

Spot the Signs

A report into chronic pain in cats



www.spotcatpain.co.uk

A report in association with FAB Cats,
supported by Boehringer Ingelheim



53%

of owners recognise
arthritis causes
significant pain and
discomfort in cats

Contents

- 4 Age matters
- 6 Spotting the signs
- 8 Happy, healthy cats
- 9 Pain free cats – What a relief!

Foreword



Leading feline author and CEO of the Feline Advisory Bureau, Claire Bessant

I am delighted to be involved in this report, which aims to raise awareness about chronic pain in cats and help owners feel more confident about spotting the signs of pain in their pets.

Owners often quote cats' independence and sense of mystery as endearing qualities. However, it's precisely these behaviours which can make it more difficult for us to spot when they are in pain. Your pet's health doesn't have to be a mystery and there are signs you can look out for.

With an ageing cat population, spotting the signs of long term (chronic) pain in cats has never been more relevant. Age-related health conditions, such as arthritis, can cause significant pain to cats. Sadly, 78 per cent of cats have never been taken to the vet for an old age check up.

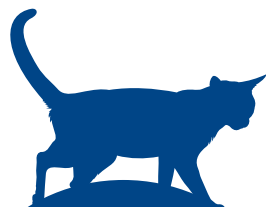
For this report, we surveyed 3,000 cat owners to find out just how aware owners really are about cat pain. We also spoke to around 100 vets for their expert opinion on pet owner attitudes and the scale of the problem.

As a result, the Spot the Signs report reveals some interesting statistics, for example, three quarters of the cat owners in this study said they would not recognise the signs of chronic pain in cats.

Of course, we love our cats and we would feel terribly guilty if we thought they were in any discomfort. Often our cats are loved just like a member of the family and indeed a fifth of those surveyed said their cat was like a child to them.

Just like us, we want our cats to live long and happy lives. By understanding the way our cats react to pain, particularly chronic pain which can be more difficult to spot, we can help them do this.

This report really is a must read for anyone with a cat! If you have any concerns about your cat, and if you think your cat may be suffering with chronic pain, please consult your vet or vet nurse.



78%
of cats have never
been taken to the
vet for an old age
check up

Age matters

It is not just the life expectancy of humans that is rising. Thanks to medical advances and better healthcare, cats are now living longer than ever before. The Spot the Signs study found that around 90 per cent of vets have treated cats that are aged 22 or above. That is equivalent to 104 in human years!

Cats have particularly athletic lifestyles, and over the years this can put strain on their joints. Of the cat owners we spoke to, nearly half had cats classed as 'mature and older' (7 years and older) and at risk from developing age-related conditions, such as arthritis. A 2002 study revealed that 90 per cent of cats aged 12 and above had signs of arthritis when X-rayed¹.

The majority of pet owners recognise that arthritis causes significant pain and discomfort and the study found that half of cat owners believe cats suffer pain in equal measures to humans.

Claire Bessant said:

"Arthritis has only just been recognised by the veterinary profession as a major problem in cats and so it is not surprising that 80 per cent of cat owners do not realise that their cats can develop this painful condition."

What is arthritis?

- Arthritis is wear and tear damage to the joints
- Symptoms of arthritis include restricted movement and chronic pain
- It is a common illness for ageing cats, but is also likely to affect overweight cats, or cats who have had an injury to their bones.
- There are treatments available which are licensed for longer term use in cats with arthritis
- If you suspect your cat is in pain, you should always speak to your vet or vet nurse

"Last summer, I noticed Matti slipping on the floor and struggling to get out of the cat flap. I thought arthritis was just a human condition, so dismissed it from my thoughts.

But as time went on, his legs seemed more awkward and were very sensitive to touch. He would also sit awkwardly when washing, concentrating on grooming his legs, which seemed to stick out.

