



# Arthritis Flare-Up Action Plan

A bad day has hit. Here's what to do, calmly, right now

PETSLIKEMINE  
ARTHRITIS & MSK SPACE

A flare-up is a sudden worsening of arthritis pain, often after overdoing it, a cold snap, or sometimes for no clear reason. Your pet may be stiffer, more reluctant to move, limping, or just quiet and withdrawn. **Flares are common, usually settle in a few days, and are not an emergency in most cases.** Keep this sheet somewhere you can find it fast, and work calmly through the steps.

## FIRST, TAKE A BREATH

A flare is a temporary spike, not a sudden collapse of everything you've been doing. **It does not mean the arthritis has suddenly become much worse, or that your management has failed.** Most flares ease within a few days with calm, sensible care. Your job now is to keep your pet comfortable and avoid making it worse, not to fix it all at once.

- 1 Ease right back on activity**  
Cut activity down to gentle, short, lead-only toilet trips for now. Avoid stairs, jumping, slippery floors, and any play that jolts the joints. **Rest the flare, but don't freeze them solid** for days on end, gentle controlled movement is usually better than total cage rest. Reintroduce normal activity slowly as the flare eases, not all at once.
- 2 Make them warm and comfortable**  
Settle them somewhere warm, soft, supportive, and easy to get into, away from draughts. A well-padded bed at floor level means no climbing or jumping. Bring food, water, and their bed close so they don't have to travel far or navigate obstacles to reach what they need.
- 3 Give prescribed medication exactly as directed**  
If your vet has prescribed pain relief, give it exactly as instructed. **Never give human painkillers on your own**, ibuprofen and aspirin are dangerous for pets. Paracetamol is sometimes prescribed for dogs, but only ever at a vet's exact dose, and it is toxic to cats. Never give a cat a dog's medication either, several are fatal. Don't increase or double up doses yourself; if you think more is needed, call your vet.
- 4 Watch, and note what you see**  
Keep an eye on how your pet is over the next day or two. Jot down when it started, what they were doing beforehand, which leg or area seems sore, and whether each day is better, the same, or worse. This helps you judge the trend, and helps your vet if you need them.

### A note on warmth

General, all-over warmth (a cosy bed, away from draughts) helps a stiff, achy pet feel more comfortable. **But do not apply direct heat**, a heat pad or hot water bottle, to a joint that is actively swollen, hot, or inflamed, as heat can make active inflammation worse.

### A note on cold

For a joint that is clearly hot or swollen, a cold compress wrapped in a cloth (never ice directly on skin) for a short period may ease it. If you're not sure whether to use warmth or cold, or how, **ask your vet rather than guess.**

## CALL YOUR VET PROMPTLY IF

Most flares settle with the care above. But contact your vet, the same day, if you see any of these:

- The flare **doesn't start improving within 2 to 3 days**, or keeps getting worse
- Your pet is in **severe pain**, crying out, or won't put any weight on a leg at all
- A joint is **hot, very swollen, or the leg looks abnormal** in shape
- Your pet **won't eat, seems unwell in themselves**, or is very withdrawn
- The pain came on **very suddenly and severely**, which can mean an injury rather than a simple flare
- **You're worried.** You know your pet. Trust that, and call.

## ONCE THE FLARE HAS PASSED

When your pet is back to their usual self, think back to what might have set it off, a walk that was too long, a big play session, jumping into the car, a cold spell, a missed dose. **Spotting the trigger helps you avoid the next one.** If flares are happening often, that's worth a conversation with your vet about whether the overall plan needs adjusting. Reintroduce normal activity gradually, not in one leap back to where you were.

**How to use.** Keep this sheet handy so you can find it the moment a flare hits. Work through the four steps calmly, use the warmth and cold notes with care, and check the red-flag list. This sheet is general guidance, not a substitute for veterinary advice; your vet knows your individual pet and is always the right call when you're unsure or worried.

**FLARES PASS.  
STAY CALM, ACT GENTLY.**