

Arthritis Medication for Cats

Arthritis is a chronic condition that cannot be cured. However, new scientific breakthroughs have allowed us to reduce pain and discomfort and potentially slow the progression of arthritis by the use of many medications and nutritional supplements.

NSAIDs - non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications include aspirin, acetaminophen and ibuprofen. NSAIDs reduce pain and inflammation. Several new NSAIDs are becoming available for pets, and one may be more effective for your pet than another. Cats are very sensitive to the side effects that may include stomach and intestinal ulcers, and kidney disease. It is strongly recommended that routine blood tests be performed prior to use to prevent exacerbation of underlying problems. **These medications should never be given concurrently with corticosteroids (prednisone)!**

- **Rimadyl** – not safe for cats as an oral medicine. A single injection is often used safely for surgical pain.
- **Aspirin** – very slowly metabolized in cats, may be tolerated if given once every three to five days. Causes vomiting in many cats.
- **Ibuprofen** (Advil, Motrin) - Has toxic metabolites that affect the liver and kidneys. **Should never be used in cats.**
- **Metacam** – One of the more safe and effective NSAIDs in cats. A liquid suspension may be dispensed by your veterinarian that can be used once every two to three days for chronic pain management. It should be used cautiously in cats with chronic kidney disease. Periodic blood tests are recommended to monitor for side effects.
- **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol) - **Is very toxic to cats! A single dose may be fatal!**

Corticosteroids - Includes prednisone, prednisolone, and dexamethasone. Are destructive to cartilage in the long-term use, and should only be used at the lowest effective dose for cats. Since cats may not tolerate NSAIDs and tolerate corticosteroids well, they are often quite useful in arthritic cats.

Tramadol – A narcotic like pain medication, which can be used along with a NSAID to control pain. It is very safe, but may cause sedation or dysphoria (uneasiness). It can be used long term safely.

Gabapentin – a pain medication whose mechanism of action is not well understood. Can be used in conjunction with other medications such as NSAIDS or tramadol. Side effects may include sedation.

Duralactin – a nutritional supplement that contains dried milk protein from the milk of hyperimmunized cows. Duralactin reduced joint inflammation by decreasing white blood cell contribution to inflammation.

Anti-oxidants – such as fish oil capsules and Vitamin E are being studied to evaluate their effectiveness, but may be beneficial.

Nutraceuticals - A class of naturally occurring chemicals that makes up the building blocks of cartilage. Supplementation of these has been proven to improve the health of joints, especially when used early in the disease process. Their presence also helps decrease the enzymes that promote ongoing cartilage destruction. They are especially helpful in any joint surgery or injury, developmental joint disease (i.e. hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, OCD), or rheumatoid arthritis. They may potentially help with disk disease as well. These products may be used in conjunction with a NSAIDs. These nutraceuticals are very safe, and have no significant side effects.

These chemicals accumulate in cartilage and in the bladder lining, and are being studied for use in people and cats with chronic bladder pain.

Dasaquin or Cosequin - is an oral powder that is given on a daily basis. Most animals require 2-6 weeks to show improvement. They have a unique combination of glucosamine with other ingredients, and are amongst the only brands that undergo studies to ensure efficacy of the product; that make it more expensive but more effective than over-the-counter combinations.

Adequan - an injectible form of a glycosaminoglycan that is usually given as a series of injections 1-2 times weekly for a total of eight injections. Most pets show a good response to Adequan, but a few will not show improvement. Follow-up injections are usually given in pairs 6-12 months later or as deemed appropriate.

Acupuncture – has been shown to be very effective in the management of chronic painful conditions such as arthritis. Most animals are very tolerant of treatment, and may be weaned to infrequent treatments.

Weight control – one of the most helpful methods to improve your pet's arthritis pain is to keep them slim with minimal body fat. Excess body fat increases inflammatory chemicals in the body that may increase arthritis. Many weight control diets are available.

All these medications have advantages and disadvantages. Not all animals will respond to all medications. Please feel free to inquire about and discuss any of these products and their potential benefits to your pet.