Key Messages

- Maintaining cats in ideal body condition throughout life is important for joint health. In senior cats, when the risk of osteoarthritis is greatest:
  - Cats between the ages of 7-12 years old (the “mature” period of the senior life stage in cats) are most likely to be overweight or obese. In osteoarthritic cats that are overweight or obese, weight loss is key.
  - Weight loss reduces the extra mechanical stress placed on the joints by the excess weight.
  - Obesity is associated with chronic inflammation and increased production of free radicals, which may contribute to joint damage. Loss of excess weight reduces inflammation and oxidative stress.

- Cats over the age of 12 (“geriatric” cats) are more likely to be underweight and may lose both fat and lean body mass. Preserving lean body mass and body weight by feeding a diet with increased levels of protein can help maintain supporting muscle strength.

In one study, 100% of the cats over 10 years of age had radiographic signs of osteoarthritis.¹

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Although research in cats is very limited, diets containing key nutrients may be beneficial for arthritic cats:

- Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate are building blocks of cartilage and help support healthy joints.
- The omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) have anti-inflammatory activity, which can reduce cartilage degradation and lameness.
- A combination of the above plus green-lipped mussel extract (a New Zealand shellfish) improved mobility in arthritic cats.²

Resources, including food and water bowls and litterboxes, should be placed where they are easily accessible to cats with limited mobility. Some cats with osteoarthritis may prefer their food and water bowls elevated several inches off the floor.

References

The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.