



Cat Watch

Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine



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IN THE NEWS ...

Low-Dose for Hyperthyroidism

A study published in the *Journal of Internal Veterinary Medicine* compared the efficacy of low-dose radioiodine treatment for cats with hyperthyroidism to the standard dose.

While radioiodine treatment is known to be effective, the optimal dose to restore normal thyroid function has not been determined. The treatment can lead to hypothyroidism and kidney problems, and a reduced lifespan. The researchers set the low-dose treatment at half the current standard dose of radioiodine.

The study included 189 cats and compared the results after treatment. Serum T4, thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), and creatinine concentrations were measured to determine the cat's health and thyroid state.

The conclusion of the study was that low-dose radioiodine is safe and effective for cats with mild-to-moderate hyperthyroidism, as evidenced by a cure rate of over 95% with a reduced frequency of post-treatment hypothyroidism and kidney problems. ❖

Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease

If you see your cat straining to urinate, it may be a medical emergency that requires immediate veterinary care

Feline lower urinary tract disease, or FLUTD, is a problem that cat owners everywhere dread. Litter box “accidents,” bloody urine, or a cat straining to urinate can all concern families. In some cases, this is an emergency—in others, a painful annoyance for you and your cat.

In general, when a cat has urinary problems, it's important



Getting your cat to drink water may require household adjustments.

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to rule out any medical conditions before considering behavioral problems (to be covered in another issue). A common indication of a urinary problem is straining to urinate. You may notice your cat going to the litter box frequently, straining in the box and not really leaving any wet litter behind. Your cat may cry out when straining or you may notice a few drops of

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Lost Cats and How to Find Them

Your kitty is frightened and may be skittish, so use a calm, organized approach to finding her

Lost cats leave behind heartbroken families. And, if they're not found, they contribute significantly to the homeless, feral, shelter, and “community cat” populations. Unfortunately, it's an all-too-common situation. “At least a third of all cats get lost at some point in their lives,” says Pam Stonebraker, associate executive director and humane education coordinator at the Tompkins County, N.Y., SPCA.

“An indoor-only cat that finds itself outdoors is likely to be very spooked,” says Stonebraker. “They are less likely to respond to an owner's calls, more likely to

travel farther, and less likely to find their way home than more confident cats.”

Hiding in silence is the behavior most typical of a spooked cat, notes former police detective turned pet detective Kathy “Kat” Albrecht. In such cases, a digital wildlife camera and a baited humane trap are tools that can save the cat's life and help reunite her with her owners.

However, outdoor-access cats that don't come home should be treated as a matter of even greater concern. Generally, says Albrecht, “When an outdoor-access cat doesn't come home, it means that some-

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SHORT TAKES

Feline-Friendly Dogs

A study published in the January 2017 *Journal of Applied Animal Behaviour Science* may help you determine if a dog you want to adopt will get along with your cat. The study looked at dogs' responses to cat-related sights, sounds, and smells to determine which dogs are likely to get along with cats.

"When dogs are waiting for adoption at a shelter, a common question is 'what is the dog like with cats,'" says Christy L. Hoffman, Ph.D., assistant professor of animal behavior, ecology, and conservation at Canisius College.

"Our study investigated what a cat-friendliness assessment might look like," says Hoffman.

To do this, the team examined the responses of 69 pet dogs when presented with three different stimuli: a realistic-looking cat doll, recordings of cat sounds, and the smell of cat urine. They learned dogs are more responsive to the sounds of cats than to the sights or smells of cats. Specifically, dogs with a history of killing or injuring a cat or other small animal spent longer orienting to the cat sounds than the other dogs. No relationship was found between a dog's history with cats and other small animals and his reaction to visual or olfactory information.

"As humans, our first thought was to test dogs' responses to the cat doll because it visually resembles a real cat. However, our findings suggest that dogs are relying more heavily on another sense,

hearing. This was surprising since most behavioral assessments focus on dogs' responses to visual stimuli. Our findings suggest that employing assessments that engage other sensory modalities, especially sound, may provide additional clues about an individual dog's behavior," Hoffman says.

