



## THIS JUST IN

### Treatment Option for Feline Oral Squamous Cell Carcinomas

*The results were generally positive with minimal side effects*

A new treatment called “microbrachytherapy,” which is used to treat inoperable feline oral squamous cell carcinomas, may be gaining momentum, according to a recent study published in *Veterinary and Comparative Oncology*.

Microbrachytherapy involves injecting a small amount of radioactive holmium-166 directly into the tumor. The study included 13 cats, and the treatment had a 55 percent response rate (including both cats that had complete tumor

response or partial tumor response). Not surprisingly, smaller tumors were more likely to respond than large tumors.

The best things

about this treatment are that there were minimal side effects noted in the cats in the study and that it is a one-time, minimally invasive procedure. ■



Jojo Medstock

## Kidney Disease Early Detection

*An ultrasonic measurement may allow veterinarians to find kidney disease at an earlier stage*

All too often, a sick older cat is brought to the veterinarian only to be diagnosed with late-stage kidney failure. Chronic kidney failure is one of the most prevalent illnesses in geriatric cats, but early detection and treatment greatly improves the prognosis for these cats. Unfortunately, cats tend to stay quiet when they're ill and not all owners are aware of the initial subtle symptoms. Kidney disease can develop for months or years before it is detected.

Recent work suggests that an ultrasonographic measurement currently used in human medicine may become a reliable diagnostic tool for early detection of chronic kidney disease in cats. A report from Portugal, published recently in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, outlines this method for evaluating kidney health and function in cats, with the goal of forestalling renal failure at an early stage.

Ultrasound is a well-recognized diagnostic tool to evaluate the kidneys. A healthy kidney has good blood flow through the organ. An ultrasonic measurement called the renal arterial resistive index (RI) can be calculated by determining the ratio of change in renal (kidney) blood flow velocity between systole (when the heart contracts) and diastole (when the heart relaxes) to the systolic velocity.

It is calculated by the equation:  
Resistive Index = (Peak Systolic Velocity - End Diastolic Velocity) / Peak Systolic Velocity

This measurement has been used for human kidney evaluations for years but has not previously been applied to cats. The study gathered 24 cats (six healthy controls and 18 with various degrees of renal dysfunction).

The renal RI was higher for all of the cats with documented kidney disease. Both kidneys had almost identical results, so presumably just one value would be adequate to evaluate overall



MonikaJurek/DepositPhotos

*The RI ultrasound measurement could become part of your cat's annual wellness examination.*

kidney function. Most of the cats with kidney disease in this study had advanced stages of the disease, and this was a small sample size, so more studies are needed.

Many clinics have ultrasound capabilities on site. At this time, this test appears to be a relatively easy and safe way to evaluate kidney function and hopefully catch any cats heading toward renal failure at an early stage. See our August 2017 issue for more on kidney disease in cats and visit [http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health\\_Information/kidneydisease.cfm](http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health_Information/kidneydisease.cfm) for more information on feline kidney disease. ■

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## Signs of Kidney Disease

- ▶ Bad breath
- ▶ Changes in urination (commonly increased volume)
- ▶ Diarrhea or constipation
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Hiding
- ▶ Increased thirst
- ▶ Lack of appetite
- ▶ Sore mouth
- ▶ Unthrifty coat
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Weight loss

## Vitamin B12 for Cats With Intestinal Disease

*Cobalamin injections may help in cats with intestinal disease—the unanswered question is how long the supplementation must continue*

A study published in the November 2017 *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine* looked at cats admitted to a teaching hospital with gastrointestinal signs and low blood cobalamin (vitamin B12) levels. Twenty cats completed the study.

Signs of illness in the cats ranged from weight loss to classic gastrointestinal signs, such as vomiting, diarrhea, and a lack of appetite. The cats were being treated with other medications, including steroids, antibiotics, and probiotics. Both actual cobalamin levels and levels of methylmalonic acid (MMA) were evaluated in the study cats. MMA is usually metabolized by pathways that require cobalamin, so if the cobalamin level is low, the level of this chemical will increase in the blood.

