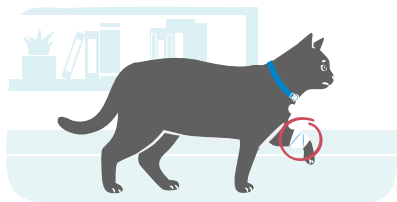


PAIN IS NOT NORMAL (CATS)



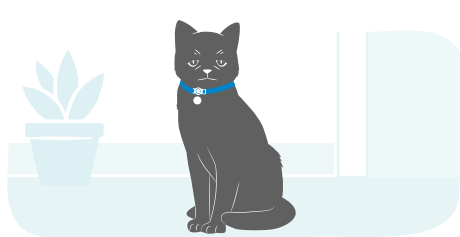
WHAT IS PAIN?



Cats can feel pain. Pain makes a cat's body hurt. It also makes them feel scared, irritated or unhappy. Each cat feels and reacts to pain differently. Any change to your cat's behaviour might mean they are feeling pain. There are ways you can help.

WHAT CAUSES PAIN?

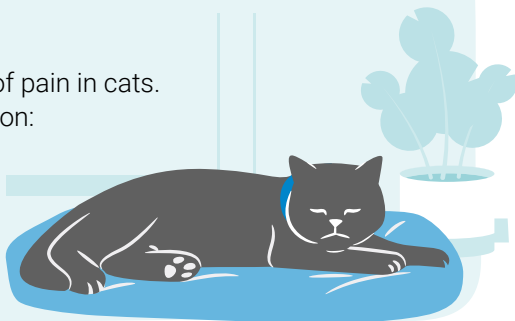
- Some cats find it harder to move after an injury or as they get older.
- They might also have been born with, or developed, a problem that causes pain (like in their joints, legs, spine, bladder (cystitis) or guts - like inflammatory bowel disease).
- The most common cause of long-term pain in cats is osteoarthritis (also called joint disease).¹
- There is no cure for osteoarthritis.¹ This means we need to help our cats feel better in other ways.
- Pain relief medicine and small changes at home can make cats much more comfortable.



WHY IT MATTERS

Living free from pain is very important for a cat's quality of life. Pain affects how animals feel and behave. However:

- Pain in cats is often missed.¹
- Many people do not know the signs of pain in cats.
- Because of this, many cats miss out on:
 - Pain relief medicine.
 - Supplements.
 - Simple changes at home that could make their lives much easier and more comfortable.



WATCH OUT FOR PAIN

Cats are very good at hiding pain. Changes can happen slowly and be easy to miss.¹ Instead of crying or whining, cats who are feeling pain often:



Sleep more or change sleeping patterns



Move less



Avoid stairs



Spend less time with people



Toilet outside the litter tray²



Hide more



Avoid jumping or struggle to jump up or down



Groom less or groom specific areas more



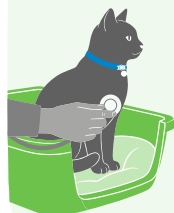
Get grumpy when touched



Pain is not normal. If you think your cat is in pain, see your vet.

SEE YOUR VET

Your vet will:



- Ask about your cat's behaviour and daily life.
- Examine your cat.
- Sometimes suggest x-rays or blood tests.

Your vet may:

- Prescribe pain relief medicine.
- Recommend supplements.
- Talk about your cat's weight and diet.
- Suggest changes to your home to help your cat feel more comfortable.



Gathering video footage of your cat at home can be very helpful for your vet to review. This allows them to look at how your cat moves when they are in an environment they feel happy in.

You can ask your vet about affordable treatment options that suit your budget. They can also help you make changes at home, so your cat is more comfortable.

NEVER GIVE HUMAN PAIN MEDICATIONS TO CATS. MANY OF THESE ARE DEADLY POISONOUS TO CATS, ESPECIALLY PARACETAMOL.

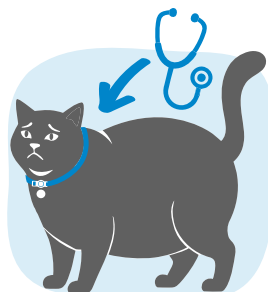


HOW TO HELP YOUR CAT AT HOME

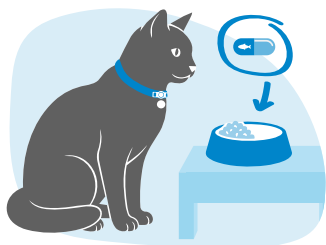
FOOD AND SUPPLEMENTS

Many cats who are in pain are also carrying extra weight. This makes sore joints work harder. Your vet or nurse can help you check if your cat is a healthy size and make a safe weight plan if needed.

Less weight = less pressure through stiff and sore joints



You can try joint supplements, especially those containing omega-3 fatty acids (like Antinol or 4Cyte).



Easy access

Eating and drinking should not hurt. Pain can make it uncomfortable for cats to bend their neck or stand while eating. Some cats may eat less or seem fussy when they are actually sore.²

You can help your cat by:

- Putting bowls on the floor so they don't have to jump up to reach their food and water.
- Using steps or offering a chair or ramps if bowls must be on benches.
- Raising bowls slightly with a box or stand (or buying elevated bowls). Some cats like raised bowls because they do not have to bend down as far.
- If your cat typically likes to drink from running water, buying a water fountain and placing it on the ground can make it easier for your cat to access instead of jumping up onto a bench to use a tap.
- Offering food and water in more than one place so your cat doesn't have to travel far. If you have more than one floor in your home, make sure your cat has food, water, litter trays and beds on every floor.