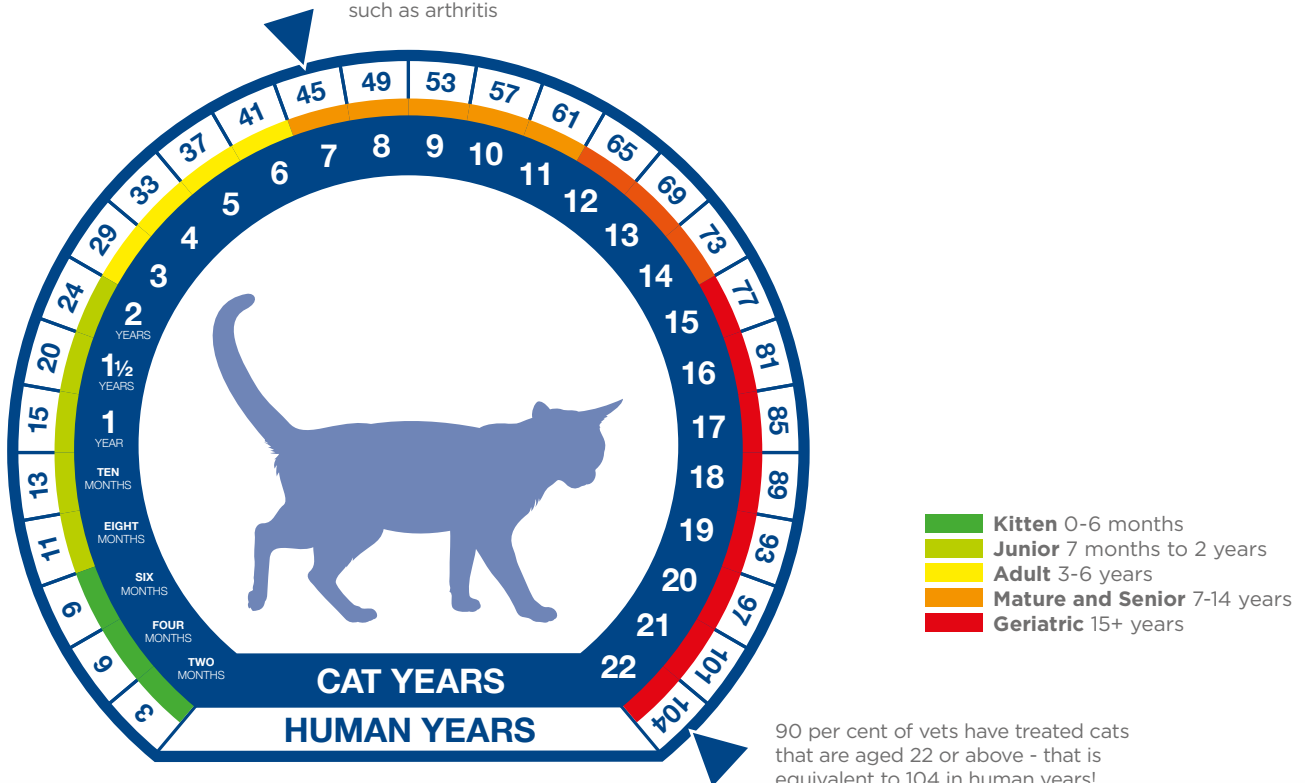
After a trip to the vets, it was confirmed that Matti had arthritis. Given Matti's great old age, I suppose it should have been unsurprising."

Denise Lawson about her 17 year old cat, Matti



Graph to show life stages of cat, with ages compared to human years:

Nearly half of cats are classed as 'mature and older'¹ and at risk from developing age-related conditions, such as arthritis



¹ Elizabeth Hardie, DVM, PH.D.,Pipl. ACVS, at North Carolina State University, conducted a study in 2002 of 100 cats age 12 and older.

Spotting the signs



93%

of owners said they would feel guilty if they realised their cat was in pain and they hadn't realised.

The study found that 97 per cent of people said they would take their cat to the vet if they thought it was suffering from arthritis.

However, the results also revealed that owners are not well equipped with the knowledge about how to spot the signs of pain, and when to take their pet to the vet. Almost all vets agree that chronic pain often goes unrecognised and that the signs of pain are confused with cats simply getting old.

