

## The Biggest Mistake You Can Make if Your Cat Is in Pain

Even minor pain can lower your cat's quality of life and lead to changes in personality, behavior and appetite. Know the 25 signs of pain in cats, the most common causes of pain and what to do - and never do - when managing your kitty's discomfort.

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### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Even minor pain can significantly lower your cat's quality of life and lead to changes in personality, behavior and appetite
- Do not give human medications to your cat; just one acetaminophen (Tylenol) tablet can kill some cats, as it causes damage to the liver and red blood cells
- While I typically prefer nondrug therapies when possible, severe pain is a situation where painkilling drugs — properly prescribed — are warranted
- For osteoarthritis pain, the No. 1 cause of pain in cats, a blended protocol of supplements is often effective for managing chronic pain
- Pain in cats can sometimes be managed by cold laser therapy, pulsed electromagnetic field therapy (PEMF), cold and heat therapy, chiropractic care and acupuncture
- It's important to seek integrative veterinary care as soon as you suspect your cat may be in pain

Even minor pain can significantly lower your cat's quality of life and lead to changes in personality, behavior and appetite. For these reasons, it's important to seek veterinary care as soon as you suspect your cat may be in pain. Along with providing options for pain relief, an integrative veterinarian can help address the underlying cause of the painful condition.

### Signs of Pain in Cats

If your cat isn't acting like himself, pain could be the reason, as pain often manifests as behavioral changes in kitties. A U.K. study investigated signs of pain in cats, revealing 25 signs considered sufficient to indicate pain. They include:<sup>1</sup>

- Lameness
- Hunched-up posture
- Difficulty jumping
- Shifting of weight
- Abnormal gait
- Licking a particular body region

- Reluctance to move
- Lower head posture
- Reaction to palpation
- Blepharospasm (eyelid contraction)
- Withdrawn or hiding
- Change in form of feeding behavior
- Absence of grooming
- Avoiding bright areas
- Playing less
- Growling
- Appetite decrease
- Groaning
- Overall activity decrease
- Eyes closed
- Less rubbing toward people
- Straining to urinate
- General mood
- Tail flicking
- Temperament

## **What's Causing Your Cat's Pain?**

Once you know your cat is in pain, the next piece of the puzzle is figuring out why. If your cat is older, osteoarthritis, intervertebral disc disease and spondylosis (joint degeneration) are common sources of pain. Other issues that can cause your cat to be in pain include:

- Trauma or injury
- Infections of the eyes, ears, skin
- Gastrointestinal tract disturbances
- Arthritis
- Ingestion of poisons
- Diseases of the back or spine
- Dental/oral infections and diseases
- Surgery (including dental surgery)
- Urinary tract disease
- Major diseases like cancer

The cause of your cat's pain will dictate the best way to treat it. While I typically prefer nondrug therapies when possible, severe pain is a situation where painkilling drugs are warranted. Felines are physiologically very unique, however, which is why prescribing pain medication for cats requires special knowledge and careful attention.

## **Pain Medications for Cats**

First off, never open up your medicine cabinet and give a human pain medication to your cat — some can be deadly in small doses. Just one acetaminophen (Tylenol) tablet can kill some cats, as it causes damage to the liver and red blood cells.<sup>2</sup>

NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) — including over-the-counter varieties like Advil (ibuprofen), Aleve (naproxen) and aspirin — can also be dangerous for cats, leading to liver and kidney damage, as well as ulcers. Some NSAIDs can be used in cats, but veterinarians must be very, very cautious of the type of NSAID, the dose and the duration of therapy.

Prescription NSAIDs sometimes prescribed for use in cats include Onsior (robenacoxib) and Metacam (meloxicam). These drugs are intended for short-term use, typically for postoperative pain, but they're also sometimes prescribed off-label for chronic conditions like osteoarthritis and cancer. Kidney damage and liver damage have been reported with prolonged use.

Certain opioids (narcotic painkillers) may also be prescribed to cats, and in some cases cause fewer side effects in felines than other types of painkillers. Options include Buprenorphine and Tramadol for chronically painful conditions and Duragesic (fentanyl patch) for short-term relief of severe pain, such as after surgery or an injury.

Many veterinarians like to use steroids such as prednisone. While steroids manage inflammation quite well, unfortunately, they can have potential long-term consequences for your pet's health and typically shouldn't be used for pain relief alone.

## **Options for Managing Osteoarthritis Pain**

Osteoarthritis is the No. 1 cause of chronic pain in cats, and it's best managed using a combination of therapies. There are supplements you can add to your cat's diet to provide the raw materials for cartilage repair and maintenance and slow down progression of the disease. These include glucosamine sulfate, methylsulfonylmethane (MSM) and eggshell membrane.

In many cases, cats may need a short course of drugs to relieve pain quickly, but many owners are concerned about the long-term side effects of these medications, especially with older cats.

The good news is that if natural anti-inflammatories are started at the same time as the drugs, the drugs can often be tapered down, or given intermittently. Cats can often enjoy an improved quality of life using a blended protocol of supplements including:

- A high-quality omega-3 supplement (krill oil)
- CBD oil
- Proteolytic enzymes

- Superoxide dismutase (SOD)
- Turmeric or curcumin
- Homeopathic remedies
- Anti-inflammatory herbs (devil's claw, boswellia, TCM formulas)
- **Esterified Fatty Acid Complex** (EFAC) complex

## Natural Options for Pain Relief

Pain in cats can sometimes be managed by offering a variety of rehabilitative therapies, including cold laser therapy, pulsed electromagnetic field therapy (PEMF), cold and heat therapy, and acupuncture (or aquapuncture). Homeopathic remedies may also work wonders in cats dealing with chronic pain, as does CBD oil. Many kitties also tolerate turmeric and omega-3 fats, as well as boswellia added to their food, all of which help naturally reduce inflammation.

If your cat is overweight, losing weight will reduce inflammation and take stress off of the body's joints. Chiropractic care, therapeutic massage and stretching exercises are other options to consider. I recommend engaging the help of an **integrative veterinarian** to develop the best, individualized pain relief plan for your cat.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [PLOS One February 24, 2016](#)

<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup> [PetMD, What Can You Give a Cat for Pain?](#)

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