Special Note of Remembrance for *DogWatch* Editor Betty Liddick

We are saddened to report that our friend and colleague Betty Liddick died June 21 following a brief illness. Betty began her long career in journalism as staff writer for numerous notable newspapers, including the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Orange County Register*, before turning full-time to her first love—writing about dogs and cats. A former editor of *Dog Fancy* (now *Dogster*) magazine, she devoted the past 16 years to pet publications emanating from Tufts and Cornell universities. At the helm of Cornell's *DogWatch* and *CatWatch*, Betty distinguished herself by crafting insightful prose that illuminated the technicalities of animal wellness while managing to compose her stories in a way that was always easy to understand. She had a passion for bringing solid information to her readers, believing that a pet owner's knowledge and understanding contributed directly to the health and happiness of the animals she loved. She was a skilled professional, a constant friend, and a leading light. Those of us who knew Betty will remember her with great fondness.

We are happy to report that Betty's role will now be fulfilled by Cynthia Foley, former editor-in-chief of *Horse Journal* and a long-time contributor of *The Whole Dog Journal*, assisted by Dr. Debra M. Eldredge (Cornell DVM '80) as technical editor. ❖

Researchers think sound may be a way to determine if a dog will be cat-friendly.



Panting in Cats

Everyone knows that dogs pant. But what about cats?

Cats do not pant on a regular basis like dogs do. Feline panting can be either normal or due to underlying medical problems.

Non-medical causes of panting. If it is very hot and/or your cat has been exercising heavily, he may be panting just to cool down. This is not common, like it is with dogs, but it is not necessarily a cause for concern either. Your cat should stop panting once he has a chance to cool down.

Cats may also pant due to stress. Consider any changes in your home or routine that may have caused your cat anxiety: moving, adding a new pet, different work schedule, or a party or reunion with lots of company. Give your cat some time to adjust, and make sure that he has places to get away from new pets or company if he doesn't feel like socializing.

Medical causes of panting. Be suspicious of any panting that doesn't have an obvious reason or that continues for an extended period of time. It may manifest as traditional open-mouth panting as seen in dogs, or look more like gasping or labored breathing. Abnormally fast breathing is also a cause for concern. Seek veterinary attention any time that your cat has difficulty breathing, as this can quickly turn into an emergency, depending on the cause.

Asthma: Feline asthma is the most common respiratory disorder in cats. Allergens that the cat inhales cause an immune response that, if excessive, restricts the cat's airway and results in difficulty breathing. Potential allergens include dust, smoke, pollen, mold and mildew, and cleaning products. Asthmatic episodes usually have a sudden onset, and can range from occasional and mild, to frequent and severe.



Your cat may pant due to stress or a medical problem, making it important to determine why.

Feline asthma is managed with corticosteroids to control the cat's immune response to allergens and bronchodilators to open up the cat's airways. These medications can be given a variety of ways, but the best method is through an inhaler. Inhalers allow the medications to get directly where they are needed.

Congestive heart failure: Congestive heart failure (CHF) is common in cats, often occurring as a consequence of a condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a condition in which the muscle of the heart's ventricle thickens, is the most common heart disease in cats. This thickening prevents the ventricles from filling properly and makes pumping blood difficult. Over time, inadequate circulation can lead to congestion in the lungs, making breathing difficult.

Treatment for CHF varies, depending on the condition of the heart and the cat's symptoms. Difficulty breathing does not guarantee that the cat is already in heart failure, but should be addressed quickly to keep the cat as healthy as possible and prevent further decline.

Tumors and foreign bodies: Panting and difficulty breathing can be caused

by physical blockage of the cat's airway. Foreign bodies may be lodged in the nasal passages, whereas tumors can occur anywhere along the respiratory tract between the nose and lungs.

The ideal treatment for a foreign body is to remove the offending item. Treatment for tumors varies, depending on the exact type and location of the tumor.

Bacterial / fungal infections: Certain bacterial and fungal infections can cause panting and difficulty breathing. Bacterial infections that develop in or spread to the thoracic cavity can cause inflammation fluid buildup, which can interfere with normal breathing. Fungal spores inhaled by a cat can result in fungal infections in the lungs that can similarly affect a cat's ability to breathe. Diagnosis and treatment of these infections can vary, depending upon their location, severity, and the overall health of the cat.

