

Arthritis: What You Can Do at Home

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

Joan Hustace Walker

If you choose to purchase your pet's foods, avoid products containing ethoxyquin preservatives, as well as BHA, BHT, nitrates, and nitrites. Feeding foods with these chemicals over a long period may be harmful. Keep in mind that if you feed foods without these preservatives, the food will have a much shorter shelf life. Check expiration or recommended purchase dates before purchasing foods. Also, keep store-bought food in a truly airtight container to maintain freshness. Do not feed your pet rancid or rank-smelling food; throw them out or return them.

Monitoring Weight and Exercise Pay attention to your pet's weight. The more your pet weighs, the more stress is placed on his joints. More stress equals more pain and more degeneration. This does not mean you should starve, underfeed, or restrict your pet's necessary nutrients in any way, though. To help slow the degeneration process, you should make sure your pet is at his optimal weight: not too fat and not too skinny.

Keeping an arthritic pet at an optimal weight can be a challenge. Because of aching joints, your pet's regular romping may be severely curtailed. Without frequent exercise, your pet may gain weight more easily. Your veterinarian may suggest feeding your pet a low-fat diet to help compensate for this.

Though your pet may not be particularly thrilled with the idea of exercising his arthritic joints, moderate and gentle exercise is of great benefit. Exercise keeps the joints mobile and strengthens the muscles surrounding the joint, which provides stronger support to the affected area.

The key to exercising your pet is in the words moderate and gentle, which means not asking your cat to repeatedly leap or climb to reach a toy. You may have to be more creative in designing walks or exercise for your cat, but if he tends to follow you from room to room or can be enticed with a tidbit, take advantage of these opportunities.

Hot and Cold Treatments Heat is effective and comforting treatment for pets who suffer from arthritis for a long period of time. If your pet's joints are painful and swollen most of the time (not just from flare-ups), heat therapy will allow you to relieve pain, increase blood circulation to the joint and surrounding muscles, and relax muscle spasms. A small, light-weight hot-water bottle wrapped in a towel is appropriate for a cat.