The researchers' hope was that by giving injections of cobalamin, the cats' levels of cobalamin (and secondarily, levels of MMA) would normalize and the signs of gastrointestinal illness would improve. Cats were given the supplement once a week for a period of six weeks.

During the supplementation period, cats improved both clinically and in their lab values. Unfortunately, within weeks of discontinuing the supplementation, the cats reverted to their previous condition.

The take-home message from this study is that cobalamin supplementation may be helpful for cats with chronic gastrointestinal illness. However, it appears that the supplementation must continue for longer than six weeks (and possibly for life) to maintain the benefits. Further study is warranted but, since gastrointestinal diseases can be frustrating for cats, owners, and veterinarians, these injections may be another weapon in the arsenal against these problems. ■

## Catnip Wins Again

*Silver vine emerges as an option*

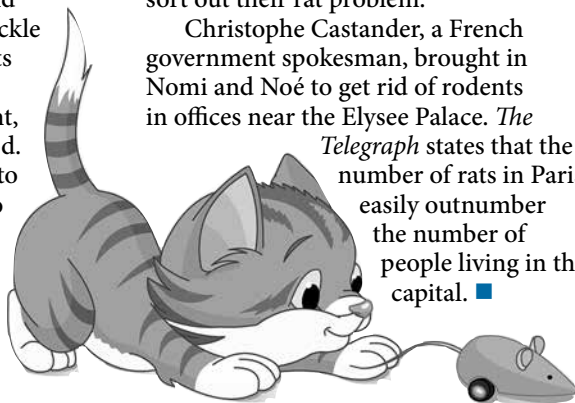
A study published in *BMC Veterinary Research* confirms catnip works.

Olfactory enrichment, i.e. great smells, can cause a "euphoric" reaction in most domestic cats, says the study, which compared catnip to other plants.

Nearly all the cats in the study responded positively to olfactory enrichment. Only one out of three cats did not respond to catnip (the study included 100 domestic cats and nine tigers; tigers do not respond to catnip, in case you need to know).

Almost 80 percent of the domestic cats responded to silver vine and 50 percent to Tatarian honeysuckle and valerian root. Although cats predominantly responded to fruit galls of the silver vine plant, some also responded to its wood. Of the cats that didn't respond to catnip, 75 percent responded to silver vine and 33 percent to Tatarian honeysuckle.

The study concluded silver vine and Tatarian honeysuckle are good choices for cats not into catnip. ■



## Mouse Patrol

*Cats at work in government offices*

The *Telegraph*, a United Kingdom publication, reports that Great Britain's cats are great for public relations and diplomacy and keeping the mouse problem down in public buildings. "We have wooed many world leaders with the Foreign Office's (cat) Palmerston," says the report, "and he and the four other government cats, including Number 10's Larry, keep Downing Street's mouse problem down. Now, other countries are getting in on the cat action, with the French government announcing it has brought in two cats to sort out their rat problem."

Christophe Castander, a French government spokesman, brought in Nomi and Noé to get rid of rodents in offices near the Elysee Palace. The

*Telegraph* states that the number of rats in Paris easily outnumber the number of people living in the capital. ■



# CatWatch

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For information on your cat's health, visit the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell Feline Health Center website at [www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/](http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/).

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# When Ear Mites Strike

*Recognize the signs of an ear-mite infestation and evict your cat's unwanted guests promptly*

**"E**ar mites are a common presenting complaint in small-animal practice," says Dr. William Miller, VMD, DACVD, Dermatology Chief at Cornell University. "The disorder can affect both dogs and cats but is far more common in cats."

Formally known as *Otodectes cynotis*, ear mites are small, barely visible mites that think your cat's ears are the perfect place to live. Kittens are frequent carriers, but cats of any age can pick up an ear-mite infestation.

