well Socialised

A correctly socialised dog that can read another dog's body language and respond appropriately is a pleasure to own. They have the skills to offer calming signals and allow a nervous dog space. They don't rush over to bundle other dogs, wanting to play and potentially causing a frightened dog to bite through utter fear! If a game of chase is initiated by another dog, a well socialised dog will oblige without playing too rough or charging in with wild exuberance causing possible injury. They are not the constant chaser, always pinning other dogs to the ground but will take to turns to be chased. These dogs are safe and calm around small children and have impulse control within its skill set.

Over Socialised

These dogs don't pay attention to other dogs' signals - everything is fair game. They go rushing over to bundle and play with all dogs or demands attention from everyone. An over socialised dog has never learnt impulse control. It believes that all the fun and excitement comes from other people and dogs. These dogs can cause as many arguments and bite incidents as an aggressive dog and fear in children and nervous adults alike.

Under socialised

It is not normal for young puppies to be timid or scared. Young puppies should approach things with intrigue and curiosity. An under socialised puppy can be a result of genetics or a lack of suitable experiences starting as early as 3 weeks. This is why care must be taken when buying a puppy. It is vital to find a good ethical and reputable breeder who is dedicated to providing positive experiences for their young puppies. They should gently expose them to a variety of sounds, people and objects and provide enrichment within their environment. An easy mistake with shy puppies is to repeatedly force them



to face scenarios that they find frightening in the hope that they will get over their fears. Shy puppies should not be put in situations where they become overwhelmed, this only leaves a puppy with a negative feeling. It will feel relieved the threat has gone away and this further reinforces their fear. Allow a shy puppy the freedom and time to make friends at their own speed. Don't allow your puppy to be bundled by other puppies or dogs or stroked and handled if people are the cause of the worry.

On the right path

Our puppy parties are an invitation to early puppy socialisation. Puppies are matched when playing, which means that all puppies will leave having enjoyed the experience of playing with other puppies. Inappropriate play will be interrupted and no puppy will leave feeling the experience was over whelming or too much to handle. A good reward based trainer will be the most effective and valuable tool that you have in your socialisation kit. Puppy classes where it is solely puppies of 20 weeks and under, are vital.

If you have a dog that is over socialised or under socialised hope is not lost, contact a reward based trainer and behaviourist who will show you how to work on improving and modifying your dog's behaviour using gentle handling and training methods. Short extract of blog written by Swindon's Speak Dog Training & Behaviour.

Short extract of blog written by Swindon's Speak Dog Training & Behaviour. Please visit our website to read the full article.

Our 2017 Charity Hearing Dogs for Deaf People



Linda & Fidget

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People is a world-leader in training dogs to alert deaf recipients to important sounds and danger signals, providing life-changing levels of independence, confidence and companionship. Dogs also help reduce the feelings of isolation and loneliness that deafness can bring.

Imagine you are deaf. You can't hear your alarm clock.

You can't hear your text messages. You miss out on social interactions. That's what life is like for deaf people, and it can be very isolating. A hearing dog can make a big difference. A big part of a hearing dog's job is to alert their deaf recipient to sounds they would otherwise miss. Simple sounds we take for granted like the doorbell, alarm clock and even

danger signals like the fire alarm. Being aware of these – thanks to a hearing dog – makes a real difference in deaf people's lives. One of those people is local Swindon recipient, Linda.

Read more about Linda and her Hearing Dog Fidget on our website.

3 months of Flea and Tick Protection for Dogs and Cats

You can now protect your dog or cat from flea and ticks for 3 months per treatment. There is a chewable tablet for dogs and a 3 month spot on for cats. Regular effective control is particularly important if you have a pet that is allergic to fleas (saliva). One

bite can often trigger an extreme reaction. You may prefer a monthly treatment that includes a wormer. These are all prescription medications and our vets will be able to advise you on the best product for your pet, types of parasite, ease of use and lifestyle.



Lydiard Bark Charity Dog Show 2017

This year's Lydiard Bark is to be held on 2nd July 2017 at Lydiard Park between 11am and 4pm. Classes can be pre-booked or booked on the day from 10.30am. Leaflets and booking forms are available in our waiting rooms or can be downloaded via our website. Profits this year will be donated to Hearing Dogs for Deaf People. This is a fun dog show and all dogs are welcome. No handling experience is necessary and we welcome children and adults alike. There will be trade stands, a charity raffle and a fun games ring where you can have fun and games with your dog. More information can be found on our website.

We are looking for people to join our judging team. You will not handle

the dogs (elf and safety!) but you will contribute to the decision making. We take time to both look at the dogs, check out their characters and listen to their stories when judging. If you would like to be considered, please email: rachel@eastcottvets.co.uk with why you think you would make a good judge. If you are entering a class with your own dog, please let us know which classes so that we can allocate you a class to judge that does not clash with your entry. Judges must be over 18 and should be clients of Eastcott Vets or a past winner of a red Lydiard Bark 1st place rosette. Where there is a larger number of requests than places available, a draw will take place.

Kennel Cough? My dog doesn't go to kennels!

