

# Complementary therapies

**C**omplementary therapies can offer relief from the symptoms of osteoarthritis, or some of the side effects of conventional drug treatments. And a number of owners believe their cat's life can be extended by a few years with the help of these therapies.

Generally speaking, complementary therapies are safe if practised by a qualified therapist from a recognised organisation: a referral from your vet is usually needed.

### Holistic approach

While conventional medicines focus on treating the pain and inflammation that goes hand-in-hand with arthritis, complementary therapies take into account how the whole body is functioning (hence holistic), including lifestyle, personality, and diet. Complementary therapies are designed to be used alongside conventional medicines and treatments, and not to replace them, although some owners find their cats live happily on these therapies alone.

### Are they effective?

While scientific research is still relatively recent, and currently small-scale, early

results indicate that some therapies may indeed help ease the symptoms of arthritis, although they can't alter the course of the condition or provide a cure, sadly. Sometimes it's the case that two different therapies can work well together.

### Acupuncture

Based on ancient Chinese theories about how energy moves around the body, this therapy uses fine needles which are inserted through the skin at certain points of the body, and left in for around 30 minutes usually, to help relieve pain and promote general wellbeing. Acupuncture can be slightly uncomfortable for your cat when the needles are inserted, but shouldn't hurt her; some even doze off during a session. Acupuncture can only be performed by a vet, although acupressure (using fingertips instead of needles) can be practised by anyone qualified to do so.

### Homeopathy

Homeopathy is based on the principle of 'like cures like.' Where conventional medicine aims to suppress symptoms – for example, by using anti-inflammatories

*– but lives life to the full!*

– homeopathy provokes the body into healing itself. Homeopathic remedies like Rhus Tox can help cats with problems such as stiffness that eases on movement.

### Massage

This therapy treats the whole of a cat's body to reduce soreness, tension, over-compensation, and old muscular injuries. By manipulating muscles and restoring their function, massage is a natural way of managing your cat's health, prolonging quality of life, and promoting wellbeing. It is of particular help to cats with hip dysplasia.

### Osteopathy

The principle of osteopathy is to restore normal function throughout the body, and reduce tension in areas where muscles are too tight, whilst ensuring that other regions are 'woken up' to spread the load across the body. Osteopathy uses gentle manual techniques and soft tissue massage to improve flexibility and range of movement. Osteopaths tailor their treatment to best suit each patient. The treatment will often result in a relaxed cat, who is brighter and more willing and able to exercise.

*Gentle stroking is also relaxing for a cat, and can help reduce any tension around the joints.*



# Exercise and physiotherapy

**R**egular exercise is good for your cat as it nourishes joint cartilage, and will help to keep her arthritic joints from stiffening and becoming more painful. Ultimately, exercise goes a long way toward keeping your cat on the move.

### Playtime

Whilst cats aren't the most dextrous of animals, they do love to play, and gentle games are a good way to keep your cat active in mind and body; hopefully without injury. If you have another cat at home, the two will probably play together happily, inside the house or out in the garden: single cats are likely to look to you for entertainment. If your cat usually ventures outside but seems reluctant to now, you could try putting his food outdoors: the smell may encourage him into the garden to investigate.

### Interactive games

Try to think up games you can play together. Simple activities like dragging a furry toy across the floor on the end of a piece of string will encourage your cat's natural predatory behaviour. And rolling a ball for your cat to chase after will get her

moving, and might keep her amused for a while – until she decides to call time, of course. My cat never tired of playing 'jump on the slithering snake,' in the shape of one of my belts that I swished enticingly across the floor.

### Stretching

A tall scratching post will encourage your cat to stretch, which will improve flexibility and helps her joints move through their full range of motion.

### The importance of exercise

It cannot be overstated just how important exercise is in reducing the secondary effects – such as stiffness and weakness – of the pain and inflammation associated with arthritis that your cat will be experiencing. Exercise will also help to keep her weight under control to avoid further pressure on her sore joints. If you're worried that your cat isn't sufficiently mobile, you could ask your vet, or physiotherapist, to suggest ways to help your cat to be more active.

### Veterinary physiotherapy

Whilst it's widely known that arthritic





*Cats naturally love to play.*



or injured dogs can benefit from physiotherapy, a view seems to prevail that cats won't tolerate the handling needed to benefit from this treatment. Yet there's huge potential in physio for cats. And with modifications and adjustments – and the use of the correct techniques – physio can significantly help a cat who's suffering from arthritis following surgery, perhaps for a hip replacement, after an injury, or because of normal wear and tear. Cats with inflammatory arthritis can be helped, too, but with more targeted, delicate treatment.

*Lilly-Pie, the Maine Coon, enjoys stretching.  
(Courtesy Josie Hughes, breeder)*



*Bert doing his proprioceptive exercises on a wobble cushion.*

*Bert pole exercising.*