Parasites: Heartworm is a parasitic worm transmitted by mosquitoes. Larvae mature within the cat's circulatory system, causing inflammation in the blood vessels. Once adults, the worms reside in the pulmonary vessels that

(continued on bottom of page 5)

LOST CATS...*(continued from cover)*

thing has happened to the cat—she may be trapped and unable to come home, or she could have become sick, injured, or chased off by a predator or another cat.

Purr-sonality Affects Lost Cat Behavior. How a cat behaves when she's in her normal territory will influence how she behaves when she becomes lost in unfamiliar territory, says Albrecht, adding, "It's a good idea to base your search strategy on the specific behavior of your cat."

Albrecht asks cat owners this important question: "What does your cat do when a stranger comes into your home?" If the cat is friendly, curious, and fearless when a stranger comes into the home, when displaced into an unfamiliar area, the cat will initially hide in fear but is ultimately likely to overcome the fear and either travel or return home. "A gregarious, outdoor-access cat is often easiest to find and grab," says Stonebraker.

Cats should ideally be kept exclusively indoors. If allowed outside, however, your cat should wear a breakaway collar with identification.



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A lost cat is likely stressed and frightened, making it extremely important to approach her quietly and calmly.

However, if the cat is so skittish and fearful that when a stranger comes into the home she runs and hides under a bed and won't come out for hours, that cat will likely not return home when displaced. Instead, she may hide in fear indefinitely. Albrecht believes that stress-induced memory loss caused by the release of the hormone cortisol could explain why such cats are often never found.

"Owners typically try to find their cat by posting flyers and checking local shelters, but these cats are well-hidden and silent—and often quite nearby," says Albrecht. Sadly, many skittish cats are mistaken for untamed feral cats, based on their fearful temperament. "If not microchipped, these cats are at risk of ending up

in shelters and being euthanized," warns Albrecht.

Mistakes Owners Make. A common error cat owners make is not having identification on their cats—no collars, tags, or microchip. Another mistake, says Albrecht, is putting the cat's dirty litter box outside, believing it will attract him. In actuality, it can backfire—it may attract a neighbor cat who beats up on the missing cat, making matters worse. "If your lost cat eventually comes home, she would've done so whether there was a litter box, a dozen roses, or nothing left outside at all," says Albrecht.

Other owners tend to wait too long to search for a lost cat, notes Stonebraker. "Some cat owners mistakenly believe

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

Even if you have indoor-only cats, it's a good idea for them to wear collars and tags, especially if they tend to be "door jumpers." Have a few good recent photos of your pets on hand, in case they are ever needed for flyers. Spay and neuter your cats to help dampen wanderlust.

And, advises Stonebraker, "Take extra precautions during holidays—particularly noisy ones like the 4th of July, when cats are particularly likely to bolt if they get freaked out by nearby fireworks." During holiday time as well, when visitors and hubbub abound, notes Stonebraker, "It may be safer to keep cats, especially shy ones, confined."

that the cat will come out when it's hungry. Or they simply give up, thinking the cat has gone off to die." Partly as a result of this attitude, the percentage of owners reunited with their lost cats (about 8 percent) is much lower than for lost dogs (about 40 percent). The take-home message, says Stonebraker? "Don't wait to find them!"

Successful Steps to Recovering a Lost Cat. Owners who have the best success in finding a lost cat remain calm but take immediate actions. "Check

PET DETECTIVES

Kat Albrecht has been helping families find their lost pets since 1997. In 2004, Albrecht launched the first-ever pet-detective academy that trains both volunteer and professional pet detectives. A positive new trend is for such trained cat lovers to form volunteer MAR (Missing Animal Response) search teams that respond with trained cat-detection dogs, high-tech search gear, and recovery equipment to help detect and recover missing cats. Albrecht and her "pet detectives" have helped thousands of families recover their beloved lost cats. To learn more about lost-cat-recovery training, visit www.missinganimalresponse.com.

local shelters, veterinary offices, and lost-pet websites—but also use your own social-media network, such as Facebook, to cast your net even wider," says Stonebraker. Most importantly, she says, "Go out and look!"

