

MANAGING YOUR SENIOR CATS HEALTH

Optimum health care can add years to the life of your pet as well as substantially decrease your cost of treating medical problems associated with aging. We would make the following recommendations:

COMPREHENSIVE PHYSICAL EXAMINATIONS:

Since pets age 5-7 times faster than humans, it can be estimated that one physical examination for a pet is equivalent to one exam every 5-7 years in humans. The exam should include a very detailed medical history along with a “nose to tail” physical examination. In later years, a comprehensive physical examination should be performed every 6-12 months depending on any specific medical problems discovered in your pet. This screening should include an ECG screening and glaucoma screening.

LABORATORY SCREENING FOR DISEASE:

Many medical problems can be diagnosed through the use of laboratory diagnostic testing long before clinical signs of disease become evident. Specific recommendations for your pet may include:

- Internal Parasite Examination
- Heartworm Testing
- Feline Leukemia/Feline AIDS Testing
- Urinalysis
- Complete Blood Counts
- Blood Chemistry Screening
- Thyroid Screening

NUTRITION:

Feed the highest quality cat food you can afford. Read labels carefully. Ideal diets for senior pets would have less sodium and fat, and more fiber than regular adult foods. Higher quality and premium foods are more digestible and result in less stool volume. Constipation is a common and uncomfortable problem in older cats. The fiber content is very important—and supplements may be needed as well. Do not constantly switch brands of food. Older cats are more prone to dietary upset from too much variety in the foods they eat. If a specific medical condition is diagnosed, a specific prescription diet may be best for your pet. Vitamin supplements help keep the skin healthy and may enhance the pet’s immune system. Fatty acid supplements may be useful for skin problems, arthritis, & inflammatory bowel disease. Do not feed table scraps or snacks unless formulated for the senior pet. New pet treats are now available from the clinic that is very palatable as well as healthy for your pet.

CAUTION: Be sure your older cat does not have to compete for food with other pets. You may need to feed older animals separately to ensure they are receiving their fair share.

FRESH, CLEAN WATER:

As the pet gets older, water consumption becomes much more important. Increased thirst and water consumption is a very important in several senior pet medical problems. Be sure to notify the clinic if you see changes in water consumption.

KEEP YOUR PET UNDER CONTROL:

Letting pets run loose takes years off their life. Statistics show cats living totally inside live much longer. Be sure your pet wears an **ID Tag** if it goes outside. Older pets lose their sense of hearing and vision; increasing the chances they will become lost.



VACCINATIONS:

Depression of the immune system occurs in older pets making them more susceptible to the common infectious diseases. Maintaining vaccinations is very important because of the potential for decreased resistance as the pet ages. Vaccination recommendations must be individualized for each pet based on breed, age, physical condition, diseases prevalent in the area, etc.

HEARTWORM PREVENTION:

Heartworms are a serious & deadly problem. Heartworm prevention is available for cats and should be considered.

PREVENT OBESITY:

Extra pounds burden the heart, kidneys, muscles, & joints, decreasing life expectancy 30-50%. It is much harder to lose weight than to prevent the weight gain. If your pet is prone to weight gains, feeding diets made to maintain weight and limited access to food is important for control.

DENTAL HYGIENE:

Periodontal Disease is a very serious problem in senior pets. Tartar buildup is a result of bacterial infection in the mouth. Once these bacteria become attached to the teeth below the gum line, it becomes a “seed” of infection that spreads all over the body. Many respiratory, kidney, liver, and heart infections are a result of bacteria spreading from the mouth. It is important to note that the “real” problem is what you don’t see (what is below the gum line) rather than what you do see (above the gum line). What you don’t see can certainly be slowly killing your pet. Dental exams, routine use of dental hygiene products, and dental scaling/polishing are important for a healthy mouth.