Kennel cough is a slightly misleading name. Whilst common in dogs that have been in kennels, it is perhaps equally common in dogs that have not. We have seen a number of recent cases of kennel cough and we are advising dog owners to get their dogs vaccinated.

Also known as infectious tracheobronchitis, Kennel Cough is a highly infectious respiratory disease which circulates in the dog population all year round. Although a range of bugs can be involved, the two most likely triggers are both common and widespread: a bacterium called *Bordetella bronchiseptica* and canine parainfluenza virus.

Once exposed to infection, it takes 3-10 days before the symptoms are seen. There is usually a persistent honking cough and fever. Owners

often think that their dogs have something stuck in their throat and dogs often cough up 'white foamy phlegm'. More rarely, serious cases can result in pneumonia and serious illness in puppies or those with a weaker constitution.

It is important not to exercise your dog if it has kennel cough in order to help prevent the spread of the disease. If you think that your dog may have kennel cough, please let us know when booking an appointment so that we can isolate your dog from others in the waiting room.

The kennel cough vaccine is slightly unusual as the vaccine is 'dropped' into the dog's nostrils. There is a discount on kennel cough vaccinations when administered at the same time as an annual booster vaccination. If you are a Pet Health Club member, you can now add a



Kennel Cough vaccine to your annual plan for an additional £1.25 per month which is overall cheaper than vaccination for non PHC Members.

Laparoscopic Spay in Female Dogs

We offer the 'conventional' surgical spay for female dogs and also Laparoscopic Spays which are spays performed using Keyhole Surgery.

Vets operate using 3 small 'keyhole' incisions, a special camera and surgical instruments to enable the procedure to be performed with the minimal of surgical intervention. Following a 'Lap' Spay the patient is left with 3 small wounds instead of a larger abdominal wound.

The advantages of Keyhole Surgery spays (or 'Lap Spays') in female dogs:

- Keyhole surgery is generally a safer and less invasive method of surgery
- It reduces the trauma caused to tissues
- Pain post-operatively is lower
- Recovery times are quicker
- As the surgical wounds are much smaller the problems associated with wound licking and the chewing of stitches is significantly reduced

Choosing a Cattery

Good catteries will book up quickly during peak times, so research well in advance of your planned holiday. Recommendation by someone that you trust is a good way of finding out about suitable catteries and visiting is always advised. Look for establishments that are licenced by the local council - anyone who boards cats or dogs as a business (in a domestic or commercial premises) must be licensed and insured.

The design of the cattery is important – the individual cat units can be alongside each other, but they need to be separated either by an impermeable barrier such as Perspex or by a wide gap, often referred to as a 'sneeze barrier'. Cats should never be able to touch each other. Avoid communal runs. This is where cats share a large space with other cats. The majority of cats don't want to share space with a cat they don't know and will find this very stressful. These and exercise areas where cats can exercise and then go back into their individual pens are potential ways to spread disease.

It may sound silly but ensure that the cat areas are secure. Your cat should be secure in their unit but the areas

where cats are transferred from baskets to cage should also be secure. Cats have an innate ability to bolt and squeeze through the smallest of gaps when basket transfers are made.

The cattery should not smell and litter trays should be cleaned regularly. Uneaten wet food should be removed and food and water bowls kept clean. Look for the provision of some enrichment in the cage. Cats prefer high places and the addition of a shelf or similar in the sleeping area or run will be enjoyed by most cats. A warm cosy bed is a must!

Barking dogs close by can be very stressful for cats, so choose a cattery that has no close contact with the kennel area. Some catteries play music to cats to help to relax them and some have plug in Feliway or Pet Remedy diffusers which diffuse stress relieving vapours.

Staff should have an obvious affinity with cats and a clear understanding of their habits and needs. You should be asked for an up to date vaccination certificate as proof that inoculations are up to date, in order to protect both your cat and the other cats in the cattery.



A good cattery will ask you for details of your vet and ask you to sign a consent form allowing them to contact a vet and give treatment if it's necessary. You should provide a contact number should there be an emergency. To make your cat feel at home you may be able to leave some bedding or toys from home. Many catteries will try to feed the same food as they have at home if they can easily source it, however if you feed a special diet, you may have to provide this if you would like them to feed it. Some keep detailed records of how much has been eaten as well as toileting records. This is good practice and can provide an early warning of any issues. Many catteries will administer medication if required and sometimes diabetic cats can be accommodated. This would need to be discussed in detail with the staff.

Recommend a Friend Prize Draw Winner

Congratulations to G Hobbs who has won £100 worth of Eastcott vouchers in this quarter's draw to spend on her 3 pets.

To read more about Recommend a Friend, visit our website or pick up a form from one of our waiting rooms.

Edison Park Clinic & Hospital

Edison Park, Dorcan Way, Swindon SN3 3FR
For Sat Nav use SN3 3RB
Mon to Fri 7am - 8pm Sat & Sun 8.30am - 8pm

Bath Road Clinic

59 Bath Road, Old Town, Swindon SN1 4AU
Mon - Fri 8.30am - 7pm Sat 9am - 12pm

Cricklade Road Clinic

6 Clive Parade, Cricklade Road, Swindon SN2 1AJ
Weekdays 8.30am - 10am and 4pm - 7pm