

How Can I Help My Arthritic Cat?

Cat Channel expert Jeanne Adlon, professional cat sitter, discusses ways to make your kitty more comfortable.

By Jeanne Adlon

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Q: My cat has arthritis. How can I make him more comfortable?

A: Like many people I know with arthritis, cats who suffer from this tend not to move around very much. I have noticed that lack of movement can bother them in a number of ways, including becoming depressed when they can't easily reach their litterbox, favorite spots or food bowls.

I remember one sweet little orange kitty named Katie, who shared her home with another cat who would devour any food in sight – including hers. Katie's food had to be put up on a counter, which became more difficult for her to reach as her hind legs gradually became affected by arthritis. Fortunately the problem was solved when a step stool was placed under the counter, which Katie was happy to use as a "leg up" to her food. Amazingly enough, the other household cat didn't make the connection, so Katie's secret was safe.

As our cats get older they will slow down, and sometimes arthritis is part of that. I always recommend getting regular checkups for all kitties, especially senior ones. If they are diagnosed with arthritis, your vet will likely have suggestions. I have also found that there are some simple things you can try to make them more comfortable. To help your cat climb up on a bed, sofa or window sill for bird-watching, I recommend a pet stair climber, found in most pet stores. It will also provide a little exercise for aching joints.

All cats love warmth, and I believe warm places become more attractive to arthritic cats. I sometimes put a heating pad on low near one of my cat's favorite spots, which he enjoys for short sits. However, make sure you do this only when you are home and turn off the heating pad when you are not there to supervise. Also, it is best not let your cat put on weight because that will only make him more uncomfortable, especially if he has arthritis. I suggest extra doses of petting and gentle play, which will help keep his body active and give you both a chance to share some quality time.