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Cat vet questions

Melissa Catt BVSc
Paddington Cat Hospital

Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

183 Glenmore Road, Paddington NSW 2021



Dear Dr Catt,

We got our cat about two years ago from a shelter. He was about twelve weeks old when we got him. Jazz has always had this habit of climbing onto my lap and pushing his front paws into my knee before he settles down and sleeps. I've never really minded this except when he uses his claws and obviously this can hurt. In the cooler months I've put a jumper or blanket over my lap so that the claws don't hurt but as it gets warmer and clothes are lighter, this is not a comfortable option. Is there anything I can do to deter this 'kneading' type of behaviour? I don't want to shoo him off me but I also don't want to be his personal pin-cushion.

Kneading behaviour in cats is a self-comforting type behaviour, and cats will do this when they are relaxed. Kittens will knead their mums when suckling. Jazz obviously thinks you are a very comfortable bed to lie on, so I guess you can take it as a compliment!! Of course excessive kneading on a bare lap can be rather painful, so you can try redirecting the behaviour. The most important thing to keep in mind is not to punish him in any way (eg saying 'no' and shooing him off), as this may make him scared and anxious about going on your lap. Cats often like soft surfaces to knead on (like laps!), so you could try providing him with a small fleecy mat or soft toy placed next to you. Some cats are responsive to catnip containing toys, and will preferentially use these for their kneading. When he climbs on your lap, place him gently next to you and see if he will take to the alternative. You could even try popping him on your lap once he's kneaded the mat and settled himself down if you like, although he mightn't transfer without another round of 'making puddings' (this is what the nurses in England used to call kneading when I worked there years ago!). If he is an indoor cat, another thing you can consider is clipping the ends of his claws, so he is effectively doing the same thing, but the pain factor is eliminated!

Dear Dr Catt,

We have an older Labrador who has been on glucosamine and chondroitin powder mixed with his food to help his joints. It was suggested by our vet and I can't help wonder whether this would also assist our ageing cat as well. Ziggy is close to ten years and although he's still fairly spry, he is slowing down and doesn't quite have the spring in his step. His next check up isn't until mid-year so I thought I would ask your opinion before seeing our vet.

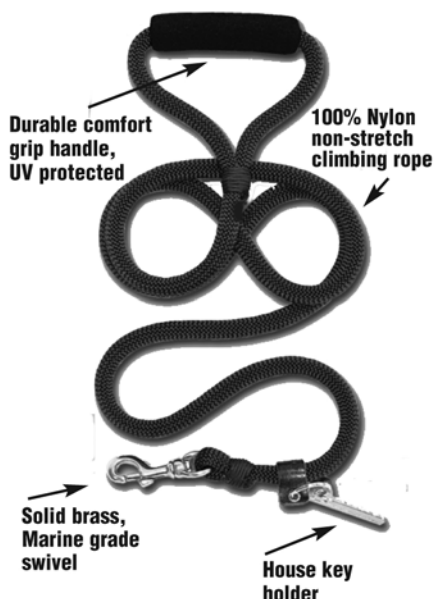
Glucosamine is a natural substance, which helps provide the building blocks for (and can stimulate the biosynthesis of) the base substance of joints. Chondroitin sulfate also has a similar effect. They help to repair joint surfaces and can have an anti-inflammatory effect, and are commonly found together in joint medications. They have been used in humans and dogs for a number of years, for the treatment of degenerative joint diseases (DJD), mainly with good success. There is not much information available for their use in cats (possibly because cats, being much smaller and more agile animals, have less incidence of DJD). According to anecdotal reports and personal experience these substances seem relatively safe and can be fairly effective, although there is variation between individuals (probably due to differences in the underlying disease process). It takes a couple of months before the levels build up in the body to see a clinical effect. There is an injection available from the vet (Cartrophen or Pentosan Vet) which works in a similar way, but is much more potent and works a lot more quickly. The injections are usually given once weekly for 4 weeks initially, then as required (eg a course at the beginning of each Winter). We will usually see a positive response to the injections in the first 2-3 weeks.



It is important to note the following: this product is not licensed for use in cats (neither are the injections mentioned above); there are no scientific studies in cats regarding these substances; and there can be variation in the quality of the different brands available. Before considering using glucosamine/chondroitin, I would strongly recommend having Ziggy checked over by your vet, getting your vet's opinion on using this for Ziggy, and ensuring that you source the medication from your vet (as the quality is likely to be higher and more consistent). Ten years old in a cat is still only late middle age, and we can start to see arthritic changes at this age (especially if there have been prior injuries), but I wouldn't assume that Ziggy's 'slowing down' is arthritis, as there may be another factor. Good luck!

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Dog/small animal questions

Dr Adam Gordon
Maroubra Veterinary Hospital

Adam Gordon graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. He completed a Masters degree in Veterinary Studies at Murdoch University in 2002. Adam has been in companion animal practice since 1990 and is principal of Maroubra Veterinary Hospital.

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Dear Dr Adam,

I have a 1 year old female ferret. My vet has told me I should get her desexed. Is this really necessary? She lives in my house and will never have access to a male ferret.

This is a very good question and one that vets are often quizzed on. Your vet has given you good advice and I would also strongly recommend desexing of your jill (female ferret). The reason for recommending desexing of all female ferrets not used for breeding is to prevent life threatening bone marrow disease.



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