

Cat Talk

Cats on Call Newsletter, Volume 8, December 2006

256 U.S. Route One, Scarborough ME 04074 – (207) 883-7000

Felines, The Masters at Disguising Illness-What to Watch for in Your Cat

Not a day passes at our clinic when we do not hear the words, "But Doc, we had no warning that anything was wrong!" In many ways, our feline companions are still wild animals. Some animals see cats as prey; therefore, it would be life threatening to show any vulnerability. It is because you know your furry friends and their special habits better than anyone, that you are in the best position to see the subtle early signs of illness. We hope that the following clues will be of great help to you in determining if your kitty should be seen. We would greatly prefer that you err on the side of caution. If you are in a quandary, please feel free to call and ask. We will not think that you are overreacting, only being very observant and acting wisely to possibly save your cat any further discomfort. >'<

Changes in Sleeping Patterns

This category is wide reaching in variables and causes. You may notice that your cat now sleeps in a different position, on a new side or in a new location. Perhaps your cat is sleeping for longer stretches or at different times. Perhaps your cat hardly sleeps at all anymore. It is normal for your cat to dream and move in their dreams. Felines do not observe daylight savings time and they do not view holidays to be an excuse for sleeping in late and not feeding them at their normal time!

Changes in Vocalization

The most serious problem is crying at night or in the very early morning. The most common causes are hyperthyroid disease, cobalamin (B-12) deficiency, hypertension, and oral or abdominal pain. It is also significant to mention to us if the sound of your cat's cry or purr has changed or if she stops talking when she used to be very vocal.

Bad Breath or a "Different" Odor

Although you may look in your cat's mouth and see no sign of gum or tooth disease, this does not mean that it is not there. Often, a rotten tooth can only be found on x-ray, but a "bad" odor is a sure sign. Many diseases such as diabetes, kidney failure, or liver disease will give your cat a unique odor. These can be treated.

Grooming less than Usual

If your cat has lived most of his life without your help grooming and suddenly you need to help, this is a clear sign that there is a problem. Cats stop grooming due to thyroid disease, oral pain and most commonly arthritis. We can help.

Gaining or Losing Weight

Cancer is the number one killer of our beloved felines, and weight control is the number one preventative action one can take to prevent cancer. Weight gain necessitates immediate attention. The cause is not always overeating. Weight gain can often point to heart disease or arthritis or any other disease that decreases physical activity. Weight loss is not normal in old age! Many times owners think that it is normal for an old cat to be thinner. If your cat is losing weight, there is a problem causing the weight loss, and the problem is not just aging.

Becoming a Picky Eater

The most common cause for being picky is pancreatitis, not a behavior problem. Pancreatitis is the most commonly under diagnosed disease in feline medicine. It is estimated that 20% of all cases of chronic pancreatitis are completely missed! There is one important consideration to note. It is true that grocery store brand cat foods can be dramatically different in their ingredients from can to can. Your cat can detect this difference with a single whiff! Your key to solving the "picky cat" syndrome may be to switch to a higher quality pet shop brand food. If the problem continues after the switch, please feel free to come in for a pancreatic blood test!

Continued Other Side.....

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Urinating or Drinking More

Are you filling the water bowl more or spending more money on cat litter? Is your kitty seeking water where - ever she can i.e. the bathtub, toilet or sink? This may be a sign of infection, diabetes or kidney disease. It is normal for your cat to drink more if she is eating more dry food, but her urine output should not increase. It is also normal to drink more in dry weather or arid environments. Remember to keep your cat's water in a separate place from the food. Kitties love fresh water!

Urinating outside the box

This is probably the number one offensive sign a cat can exhibit, and sadly, it is the most commonly misinterpreted sign. A recent study done of cats who were presented for euthanasia because of "inappropriate urination" demonstrated that 85% of these cats had a medical (and therefore potentially treatable) problem and NOT a behavior problem. A proper work-up for all these cats would have been a full urinalysis and an x-ray or ultrasound.

Bolting from the Cat Box

Cats most commonly exhibit this behavior when their anal glands are uncomfortable. It does not mean that they think that the box needs attention. They need the attention!

Changes in Group Dynamics

Often other cats are the sentinels to illness. It is instinctive to either attack or shun an animal that is not well. If one or all of your cats is picking on one particular cat, don't bring in the aggressor. Have the victim looked over carefully. He is the one in trouble.

False Alarm

It is an old wives tail that the color and moisture on a cat's nose is an indicator of health. It is a good idea to check gum color. Immediate attention is indicated if a cat's normally pink gums are pale, blue, yellow or red.

How to help your cat have Pleasant Veterinary Visits.

Fear is the Primary cause of challenging visits.

1) To reduce stress, bring along the cat's favorite treats, toys and blanket. You can do regular "play vet" procedures that mimic ear cleaning, checking the mouth and the back end. If Mom or Dad do these regularly, they are not so scary when the nurse or doctor do them. Plus, you may find a problem early.

2) Many people ask about providing pet tranquilizers. These are not always safe, and can make it hard for the hospital to diagnose some diseases. We recommend using a Flower Essence. The two best choices are Rescue Remedy™ for non-painful stress and Aconite for anxiety associated with a painful memory. We normally carry these in our office. Please call for pickup prior to your visit.

3) Keep the carrier out in the home. Put treats inside or feed the cat inside the carrier daily. Train cats to view the carrier as a safe haven and "home away from home". Carriers that have both top-loading and front opening are best. The former feature allows for stress-free placement and removal of cat. Many times we will just remove the top off the front-loading carriers and examine the cats in the carriers. Please make sure the carrier screws are well oiled and present. We do have extra screws at our office.

4) PLEASE always put your cat in a safe container that can be held in place by a seat belt. Cats are just like children when it comes to air bags. Sadly, they can also be the cause of accidents if they get under the brake pedal. Take your cat for regular car rides. Begin with very short ones to places other than the veterinarian. To prevent carsickness, place your cat in the front seat and cover his carrier with a towel or blanket so that he can not "see" the motion.

Also, be very limited with food prior to travel. Regular visits to the veterinary hospital for "fun" visits i.e. to obtain food or treats are a great idea.

5) If these tips are not enough, **REMEMBER WE DO HOUSE CALLS!** Happy Holidays to all!