Start by searching your own property to make certain your cat is not trapped, injured, or hiding in silence. "Search by day, but also search late at night when there is less ambient sound and you have a better chance of hearing a meow," advises Albrecht. "Use a flashlight to search for 'eye shine' and look in all potential hiding places."

Next, obtain permission from your neighbors to enter their yards, and conduct a slow, methodical physical search for your missing cat. While this may be an uncomfortable request, "Simply asking the neighbors to look for your missing cat is not sufficient!" Albrecht says. "Your neighbor is not going to crawl around on his belly to look under his house or deck for your missing cat, yet the statistics show that this is where your cat is most likely to be hiding."

Many cats wander into open out-buildings and garages, and get stuck

there when someone closes the door, notes Stonebraker. She recalls one cat becoming trapped in a restaurant that was closed for the winter. "Fortunately, someone heard the cat



If a cat is microchipped, a veterinarian can scan for the chip and receive information to help locate the cat's owner.

meowing, caught her, and brought her to the shelter, nearly starved. She had been trapped in there for two months." That particular story had a happy ending: The adventurous cat lived and was soon adopted. Stonebraker notes that it is not unusual for cats to return home after having been missing for months. Her take-home message? "Don't give up!" ❖

PANTING...*(continued from page 3)*

connect the heart and lungs, harming the cat both through inflammation and the obstruction of blood flow. Cats with heartworm disease can be easily mistaken for having feline asthma, because the two conditions have very similar symptoms. Feline heartworm can be treated, but ideally all cats that are exposed to mosquitoes should be on a regular heartworm preventative.

Another parasite that can affect a cat's ability to breathe is lungworm. Cats can

become infested with these worms by either drinking water contaminated with the larvae of these parasites or by eating prey (birds, rodents, snails) harboring lungworm larvae.

Viruses: Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a viral infection that attacks a cat's immune system. This then makes the cat vulnerable to other infections that it otherwise could have resisted. Infection with various parasites or bacteria can then result in fluid

buildup in and around the lungs, which in turn causes difficulty breathing. The best way to protect your cat is to keep him out of situations where he could be bitten by an infected cat (FIV is usually transmitted through bite wounds).

Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) comes in a both wet and dry forms. The wet form causes fluid to accumulate in a cat's body cavities, and can make breathing difficult if fluid accumulates in the thoracic cavity. ❖

URINARY...(continued from cover)

blood left behind in the litter. Sometimes families will notice that their cat is grooming more than usual in the genital area. Your cat may even be urinating outside the litter box—bathtubs and sinks are common sites that cats with bladder problems will choose. Any of these signs are reasons for a visit to your veterinarian.

The most common urinary problem, especially in cats under 10 years of age, is Feline Idiopathic Cystitis or FIC. Idiopathic means “of unknown cause” and cystitis simply refers to bladder inflammation. This can be a frustrating diagnosis for owners.

Dr. James Flanders, DVM, DACVS, Associate Professor of Small Animal Surgery at Cornell, points out it is now felt that FIC may be a multi-organ disease with the bladder being the site for the most notable symptoms. There is no specific test for FIC. Instead, your veterinarian will rule out a bacterial bladder infection, signs of cancer, and any development of crystals or stones in the bladder. Behavioral considerations will also be ruled out, although stress does seem to be a factor in FIC in many cats. A thorough history will be taken and a complete physical examination will be done.

A urinalysis is an important laboratory test for any cat with urinary problems. The urine will be evaluated for the presence of bacteria, parasites, crystals, and blood. The pH (measure of acidity) will be checked and levels of protein and toxins will be verified. Cats with FIC tend to have sterile urine, so there is often no bacterial growth detected. Normal cat urine is fairly acidic, which tends to keep crystal development to a minimum. With illness, the pH can change. Blood will often be noted in the urine of cats with FIC.

Treatment. Treatment is tricky. Symptoms often wax and wane, so it can be hard at first to tell if your changes and treatment are working. Still, there are things you can do to



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If your cat is normally active and playful, be alert for signs he may be distressed.

improve an affected cat’s well-being. These changes fit for almost any cause of feline lower urinary tract disease.

Make sure your cat always has access to fresh, clean water. Some cats prefer a

change in your work schedule, can stress your cat as much as major changes like moving to a new home or adding a new pet.

