

## Arthritis: What You Can Do at Home

**Caring for your arthritic pet involves paying attention to his comfort.**

*Joan Hustace Walker*

Diet Without the proper nutritional building blocks, a healthy pet cannot maintain healthy bones, ligaments, cartilage, tendons, muscles, and joint fluids. His immune system is also weakened. Now, consider the fact that your pet is not 100 percent healthy (because he has arthritis) and has nutritional needs in addition to what is normally required. Without an appropriately enhanced diet, your pet's ability to fight the progression of arthritis will be greatly decreased.

Elderly patients may have an increased need for certain nutrients, along with a decrease in the ability to absorb them. So to give your pet a fighting edge, it is critical that he eat properly. One of the first treatments a holistic veterinarian may suggest is a change in your pet's diet.

Home-Prepared Meals If you have the time, energy, and ability to feed your pet freshly prepared meals that meet your veterinarian's specifications each day, it is the best way to provide your pet with the exact nutrients he needs without introducing any harmful chemicals or synthetic food preservatives. Preparing a meal of meat, raw vegetables, bonemeal, vitamins, digestive enzymes, and dietary supplements every day, however, is not easy. This type of food preparation demands planning, commitment, and patience in order to create a meal that is beneficial to your pet. If you have a busy schedule, preparing home meals for your pet may not be a viable option.

For those of you who are game to the idea, you will need to work closely with your veterinarian to establish a healthful diet for your arthritic pet. Keep in mind that your cat's protein requirements are quite different from a dog's, so following a recipe for a dog will not suffice for your cat. For example, cats require some animal-origin supplements such as vitamin A and fish oil, not beta-carotene and flax oil as are commonly used in dog meals. Also, realize that the recipes are designed to provide for your pet's needs. Never leave out any ingredients or change their proportions, unless you're absolutely sure it's okay for your pet. If you have questions, always consult with your veterinarian.

If your pet is allergic to some meats or you want to create a vegetarian meal, proceed with great caution and under the strict supervision of your veterinarian. Cats require higher levels of protein (than dogs do) with a vitamin and amino acid mix found in meats, not plants. Creating the correct mix through a nonmeat diet can be extremely difficult and usually is not recommended (without extensive supplementation with animal-origin foods). Everything about a cat's metabolism is structured around eating meat. If your pet is allergic to one type of meat, you may want to try different kinds before feeding him a strictly nonmeat diet.

While on the subject of allergies, some practitioners believe that allergens can antagonize arthritis. If your pet has a sensitivity to a known allergen, avoid it in the pet's diet. Though not necessarily allergens, food from plants in the nightshade family, such as potatoes and tomatoes, can make arthritis worse.