

Understanding: Osteoarthritis (OA)

What is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a progressive, degenerative joint disease that affects approximately 25% of dogs and a staggering 90% of cats over age 12. While it cannot be cured, modern veterinary medicine has evolved to focus on "multimodal" management—combining several therapies to significantly improve a pet's quality of life.

Recognizing the Signs Pets are masters at hiding pain, especially cats. Often, the signs are behavioral rather than just a visible limp.

Common Signs in Dogs	Common Signs in Cats
Stiffness when rising from rest	Reluctance to jump up onto counters/beds
Limping (often improves after "warming up")	Hesitating before a jump or "climbing" instead
Reluctance to climb stairs or jump into the car	Matted fur/poor grooming (it hurts to reach back)
Muscle loss (atrophy) in the hind legs	Urinating or defecating outside the litter box
Irritability or "snapping" when touched	Hiding more than usual or being less social

What Causes OA?

While the exact cause is complex, several factors can increase your risk of developing Osteoarthritis:

- **Age:** The risk increases significantly with age
- **Obesity:** Excess weight puts greater stress on weight-bearing joints (knees and hips).
- **Joint Injury:** Previous injuries (like a torn meniscus or ligament) can increase the risk in that joint later on.
- **Genetics:** A tendency to develop OA may run in predisposed genetic heritage

Managing and Treating OA

There is no cure for Osteoarthritis, but treatment focuses on **managing pain, improving joint function, and slowing the progression of the disease.**

1. Lifestyle Modifications (First-Line Treatment)

- **Exercise:** Low-impact activities are crucial. They strengthen the muscles around the joint, stabilize it, and reduce pain.
 - *Examples:* Swimming, walking
- **Weight Management:** Losing even a small amount of weight can significantly reduce stress on weight-bearing joints.

2. Medications

- **Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs):** Medications Like Rimadyl (Carprofen), Galliprant, Meloxicam. Remember dogs **SHOULD NOT** have over the counter human medications like Ibuprofen or Tylenol. Both are toxic and can lead to serious injury or death.
- **Nerve specific medications (If a nerve is affected):** Medications like Gabapentin in combination with a NSAID may prove to be helpful.

Supplements (Nutraceuticals)

- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** Look for high-quality fish oils (EPA/DHA). These are some of the most scientifically backed supplements for reducing joint inflammation.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin:** The "building blocks" of cartilage (e.g., Dasuquin or Cosequin).
- **Green-Lipped Mussel:** A natural anti-inflammatory often found in joint-support diets.

3. Other Treatments

- **Physical Therapy:** Range of motion exercises to keep the joint mobile.
- **Injections (dog):** Librello (Monoclonal antibody target specifically for OA nerve growth factor) Once monthly injection, or Aqeduan (Polysulfated Glycosaminoglycan) helps to support the healthy cartilage tissues throughout the body, as well as helps connective tissues and joint fluid, and helps reduce inflammation associated with arthritis.
- **Injections (cat):** Solensia (Monoclonal antibody therapy targeted for nerve growth factor)
- **Additional Treatments:** Laser therapy, Hydrotherapy, Acupuncture, Massage, PEMF (Pulsed Electromagnetic Field Therapy).
- **Advanced Treatments:** **Synovet OA** (a targeted radioisotope injection for elbows) and **PRP/Stem Cell therapy** are becoming more accessible for severe cases.

4. Environmental Modifications

Simple changes at home can make a massive difference in your pet's daily comfort:

- **Non-Slip Flooring:** Place yoga mats or runners over hardwood or tile to prevent "Bambi-legs" and painful slips.
 - **Ramps & Steps:** Help them reach the couch or car without the high-impact landing.
 - **Orthopedic Bedding:** Memory foam beds help support aching joints and keep them away from cold, hard floors.
 - **Raised Bowls:** Elevated food and water bowls prevent neck and shoulder strain, especially in larger dogs.
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Common Symptoms

Symptoms tend to develop slowly and worsen over time.

Symptom	Description
Pain	Joints hurt during or after movement.
Stiffness	Most noticeable upon waking or after periods of inactivity/ laying down.
Tenderness	The joint may feel sore when light pressure is applied to it.
Loss of Flexibility	Inability to move the joint through its full range of motion.
Grating Sensation	Bone-on-bone (crepitus) grinding with movement.
Swelling	May be caused by inflammation of the soft tissues around the joint.



Living Well with OA

Osteoarthritis is a chronic condition, but it doesn't have to stop you from living a full life.

Consistency is key! Sticking to your prescribed exercise routine and maintaining a healthy weight for your pet are the most effective ways to control their symptoms and improve long-term joint health.

- **Apply heat or cold:** A heating pad can help relax stiff muscles, and ice packs can help reduce swelling and pain after activity.
- **Talk to your veterinarian:** Regular check-ups are important for monitoring your pets condition and adjusting their treatment plan as needed.



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