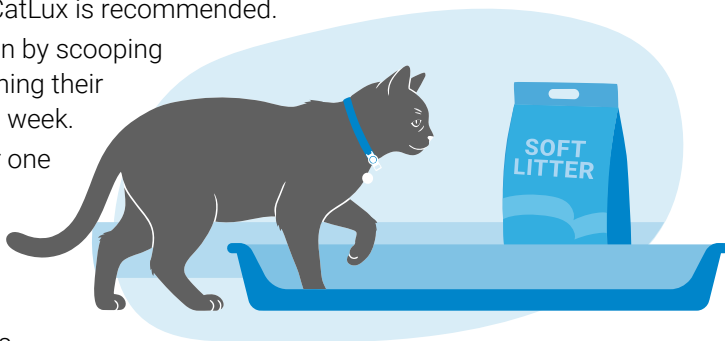
In homes with more than one cat, pain can make it harder for a cat to access food, water, or litter trays. Offering them choices in quiet areas and making sure there are many places they can access these resources helps reduce stress.²

BIG, LOW LITTER TRAYS AND SOFT LITTER

- Some cats may need a litter tray with lower sides as it gets harder to climb in and out of trays with higher sides.
 - Walking on hard surfaces can be painful. If it hurts your cat to use their toilet, they may choose to toilet elsewhere. Litter should be soft on paws. Softwood clumping litter by CatLux is recommended.
 - Keep the trays clean by scooping every day and washing their tray at least once a week.
 - Remember to offer one litter tray per cat, plus one extra!
- For example:

→ 1 cat = 2 trays

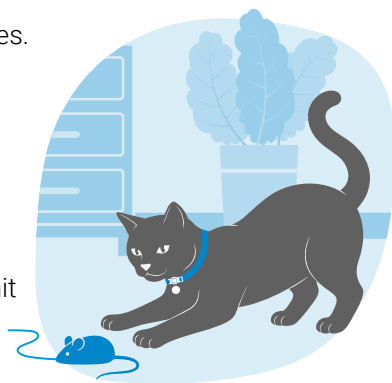
→ 2 cats = 3 trays



GENTLE EXERCISE

Encourage your cat to move around daily and engage in gentle play – this helps keep your cat's muscles strong and reduces stiffness.

- Cats will play hunting games for their entire lives. If your cat isn't interested in play anymore, this could be a sign they are in pain or sick.
- Using wand toys like "DaMouse" by GoCat and moving this gently around objects for your cat to stalk and chase for a few minutes can be really fun and satisfying.
- Too much movement can be painful. Try to limit twisting and jumping during play.
- Short sessions are best.



AVOID SLIPPERY FLOORS

Slippery floors can be hard for sore or stiff cats. You can help by:

- Putting down non-slip rugs or runners on smooth floors.
- Using non-slip mats near food bowls, litter trays, and favourite sleeping spots (including those that are high up).²
- Placing non-slip surfaces in cat carriers for visits to the vet too.

COMFORTABLE PLACES TO REST



- If your cat is trying to jump up onto high surfaces, you can offer them a platform in-between so they don't need to jump so high e.g. pull out a chair so they can jump from the floor to the chair and then up onto the table.
- Also provide comfy bedding options closer to the floor.

Offer beds with lots of padding.

- This is softer on sore joints and keeps your cat warm.
- Colder weather can make your cat feel sorer and stiffer.
- Donut beds are a great option.
- Or heated blankets/mats (supervised only).

Take care to make sure beds are not too close to heaters.

- This can cause burns or fires.
- Hot water bottles should never be filled with boiling water and must always have a thick cover over them to prevent injury.

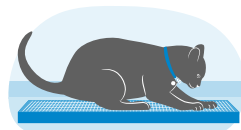


SCRATCHING

Scratching is important for all cats.

If tall posts hurt your cat or your cat won't use them:

- Try flat scratchers like carpet squares or cardboard scratchers.
- Place scratchers near their favourite resting spots for easy access.



GROOMING

When cats are in pain, they won't clean themselves properly.

- You will see clumps of fur and dead skin (dandruff) when this happens. Their coat might also be extra oily or greasy.
- You may need to start brushing your cat or brush them more often, so they don't get uncomfortable mats.

Some cats might find this unpleasant or too painful. In these cases, stop and speak with your vet. The vet may shave your cat after using pain relief or sedation if needed.



- Also check their nails regularly as they can quickly overgrow and curl into the paw pads – this is very painful!
- If grooming becomes too hard at home, talk to your vet.

TOUCH



Let your cat choose if they want to be touched. When cats are feeling pain, they might not like having sore parts touched or being picked up as this can make them feel worse. See our handout "[Let your cat choose if they want to be touched](#)" for more information.

Pain changes how a cat feels, moves, and behaves. Too many cats live with pain because the signs are missed.

Help your cat by:

- Watch them carefully
- Seek help from your vet
- Make simple changes at home

References:

1. [Osteoarthritis in cats: what we know and mostly what we don't know...yet](#), J Feline Med Surg. 2025 Jul 20;27(7):1098612X251347999. doi: [10.1177/1098612X251347999](#), accessed 3 April 2026
2. Changes to the home environment for cats with muscle/joint pain or mobility problems: a guide for caregivers, iCatCare, <https://icatcare.org/resources/cat-carer-guide-changes-to-the-home-environment.pdf>, accessed 3 April 2026



To learn more about caring for cats, visit:

**Meeting the Needs of Cats | Helping Your Cat Feel Safe,
Healthy & Happy | RSPCA NSW**