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Winter blues

Arthritis in pets

Arthritis or degenerative joint disease comes in 2 forms. Inflammatory joint disease (like rheumatoid arthritis) is an active disease that destroys joints, and often affects young animals. Osteoarthritis is the one most people think of which is the wear and tear arthritis of age, often following joint injuries.

Due to changes in blood flow, osteoarthritis tends to be worse in cold weather.

Signs your pet may have arthritis include

- Reluctant to get up in the morning.
- Stiff or jerky movements.
- Whimpering when standing.
- Cats often will stop jumping on to the furniture.
- Unable to walk as far.
- Cats may stop grooming.
- Swollen or painful joints.
- Pets with arthritis may sleep more, gain weight, and can become irritable.

Turn to the back page to see what we can do if your pet has arthritis



Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) are caused by 'Coronavirus', but not the one that causes FIP in cats. Most 'Coronavirus' only infect a single species of animal.

A Corona is also a meteorological phenomenon around the sun or moon caused by water crystals in the atmosphere, a famous brand of Toyota (in the same series as the Crown), and an even more famous Mexican beer.

Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)

Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)

FIP is a relatively rare, and unusual disease. It is caused by a virus, called a Coronavirus (because it looks like a crown under an electron-microscope – allegedly).

Coronavirus is highly contagious and infects many cats and causes little or no clinical signs. Some cats get a mild diarrhoea for a few days. About 40% of cats have been infected with Coronavirus at some stage in their lives, and it will cause almost all of them no problems whatsoever.

However, in a very small percentage of cats the virus mutates and causes a very different disease. FIP is caused by this mutated virus. Once in this form the virus no longer appears to

be infectious but can be devastating for the affected cat.

FIP generally occurs in cats from 3 months to 3 years of age.

FIP occurs in two forms. The wet form affects the abdomen and chest cavities, whilst the dry form targets particular organs such as the brain, and eye.

Affected cats generally show a gradual slide in to weight loss, decreased appetite, fever, and possibly a swollen abdomen.

Acute blindness or severe eye changes can also occur. Other signs are vague but include a poor hair coat, jaundice, and sometimes central nervous signs such as changed behaviours or seizures.

To date no effective treatment is available and virtually all affected cats succumb to the disease.

Piranhas

Flesh eating devils
of South America.

Or Not!

Hollywood has metaphorically dined out on Piranhas for decades. Unfortunately truth may be somewhat less inspiring than fiction in this instance.

- True. Piranhas have a lot of sharp teeth. And can grow more if they lose them.
- False. They do not devour large living animals and humans. Dead and dieing animals that fall in to the water may be eaten, but rarely killed.
- True. Some Piranha species are vegetarian.
- True. Swimmers have had their toes bitten by a Piranha.
- True. Actor Eric Fleming of Rawhide fame was allegedly nibbled by Piranhas. However he had drowned and been floating around for 3 days first.
- True. They are tasty and make a nice soup, and are often also served baked.
- If you stick your finger in their mouth they will bite it. And it hurts. Apparently.
- True. Piranha travel in large shoals. This is actually for protection as they are often eaten by other animals.
- True. Back to Eric Fleming. Though the Rawhide theme famously featured in the Blues Brothers movie neither John Balushi or Dan Akroyd were eaten by Piranhas.



Diagnosing and treating arthritis

Diagnosis

Clinical signs and history often make us suspicious your pet may have arthritis (see the clinical signs on the first page). Older pets, or pets that have had joint injuries are also at an increased risk.

Dogs often have thickened joints, that don't move as well as they used to when we feel them, and may also be painful to touch. Cats on the other hand may have few obvious signs, other than changes in behaviour.

Therefore to confirm a diagnosis of arthritis we sometimes need to xray your pet.

We may also collect a small amount of fluid from your pet's joints, and send it to the lab. This is particularly helpful if we think your pet may have rheumatoid arthritis (joint fluid is the best way to tell, and the treatment is quite different).

Joint fluid also allows us to detect rare conditions such as joint infections.

Once we have a diagnosis we can look at the best treatment options for your pet. See the box below for some of those options. Not every option suits, or is necessary for every pet. However as the list shows there are lots of things we can do to improve the lives of pets with arthritis



Treatment options for arthritis

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories are one of the most common treatments
- Diets such as Hills J/D can increase the production of protective proteins within the joints.
- Beds made out of conforming foam, that moulds to your pet's shape can decrease pressure and pain on joints.
- Pentosan-poly sulphate. This is a series of weekly injections for a month that help joints repair themselves and is one of the only treatments that can actually reverse some of the damage arthritis causes.
- Regular exercise and avoiding obesity are also important.