Claire Fowler, business head of small animals at Boehringer Ingelheim said: *"Despite a steady increase in the number of cases of arthritis and chronic pain in cats being diagnosed, the research shows awareness amongst cat owners of how to look for pain in their cats remains low, despite 86 per cent saying they would want their vet to let them know if their cat might be in pain."*

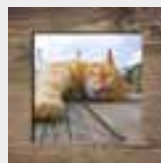
When shown a list of signs of long-term pain in cats, 65% of owners said they recognised at least one sign in their own cat.

Common signs of pain include:



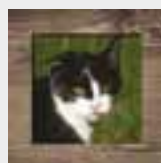
Reduced mobility

In the study more than one in twenty owners reported signs of hunched or stiff posture in their own cat.



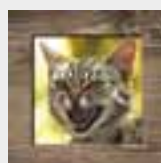
Reduced activity

More than a fifth of owners reported signs of reduced activity in their own cat.



Changes in grooming habits

44 per cent of owners said they would worry if their cat had unusually scruffy or matted fur. Around one in ten also reported that their cat had signs of a dull coat and had reduced grooming.



Changes in temperament

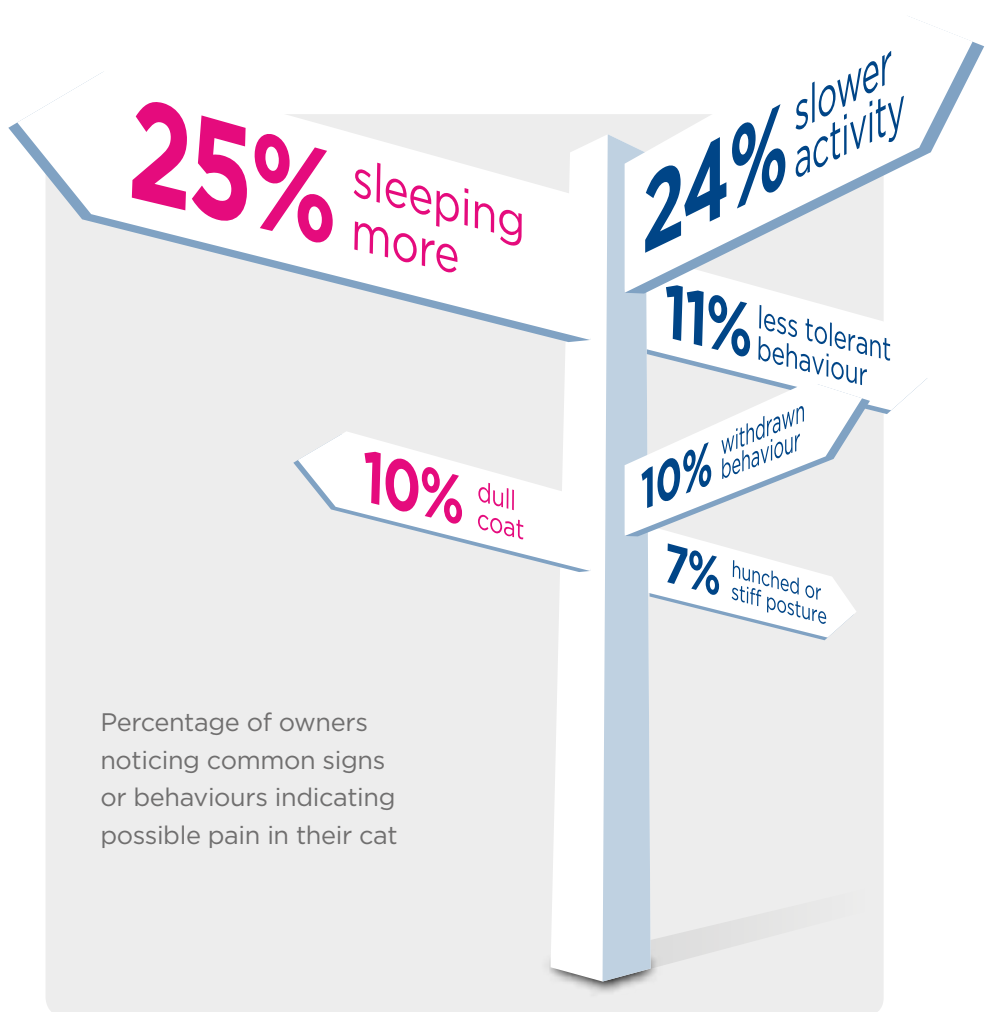
The study found that withdrawn behaviour would worry 45 per cent of owners and less interactive behaviour would worry 35 per cent. One in ten owners reported signs of withdrawn behaviour in their own cat.



