A New Way to Treat Osteoarthritis in Cats

As our feline fur babies get older and our understanding of cat behaviour continues to improve, we are becoming more aware that chronic degenerative diseases such as osteoarthritis are being under-diagnosed in our kitty friends.

In a study published in 2002, it was found that 90% of cats over 12 years of age had evidence of degenerative joint disease such as osteoarthritis.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative condition of the joints where the cartilage that normally helps cushion the joint starts breaking down. This can be due to many factors including genetics, previous injury or trauma, being overweight or just general 'wear and tear'. In advanced cases, this can lead to the bones in the joint rubbing against each other causing inflammation, bony changes and most importantly pain and discomfort. Without intervention and treatment, the severity and pain will only continue to deteriorate.

Diagnosing osteoarthritis in cats can be challenging even for the most experienced veterinarians. Cats, unlike dogs, are masters at hiding pain and discomfort. Cats also notoriously dislike being handled during examinations making it difficult to make an accurate assessment of their movement patterns and for any signs of discomfort. Therefore, we often rely on your (owner's) observations at home on whether their behaviour has changed at home to help with a diagnosis.

Common signs of arthritis in cats include reduced mobility such as difficulty jumping up and down, difficulty using the litter tray, going up and down stairs or stiffness in the legs. They may also show reduced activity, spending more time sleeping and resting, not exploring or playing as frequently, they may show altered grooming tendencies and end up with matted or an unkempt coat. At times, they may even show temperament changes and may be more irritable when being handled or patted or avoiding interactions with other people or animals.

Diagnosis of osteoarthritis usually starts with a physical examination, however as previously mentioned, it is not always easy to come to a definitive diagnosis based on examination alone. At times, further investigation such as radiographs may be required. In instances that the diagnosis is uncertain, a simple treatment trial with medications may be used. A blood

test may also be recommended to ensure there are no other concurrent diseases prior to starting medications.

Treatment of osteoarthritis typically involves a multi-faceted approach, we typically will recommend the following: environment modification, diet and dietary supplements and medical treatment.

Environmental modification means modifying the environment to make life easier for your cat such as using a lower litter tray so it's easier to step in and out of, softer beds, using ramps and steps and making sure that food and water are easily accessible. Modifying their diet is also an important facet, this is to ensure that they are as lean as possible as obesity or being overweight will exacerbate arthritis. Adding in supplements such as essential fatty acids (Omega 3 & 6 oils) can help reduce inflammation and provide nourishment to the cartilage in the joints, improving overall joint health.

Options for medical treatment have traditionally been quite limited, this typically means using a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory to help control the inflammation and pain within the joints. However, these drugs typically require daily oral dosing, they aren't without side effects and they can only be safely used in patients without underlying disease.

Recently, an exciting new alternative pain relief has been approved and released in Australia called ***Solensia***. Solensia is a **monthly injection** with a high safety profile, it contains a compound which works like your cat's natural antibodies, but instead of helping to fight diseases, these antibodies work to reduce pain signals. Clinical studies in America have thus far shown promising results for the safety and efficacy of *Solensia* for cats with osteoarthritis.

At VetHQ, we pride ourselves as a progressive and forward thinking practice, ready to embrace new medications and technology to ensure the best outcomes for you and your pets. We promise to continue to evaluate the safety data and research on *Solensia* and we will aim to provide this exciting, new medication to your pets where appropriate.

If you have any questions on whether your cat could benefit from this new medication or if you have any suspicions your cat may be suffering from osteoarthritis, please do not hesitate to contact us!

Dr Ivan