## Close Contact

"The mite doesn't live in the environment for very long, so transmission from one cat to the next is by direct contact with an infected cat or by resting/sleeping in a bed immediately after a heavily infected cat was there," says Dr. Miller. "As the cats, usually kittens, play together or rub each other, the mite can be transferred and then start its life cycle in the new cat. Cats who shun contact with other cats are unlikely to get ear mites." Outdoor cats do commonly contract ear mites.

Just because your cat's ears are dirty does not necessarily mean that he has ear mites, as a variety of infections

## Signs of Ear Mites

*Always inspect new cats or kittens for possible ear mites*

If your cat has ear mites, you are likely to notice:

- ▶ A dark waxy substance of earwax and mite debris inside the ear
- ▶ Head shaking
- ▶ Scratching at the ears
- ▶ Reddish ears (outer ear irritated by the scratching)

and conditions can cause gross ears. Definitive diagnosis is achieved at the veterinary clinic by looking at an ear swab under a microscope. The technician or veterinarian will look for mites, bacteria, and yeast. Secondary bacterial infections are fairly common along with ear mites, especially in more severe cases.

Ears with mild infestations may only look a little dirty, while ears with severe infestations will look gross and smell.

## Treatment

Ear-mite infestations are treated by cleaning the ears and applying topical medication. Cleaning is an important first step because it removes all of the debris that the mites live and hide in and will also remove some of the mites. Clean ears also allow for better penetration of the medication. The exact medication chosen will vary depending on the severity of the infection and whether or not there is also a bacterial infection that needs to be dealt with. Your veterinary staff can clean your cat's ears and apply the first dose for you.

Back at home, follow prescription instructions and complete the full course of medication to get the best results. When applying the medication, stick the end of the bottle as far into his ear as you can without forcing it. Getting the medication down inside his ear canal will allow it to reach any mites down there and also makes it less likely that your cat will shake the medication out. If your cat is not a fan of having drops placed in his ears, wrap him up in a towel to protect

yourself from his claws (see our February 2018 issue for more details).

When your cat's treatment is complete, keep any extra medication so that you will already have it on hand if he has any future ear issues and won't need to buy a new bottle (just don't forget to have your cat examined, because if he actually has a yeast infection, the ear mite medicine won't help!).

As for home remedies, Dr. Miller says, "Lots of old-time remedies like baby oil can work, but they are messy and can cause problems if there is a secondary infection in the ear." Prescription medications generally require fewer doses to be effective.

If left untreated, ear-mite infestations can progress to ear infections that affect the cat's middle and inner ear, potentially causing irreversible damage to the cat's hearing and ability to balance.

## Prevention

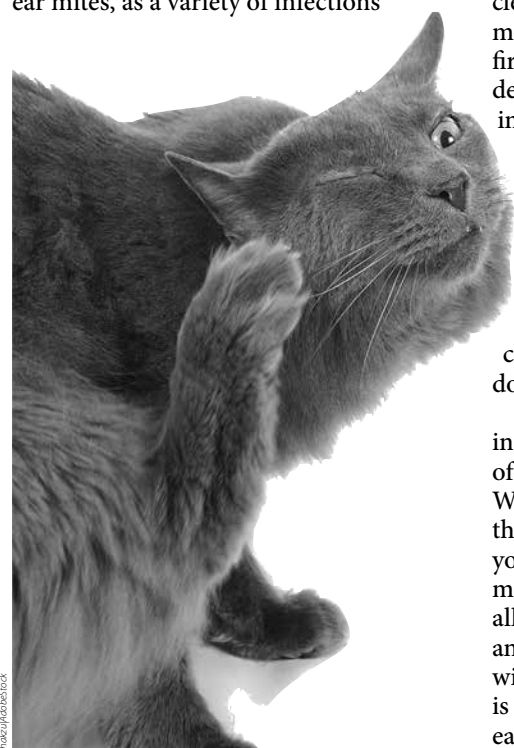
Keeping your cat indoors will go a long way toward preventing an ear-mite infestation. If you have multiple cats, Dr. Miller warns, "If one cat in a household has ear mites and the cats socialize with each other or share beds etc., it would be assumed that all of the cats might have the mite and should be evaluated or treated for ear mites." When adding a new cat, check his ears and have an ear swab done by your veterinarian if they are dirty. Ideally, you can start treatment to get the infection under control before introducing him to your other cats. ■