Research shows that just

2%

of owners take their cat to the vet if they observe changes in its behaviour



16%

of owners assumed a hunched or stiff posture was an unavoidable part of ageing for cats.

Half of owners said they worry that their cat might be in pain and they don't realise. If you recognise signs of pain in your cat, it is important to speak to your vet or vet nurse.

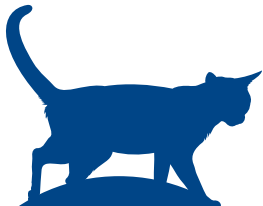
"Jasper began to hide away for most of the day, picking spots where he wouldn't be disturbed. He would make growling noises at us when we tried to pick him up and would suddenly lash out when being petted, becoming really unpredictable.



It was a complete surprise to find out he was suffering with arthritis. I had no idea it was so common in cats at that age. It was comforting to find out that there was a treatment available for the chronic pain."

Janice about her cat Jasper, aged 13

Happy, healthy cats



40%

of cats diagnosed with arthritis were also described as overweight by their owners

Whether a cat has arthritis or not, it is important to keep pets healthy. Other problems, such as obesity can exacerbate or cause other health problems. There are actions that owners can take to ensure their cat lives into old age more comfortably.

In the study, a third of owner's described their pet as overweight. Results from the vets confirmed that this is a growing problem, with 78 per cent agreeing that more cats are overweight now.

Extra weight can put more strain on joints and increase the risk of arthritis. In the study, nearly 40 per cent of the cats diagnosed with arthritis



were also described as overweight by their owners. Overweight cats were also more likely to have other signs of possible ill-health, such as a dull coat, slower movement and a scruffy appearance.

If your cat is overweight ask your vet or vet nurse for advice on a suitable diet.



“Cassie is the ripe old age of 18 and she’s not so bad for her age, regularly catching birds and mice, however this wasn’t always the case!

Cassie used to be a hugely fat cat and terribly overweight. Her previous owner would give her five plates of packet food a day, as well as dinner time scraps.

All the extra weight was putting pressure on Cassie’s joints and causing her pain. She became very reluctant to go outside, barely hunted, picked at her food and slept a lot. We even had to build a ramp to the cat-flap and give her extra steps to get outside.

I put her on a low calorie dried cat food to help control her diet. As the pounds dropped off, Cassie became a different cat! If she needs more help, we know we can give her pain medication. Even very old cats are active when they feel well.”

Rosie Mapplebeck about her cat Cassie, aged 18



Pain free cats – What a relief!



42%

of owners would see a vet as soon as possible if they thought their cat was in pain

The study found that most owners feel their cat's welfare is the most important priority. Pain relief can help manage the pain and inflammation associated with arthritis, allowing a cat to make the most of life. There is treatment available which is licensed for long term use in cats with arthritis.

- It is always important to follow your vet's advice on the use of medicines
- A vet will need to see your cat at regular intervals to check that the medicine is still suitable and working for your cat
- Speak to your vet for more information





For more information

The Spot the Signs website, launched by feline charity FAB, and supported by Vetmedica, the animal health division of Boehringer Ingelheim, is a dedicated resource to help owners spot the signs of cat pain.

It includes expert support from a panel of cat medicine and behaviour specialists including leading feline author Claire Bessant and TV vet Pete Wedderburn. The website, which is fronted by Jess the Cat, also features case studies, interactive competitions and exclusive Jess the Cat content.

Visit www.spotcatpain.co.uk.



Join us at Facebook to show your support
[Facebook.com/spotcatpain](https://www.facebook.com/spotcatpain)