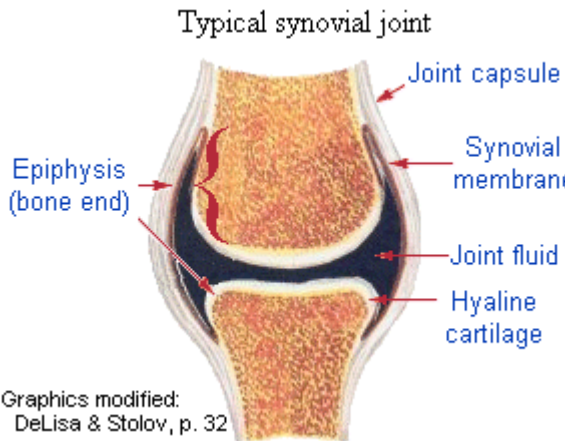


## Arthritis in Cats.

This information sheet has been produced to help you get an understanding of what arthritis is, why it may have clinical relevance to your pet and how it may be treated.

### *What is arthritis?*

Arthritis is the term used to describe what happens to a joint when it becomes inflamed. The diagram below shows a cross section of a typical joint. When a joint becomes damaged, it



undergoes a number of changes. The cartilage becomes damaged and degenerates, the joint capsule becomes thickened and the joint fluid becomes thin and becomes less lubricating. Large numbers of inflammatory cells enter the joint and perpetuate this process. Eventually the joint tries to stabilize itself and extra bits of bone (called osteophytes) try to bridge the joint. This whole process is painful. It is the body's way of trying to keep the joint rested. However, unless treated, the arthritis will only worsen.

### *How has arthritis occurred in my pet?*

A joint can become inflamed for many reasons. Most cases of arthritis in the cat are of a primary nature- that means old age, or 'wear and tear' arthritis. Some cats will develop arthritis after a traumatic episode (e.g. a car accident) or after a joint has become luxated. Arthritis can also be caused by infections after cat bites. Recently it has been shown that the cat flu virus, Calicivirus, can cause arthritis in some cats.

### *Is this the same as Rheumatoid arthritis?*

No. Rheumatoid arthritis is the term used to describe immune-mediated arthritis. This is when the body produces antibodies against its own joints and so multiple joints are affected. Although cats can suffer from rheumatoid arthritis, it is rare for them to do so.

### *How do I know if my cat is suffering from arthritis?*

Arthritis is very common in older cats and is now recognized as one of the most common diseases in cats. About one in five cats are likely to have arthritis by the time they are nine years old. It has taken a number of years for the veterinary profession to realise how important this disease is in cats, because it is very hard to recognize when a cat is in pain. The most common features of arthritis in cats are a reduced level of activity and a reduced inability to jump. These signs are often attributed to old age, but may be important. This makes you- the owner- the best person to recognize these signs of chronic pain in your cat. Other behavioral changes, such as increased vocalization, increased aggression, resentment of handling, seeking seclusion, alterations in grooming and changes in appetite may be an indicator of pain. Lameness can be seen in cats, but is not so obvious as they often try to hide it. If your cat has changed its behaviour in any of these ways then it is recommended that your vet checks him/her for arthritis.

### *How can arthritis be diagnosed?*

Clinical examination alone may indicate arthritis. Thickening of a joint or crepitus (a grinding feel when a joint is moved) may be felt.

X-rays are often needed help diagnose arthritis. They can show the extra bony growth (osteophytes) and swelling of the joint.

Sometimes joint taps are needed. This is where a sample of the synovial fluid is obtained using a needle so that it can be looked at under a microscope. If a joint is arthritic, it will have an increased number of inflammatory cells in the synovial fluid.

Another way to diagnose arthritis is to see whether or not a cat responds to the treatment for it (see treatment section below). This can be helpful if x-ray changes are not apparent, but if a vet strongly suspects that a joint is arthritic.

### *How are cats treated for arthritis?*

The main treatment for arthritis is a Non Steroidal Anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID). NSAIDs act as an anti-inflammatory and a painkiller and can be a very effective treatment. It is likely to be used for a period of 4 to 6 weeks to begin with and then can be used when a cat suffers flare-ups of the arthritis, or it may be needed long term to settle down a badly affected joint. The side-effects are rare. Occasional vomiting and diarrhoea are reported and we have to be wary of using them in cats with renal or liver disease.



Another new medication now available is Solensia. This is an antibody treatment that works against the molecules that cause pain in the joint. It is very safe and is given as a monthly injection.



Other supportive measures are important. Modifying the environment, such as providing comfortable bedding, reducing the necessity for jumping, using shallow litter trays and modifying the cat flap can all be considered. Cats are territorial animals and changes to their territorial environment can lead to anxiety. This can compound the problem. It is important to provide places to hide, such as igloo beds. Think carefully about where water

bowls and food bowls are sited. It is worth placing two food/water bowls in different places to encourage exercise and mental stimulation. Stroking a cat can release neuro-transmitters that improve his/her mood, so it is important to spend some time each day stroking his/her head and grooming. Be careful not to cause pain though. The use of pheromones such as Feliway, which are available as a spray or diffuser plug-in, can be used to help keep a cat calm.



Nutritional supplements have been shown to help arthritis in cats. Supplements containing Glucosamine and Chondroitin are available. These substances are the building blocks of cartilage and so adding them to the diet may help the cartilage repair itself. It is best to use products from reputable companies which can guarantee the quality of their Synoquin). A study performed in 2002 indicated that

cheaper glucosamine/chondroitin products (including many versions) did not contain the amount of glucosamine or that was stated on the label!

Recently, prescription diets have become available to help treat

These diets contain essential fatty acids and are clinically proven to help reduce the clinical features of arthritis.



veterinary products (e.g. 84% of human chondroitin

arthritis.

### *Will my cat be cured of arthritis?*

It is unlikely that he/she will be cured of this condition. Once a joint becomes arthritic it is already failing. We can use the treatment outlined above to help to manage the arthritis so that it does not cause your cat pain and so that he/she will be able to live a full and happy life.