## © DID YOU KNOW?

## AVMA Prevention List

**T**he American Veterinary Medical Association reminds us that vaccination and deworming preventatives can prevent these diseases:

- ▶ Rabies (this can be spread to people)
- ▶ Feline panleukopenia (feline distemper)
- ▶ Feline herpesvirus infection
- ▶ Feline calicivirus infection
- ▶ Feline leukemia (FeLV)
- ▶ Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) infection
- ▶ Heartworm disease
- ▶ Intestinal worms (roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms, etc., some of which can also infect people) ■





# Neurologic Symptoms Need Immediate Veterinary Care

*A cat who starts walking in circles, wobbles when he moves, or flops to the floor for no apparent reason may have neurological damage*

**W**hen your cat develops a problem that might be neurologic, get her right to your veterinarian. There's no time to waste.

Your cat will likely receive a general physical exam, blood work, a thorough eye and ear exam, and also a specialized neurologic physical examination.

Your veterinarian will check for proprioception (awareness of body position in space) by flipping your cat's paws over to see if she recognizes the paw is upside down. Your cat may do some "hopping" exercises to see how each foot and leg responds to movement challenges. These tests may look silly, but they can relay serious information about how your cat's body provides feedback to the brain about its position in space and the brain's response to changes in body position.

Some neurologic problems are secondary to other problems, such as a buildup of toxins due to liver damage or a



Most kittens are quite agile and purposeful in their play. One who is oddly clumsy might have neurological issues.

head tilt and balance problems as a result of an ear infection.

The first neurologic problems seen in cats can show up in young kittens. The kitten that is adorably clumsy may actually have a congenital (present at birth) defect in his cerebellum. The cerebellum controls balance and

coordination, so problems in that part of the brain are manifested as clumsiness and an uncoordinated gait. This condition generally results from an infection with feline distemper virus in the unborn kitten. While these kittens are clearly not normal, they can live a full life with some extra caution to help keep them safe from stairs, etc.

In senior cats, cancer is a concern. Meningiomas are the most common

brain tumor in cats. This tumor develops in the membranous cover of the brain. Luckily, it is generally cured by surgical removal. A wide range of clinical signs may be noted, depending on what part of the brain this cancer grows in.

## Hyperesthesia

In adult cats, two common neurologic problems are hyperesthesia and epilepsy (seizures). Hyperesthesia is an extreme sensitivity in an area of your cat's skin. This is almost always on the back, right in front of the tail.

This is usually noticed when you go to pet that area and suddenly your cat reacts. The response may be as benign as simply going to

scratch the area herself or it may be a bite headed your way. Pupils may be dilated, and there may be drooling. You may notice intensive scratching and digging at the spot. Some cats may vocalize or urinate. While your cat's response may be unpleasant, the real problems are the potentially self-mutilating behaviors and, of course, the underlying sensations (i.e. discomfort) that cause this behavior.

While some veterinarians feel this is related to obsessive-compulsive disorders, Dr. Alexander (Sandy) de Lahunta, emeritus professor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine and a renowned pioneer in veterinary neurology, says it could be representative of a seizure-type problem. Siamese cats may have a genetic predisposition, so cats showing this disorder should probably not be bred.

To diagnose hyperesthesia, other causes need to be ruled out. That means looking for any cause of pain in the sensitive area, such as spinal arthritis and skin problems, including parasites, allergies, and fungal infections.