“FIC may be a multi-organ disease with the bladder being the site for the most notable symptoms.”

dripping faucet or a fountain. Provide plenty of litter boxes in easy-to-access sites. A dark corner of the basement may not be attractive to your cat! A standard recommendation is one litter box per cat plus a spare. Clean litter boxes daily—or even twice a day. Fully empty the litter boxes and scrub at least once a week. Discuss the ideal diet for your cat with your veterinarian. Many cats do best on a canned-food diet.

Minimize stress. Set a routine for your cat’s care and try to follow it. Be aware that small changes, such as

Urinary Emergency. The urinary problem that is truly an emergency is urinary blockage. This is seen almost exclusively in male cats. Male cats are the primary victims because their urethra is longer and narrower than that of female cats. You might notice your cat virtually living in his litter box and constantly straining, but not producing urine. This can be due to urinary crystals or urethral plugs—a toothpaste-like mixture of minerals, cells, and protein that effectively blocks the urethra.

If the blockage has gone on for more than a few hours, your cat will start to show signs of illness. He may vomit, act depressed, and cry out in pain. You may be able to feel a hard, tense bladder if you palpate his abdomen. Since the urine cannot be passed, toxins that normally are removed via the urine will build up in the blood. A cat straining to urinate should be considered a medical emergency. Waiting over a weekend or even overnight could be deadly for your cat.

At the veterinary hospital, your cat will be sedated and a urinary catheter will be used to remove the urethral obstruction. A urine sample will be collected to look for inciting causes, such as infection or crystals. The bladder will then be flushed to help break up and remove any debris. Intravenous or subcutaneous fluids will be given to rehydrate your cat and encourage the production of “clean” urine to aid in the flushing of toxins. A hospital stay with a catheter left in place for a day or so may be required.

The presence of urinary crystals and stones can lead to blockage in both male and female cats, along with the earlier signs of straining and possibly bloody urine. A urinalysis is critical here to accurately diagnose the type of stones and crystals found. Different types of stones form under different conditions of pH (acidity) in the urine. For example, struvite stones and crystals develop with alkaline urine. Knowing this via urinalysis, your veterinarian can help you with special diets that dissolve stones by making urine more acidic. On the other hand, calcium-oxalate stones often require surgical removal.

Dr. Flanders emphasizes, “Once your cat is home again you can start the medical management prescribed by your veterinarian. Fresh water, fresh litter, special diet, avoiding stress, all seem to help prevent recurrence of obstruction. However, up to 40% of cats with urethral obstruction will have a recurrence within six months. Male cats who have more than two obstructions and do not seem to respond to medical management might be candidates for a special surgery that enlarges the urethra. This is certainly something to discuss with your veterinarian if your cat is a repeat offender.”

Actual bladder infections are not that common in cats. They tend to occur mainly in older cats and may be secondary to other illnesses, such as diabetes. Diagnosis is via urinalysis to look for bacteria and then a culture to determine the exact type of bacteria and what antibiotics the infection is susceptible to.

To obtain a sterile urine sample for culture, your veterinarian may perform a cystocentesis—using a long, sterile needle to draw a sample from the bladder through the body wall.



You may find your cat spends a lot of time in the litter box without making much urine.

SYMPTOMS OF URINARY PROBLEMS

- ◆ Blood in urine
- ◆ Frequent urinating
- ◆ Licking genital area
- ◆ Light or scanty amounts of urine
- ◆ May spend longer times in litter box
- ◆ May try to urinate out of litter box
- ◆ Pain with urination
- ◆ Straining to urinate

While this sounds intense, most cats simply lie or sit quietly for the sample to be drawn. Your veterinarian will start your cat on a general antibiotic while waiting for specific culture results. This is another time to try to increase your cat’s fluid intake to speed up recovery. Low-sodium broth diluted into water can encourage drinking. You can also dilute the juice from a can of tuna canned in water.

Prevention. FLUTD is common enough that many cat owners and their cats will have to deal with this at some point. You can try to avoid the problem by encouraging fluid intake by your cat. Having plenty of fresh, cool water available is critical. You may need more than one water source if you have multiple cats, and some cats prefer fountains or dripping faucets. Diet can also help, with canned foods providing more hydration than dry foods. Making a slurry for meals will entice some cats to consume more liquid. If you have multiple cats, it may be easiest to simply put all of your cats on the prescribed diet. You don’t want your sick cat snacking on the wrong foods.

