

Chronic Pain Management

Arthritis in the knees of a young cat is very unusual. A malformed joint may be to blame.

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Q. My Orbie is a 5-year-old female, and my vet just informed me that she has arthritis in two knees. Is there anything I can do to ease the pain so she can get back to being somewhat normal again?

A. Arthritis in the knee of a cat is unusual and arthritis in any joint of a cat that is only 5 years old is very unusual. I would wonder whether or not your cat has some malformation of her knee joints that are now causing her problems. If that is the case and an underlying joint problem can be identified, she may benefit from surgical intervention and correction of a malformation. Of course, some malformations cannot be fixed surgically, so no matter what the cause, your only alternative is long-term pain management.

Chronic pain management in cats is more difficult than with dogs. Cats have a very different metabolism than dogs or humans, and so the drugs that we typically use in other species must be administered very carefully in cats to avoid toxicity. Two of the most common and safe drugs that I use in such cases are omega fatty acids and glycosaminoglycans to help the joints. These are actually nutraceuticals, and many cats seem to do well on them.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can be used, but only at a very reduced dosage and reduced dosing schedule to avoid toxicity. For instance, giving meloxicam every two to three days helps with the discomfort. Acetaminophen is very toxic to cats and should not be used at all. You should discuss various options for using NSAIDs with your veterinarian because many different NSAIDs are available and only a few of them are appropriate for cats.

Remember, the key to safe chronic NSAID administration in cats is using the smallest effective dose. In cats with renal disease, much smaller doses, or avoiding use, are recommended.