

# How *Tui Na* can help ease your cat's arthritis

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***Tui Na*, also known as acupressure-massage, is an effective way to alleviate the the discomfort of arthritis in cats.**

Cats are tricksters. Their wild ancestors evolved not to show weakness or pain lest they fall prey to other predators in the wild. Our domesticated cats have the same "ancestral" mindset, so it can be difficult to assess when they may be suffering from painful conditions such as osteoarthritis. That means it's up to us as to watch for any subtle signs of arthritis encroaching on our cats' joints, and to take steps to relieve their discomfort using the tools available to us — including *Tui Na*, a form of Chinese acupressure-massage.

## SIGNS OF OSTEOARTHRITIS

Basically, arthritis is the degeneration of cartilage between the bones, leading to a painful progression of joint disease. Cats tend to develop arthritis in their shoulders, hips, elbows, stifles (knees), and tarsi (ankles). Any cat over the age of seven can become arthritic; however, joint disease is more common and more severe in cats over the age of 12.

As your cat ages, watch for any reluctance to jump on furniture, along

with litter box avoidance, changes in her gait, matted fur along her spine, and/or changes in behavior and personality. Is your cat sleeping more? Is she seeking sunny spots and other warm places to curl up in more than ever before? If your cat's coat appears scruffy and matted, it's because she doesn't have the flexibility to groom herself as thoroughly as she used to, because she is not able to twist and reach her back and chest. These are common indicators of osteoarthritis in a cat.

To be absolutely sure your cat's condition is arthritis, visit your holistic or integrative veterinarian to rule out other health conditions that can present in a similar fashion. Depending on the severity of your cat's condition, your vet may recommend ways to make your cat more comfortable, including dietary supplements, weight management, an exercise routine, pain relief medication — and complementary therapies such as acupressure-massage.

## OSTEOARTHRITIS FROM A CHINESE MEDICINE PERSPECTIVE

In Chinese medicine, osteoarthritis is considered a "cold" condition because the underlying effect is the deterioration and loss of living tissue. There are times when arthritis presents as acute inflammation (heat) and painful swelling; however, the cartilage and bone are experiencing a sort of death and therefore become cold. This is why, in Chinese medicine, arthritis is considered a "cold" syndrome.

These ancient concepts are really very effective and simple: if the body is cold, it needs to be warmed. So when a limb or joint is experiencing a cold syndrome, it needs to be warmed to relieve pain and encourage healthy tissue.

## TUI NA: ACUPRESSURE-MASSAGE

Ancient Chinese doctors were highly adept at soothing the aches and pain of arthritis. Feline and human bodies have



not changed since then. The bodywork techniques used to soothe and warm arthritic limbs in ancient times have been used consistently for thousands of years. These warming techniques are called *Tui Na*.

*Tui Na* (pronounced "tway naah") is the original Chinese acupressure-massage. Two hands-on techniques known to warm the limbs can help improve your cat's comfort and mobility. The beauty of these techniques is that you can practice working with your cat to help her.

## TUI NA TECHNIQUES

### 1. *Cou Fa*

The first technique is called *Cou Fa* (pronounced "soo [long 'o'] fa"). This is a rolling and rubbing technique where the friction of the rubbing creates heat.

It's best to perform *Cou Fa* with your cat lying on her side. Place one hand under her fore or hind limb to support it. Place your opposite hand directly on top of the limb in the same location. Then start to slowly, rhythmically, and gently move

one hand forward and the other back across the joint. Continue to increase the speed as you repeat the forward and back motion to build warming friction around your cat's joint.



### 2. *Tui Fa*

The second technique is *Tui Fa* (pronounced "tway fa"). This hands-on technique is highly versatile. *Tui Fa* can be used easily along your cat's limbs, spine, hips, and shoulders to increase energetic movement and warmth.

Place one hand on your cat. Using your opposite hand, place your forefinger and middle finger where you want to begin. Then gently glide along the

limb, shoulder, or spine going from top to bottom or from head toward the tail depending on your intended location. Next, draw back along the same "channel" you used doing the forward motion. Continue by moving up and back along the channel, repeatedly and rhythmically, to create a warming effect.



Most cats love *Tui Na* — especially if you, as her special person, are helping her feel better. She may take a while to get the message that you want her to feel her best, so give it a try when she seems open to having a *Tui Na* session with you. The point is to share a time of healing with her!

## COMMON SIGNS of arthritis and degenerative joint disease in cats

### Limited mobility:

- Difficulty getting up or down
- Reluctance to jump up or down
- Avoiding stairs
- Stiffness or lameness
- Swollen or hot joints
- Difficulty using litter box

### Difficulty grooming:

- Less time self-grooming
- Scruffy, matted appearance
- Excessive grooming of joints
- Longer, sharper nails

### Less activity:

- Increased sleeping
- Less time exploring or playing
- Reduced social interaction

### Changes in temperament:

- Personality change
- Irritable or reactive when petted
- Avoiding other animals and people