GROOMING & NAIL TRIMMING:

Maintaining healthy skin & toe nails makes your pet more comfortable, prevents odor, and makes your pet “shine.” Notify the clinic if you observe excessive scratching, flaking, fleas, ticks, sores, or bald spots. Skin growths are also more common in senior pets. Early removal decreases pain, your costs, and chances of spreading. Brushing your cat regularly to prevent mats and tangles maintains healthy skin. After brushing, wipe off loose hair with a damp towel to remove loose hair. This also helps prevent hairballs. Older cats sometimes get lazy in their grooming habits, especially if arthritis or obesity makes it hard for them to stretch and bend. Keeping the toenails trimmed is also very important.

FLEA & TICK CONTROL:

We now have excellent weapons in our war on fleas & ticks. We recommend **FRONTLINE** or **REVOLUTION** topical flea control drops available at the clinic. **DO NOT BE FOOLED!** The over-the-counter “look alikes” are not the same-and in fact can be fatal to your pet. **DO NOT USE OVER THE COUNTER FLEA CONTROL DROPS – MANY CATS ARE SENSITIVE TO THE CHEMICALS AND OFTEN WILL BE FATAL.**

MEDICATING YOUR PET:

NEVER give human medications or medications prescribed for other pets to your senior pets. The liver and/or kidneys once administered must break down most drugs. There can be very serious complications if a medication is given to a pet that has compromised internal organs. **NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN, IBUPROFEN, OR TYLENOL- type products TO YOUR CAT. *One Extra-Strength Tylenol™ can kill your cat.***

MAINTAINS A CONSTANT ENVIRONMENT: Tolerance to heat and cold decreases with age. Warmth also lessens the signs of arthritis.



SCOOP OUT YOUR CAT'S LITTER BOX DAILY:

We strongly recommend using a litter that can be completely changed each day. Cheap plastic garbage bags make practical litter pan liners. If you choose to use the "scoop able" litter, it is important to remove the "clumps" to minimize bacteria content. *Remember that your cat walks through the litter box and then licks its feet to clean itself.* This normal function can result in diarrhea if the litter box is not cleaned to remove the majority of contamination. We do **NOT** recommend the scoopable litters. We much prefer the litter box be changed every day. Remember that arthritis in your older cat may create trouble entering and exiting the litter box. A shallower pan may be required to prevent elimination accidents outside the litter box or it may need to be moved to a more accessible location if steps are required to reach the box. Impacted anal glands can also cause defecation just outside the litter box. Avoid changes in the brand of cat litter used. Cats don't like change, especially the perfumed litter. **NOTIFY US IMMEDIATELY IF THE CAT BEGINS TO ELIMINATE IN INAPPROPRIATE LOCATIONS.** Quite often, this is a signal of a medical problem.

PRESENT YOUR CAT FOR EXAMINATION IF YOU OBSERVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Sustained, significant increase in water consumption. (more than 1.5 cups/day for the average cat)
- Sustained, significant increase in urination.
- Weight loss.
- Significant decrease in appetite or failure to eat for more than 2 consecutive days.
- Significant increase in appetite.
- Repeated vomiting.
- Diarrhea that lasts over 2 days.
- Difficulty in passing stool or urine or prolonged sitting in the litter box.
- Elimination accidents in the house or general changes in bowel habits.
- Lameness that lasts more than 3 days, or lameness in more than one leg.
- Noticeable decrease in vision, especially if sudden in onset or pupils that do not constrict in bright light. Sudden blindness is caused by hypertension and is a medical emergency.
- Masses, ulcerations (open sores), or multiple scabs on the skin that persists more than 1 week.
- Foul mouth odor or drooling that lasts more than 2 days.
- Increased size of the abdomen.
- Increasing inactivity, especially time spent sleeping.
- Persistent coughing, gagging, or panting.
- Hair loss, especially if accompanied by scratching or if in specific areas.
- Seizures (convulsions)
- Reluctance or inability to chew dry food.

CALL US ANY TIME YOU OBSERVE A POTENTIAL PROBLEM OR NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND ADVICE.