Try to minimize stress as much as you can. Introduce any changes to your routine or your household as gradually as possible. If your cat is prescribed a special diet, do the change gradually over a couple of weeks.

Remember that while FLUTD can be a minor medical hassle, it can also be an emergency. Don’t hesitate to contact your veterinarian if your cat shows any of the signs of a bladder problem. While this rule of thumb applies to all cats, it is even more important for male cats who might have a urethral blockage. ❖



Elizabeth

Elizabeth is thankful for the assistance of the Cornell Feline Health Center in providing the answer on this page.

Litter-Box Avoidance

Q I thought cats were always clean, which is why I chose a feline companion over a dog. I didn't want to deal with "I have to go out" at all hours of the day and night. But my new kitten says no way to the litter box. She will dig in it and play in it, but she otherwise doesn't use the box. She just seems to quickly hunt down a spot and goes. How can I talk her into the virtues of her own private bathroom?

A Well, we cats are naturally inclined to be neat about our elimination patterns, but sometimes humans don't understand our needs.

First, let's talk about that litter box. Location, location, location. We want a private bathroom, just as you do. High-traffic areas are simply not good litter-box sites.

If the litter box is destined for the basement, you may have to keep it in the main living area until your kitten is comfortable and confident about using stairs and going by himself into the strange, new basement area.

Be sure the litter box isn't too tall for the kitten to comfortably get in and out. If it's one of the ones with a top on it, you may want to give up on that. Some of us just don't like enclosures.

If you have more than one cat, this kitten may have pushed the cat-litter-box ratio too high. While some cats don't mind sharing a box, many of us find it somewhat, uh, disgusting. Consider adding a litter box choice or two, even if they're within a few feet of each other.

Also in a multi-cat household, you need to be certain it's the new kitty who is leaving messes. Your veterinarian may be able to provide a harmless prescription stain. Given orally, the stain reveals urine in ultraviolet light. It takes several days for the stain to clear the cat's system, so sleuthing takes time, especially if more than one cat is suspect (you'll need to do the cats one at a time).

You didn't say where you got your kitten, but if he was used to going outside in the dirt, that typical clay kitty litter might not be the best choice. You may need to start out filling the box



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Your new kitten may need a little help to understand the purpose of a litter box.

with dirt, then gradually work in the kitty litter of your choice. You can also scent the box just a bit by leaving behind a little urine or feces, as a reminder about what the litter box is for.

Speaking of scent, some of those "perfumed" products are downright obnoxious. It can be overpowering when your nose is only six inches above it.

We all agree on low-dust, however. The litter must be absorbent, too. If it's a clumping litter, you may need to clean the box more than just once a day. Those clumps might look tiny to you, but for us, they're huge boulders.

There are a few of us cats who don't like the feel of clay pebbles under our feet. A non-clay litter—although more expensive—might be to your new kitten's preference. You can try newspaper, corn, pine, or another specialty litter.

Help your kitty along. Place him in the box after he's taken a nap or eaten a big meal or just finished a really fun play session. These are opportune times for you to do some encouraging because they're moments we cats tend to need to go.

A health problem is a common cause for older cats to stop using the litter box. Kittens are susceptible to intestinal parasites, which may make us ill and have trouble making it to the litter box. A consultation with your veterinarian is always a good idea.

Finally, and I hesitate to even remind you of this because you're a reader of this newsletter—which means you're a caring, educated cat owner—don't punish your kitten. She won't know why she's in trouble, and it won't help convince her to use the litter box. ❖

—Sincerely, Elizabeth

PLEASE SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS

We welcome questions on health, medicine and behavior, but regret that we cannot comment on prior diagnoses and specific products. Please write *CatWatch* Editor, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713 or email catwatcheditor@cornell.edu.

COMING UP ...

DISASTER PLANNING



GERIATRIC CARE



NASAL IRRITATION



REHOMING A CAT

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor
CatWatch[®]
535 Connecticut Ave.
Norwalk, CT 06854-1713
catwatcheditor@cornell.edu

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