

Cat Talk

256 US Route 1, Scarborough, ME 04074 (207) 883-7000

Hypertension in Cats

More common and dangerous than you might think!

Crying at night, dilated pupils, and color changes to the eyes, stumbling, unusual active behavior, increased thirst and urination: these might be the first signs that your cat has dangerously high blood pressure, also known as hypertension.

While both older people and older cats can have hypertension, it is not usually from the same cause. Cats do not get atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), as do humans with primary heart disease. Usually, a cat's elevated blood pressure is attributable to another underlying disease process, such as kidney disease, diabetes, or hyperthyroidism. This is great news for cats because if the underlying disease is treated, the hypertension may resolve without further treatment.

Early detection of hypertension can also help to detect the presence of deadly primary diseases before they have a chance to cause too much damage to the body. Blood pressure in humans is tested using an inflatable cuff and a stethoscope. Blood pressure in cats is most accurately measured with a Doppler (an ultrasonic sensor) that is paired with a kitty-sized cuff. The cuff can be placed on a front or rear leg while the Doppler is placed on the underside of same leg just above the pad. Because cats are easily stressed, we try to provide a quiet room and a few minutes to allow the kitty to relax and adapt to the environment before attempting to use the Doppler.

Most felines are very obliging about having their pressures checked and allow us to take two to three measurements, which is ideal for accurate results. Normal blood pressure for cats is 130-180/100, but in the exam room, the systolic blood pressure (top number) may be as high as 200 in a normal cat. Treatment is

indicated when the systolic pressure is consistently greater than 200.

Treatment is often two-fold in that the underlying disease is identified and treated first (which in some cases is sufficient), then the hypertension itself is brought under control. Treatment for hypertension is similar to that in humans. Heart medications such as Norvasc®, a calcium channel-blocker, may be prescribed once or twice daily, depending on the severity of the hypertension. (This medication is safe and very easy to administer.) Once the blood pressure is stabilized, recheck blood pressures are usually done every one to six months.

We can offer our patients a blood pressure check during the annual exam, but if you have noticed any of the above mentioned warning signs please do not hesitate to call our office for an appointment. If caught early enough, many of the adverse effects of hypertension are reversible. We have even seen blind cats completely regain their sight!