## Idiopathic Vestibular Problems

*The term "idiopathic" means of unknown cause*

An idiopathic vestibular problem is a fairly benign neurologic condition often noted in late summer or early fall. You may notice your cat walking as if drunk, tilting her head to one side, rolling, or falling. Often her eyes will move back and forth rapidly (nystagmus). She may vomit or cry out.

Your veterinarian will do a careful exam to rule out potential causes, such as an ear infection. Once it appears that this is truly vestibular disease, your cat will be treated symptomatically with medications to help with nausea and balance.

Your nursing care is important. You will need to keep her confined and safe, so she can't hurt herself wandering or rolling around. Encourage her to eat and drink. Fortunately, this syndrome tends to be short-lived, and most cats are back to normal within a week to 10 days.



terozent/PhotoStock

Dr. Emma Davies BVSc MSc, lecturer in neurology in the Cornell University Hospital for Animals, emphasizes that underlying causes need to be evaluated. “The most important thing in cats with hyperesthesia is making sure that there is nothing causing the hyperesthesia that we can identify and treat. Cats can have intervertebral disc extrusions and many other disorders that can result in hyperesthesia. If we cannot identify a cause then we can certainly treat it symptomatically. Gabapentin (a drug frequently used to control epileptic seizures) works well, but otherwise it depends where they are hyperesthetic. We have worked with anesthesia to perform a local epidural injection in animals with lumbosacral or tail pain.”

Anxiety and stress seem to add to a cat’s hyperesthetic reaction, so a treatment plan will often include some behavioral aspects. This might include medications to affect behavior and/or establishing a routine to minimize stress associated with change for your cat. Luckily, most cats can be managed and continue to lead happy, active lives.

## Epilepsy

Epilepsy is not as common in cats as it is in dogs, but it can be devastating to affected pets and their owners. Epilepsy, or seizures, can be secondary to other medical problems. Trauma, such as being hit by a car, may lead to seizures.

A brain tumor or a metabolic disorder, such as liver damage with a buildup of toxins or diabetes with a blood glucose irregularity, can lead to seizures. Dr. Davies notes, “The cause of seizures in cats varies. In young cats, it may be infectious causes, such as FIP or toxoplasma, and rarely an inflammatory cause, or in older cats it may be hypertension (high blood pressure), neoplasia (cancer), or metabolic causes.”

An MRI (magnetic resonance

imaging) or CAT (computer-assisted tomography) map of your cat’s brain may be done to rule out any problems, such as tumors. Just as with dogs, however, an underlying cause for a cat’s brain “short circuits” and seizure activity is often not identified. In these cases, the seizures are termed “idiopathic epilepsy.” With epilepsy, it is important that you keep a record of when your cat experiences seizures and any factors that might have contributed. Record the time and duration of the seizure, how it started, and any possible factors that might contribute to seizure activity. Cats with idiopathic epilepsy may cry and urinate or defecate while seizing. Once they come out of the seizure and have a period of recovery (since seizures are physically exhausting), they will commonly return to perfectly normal behavior.

Seizures are usually controlled medically. “I feel that phenobarbital works very well to control seizures in cats, especially as they do not seem to demonstrate many of the side effects that afflict dogs,” says Dr. Davies. Phenobarbital is often the first drug of choice, as it is relatively inexpensive. If this does not control your cat’s seizures, other medications can be tried. In some stubborn cases, a combination of medications may be required.

Seizure medications need to be given consistently, the same time of day and every day. Stopping medications can lead to the onset of seizures. Each time your cat has a seizure, the abnormal pattern of electrical activity in the brain is reinforced, increasing the likelihood of future seizures. The goal of administering seizure medications is to control, not cure, seizures.

Occasionally a cat may have a



Outdoor cats have a higher risk of head trauma, such as from slipping and falling, which could cause neurologic problems.

breakthrough, even though she is normally well controlled on her medications. If your cat goes into “status epilepticus,” or recurring seizures, you need to contact your veterinarian immediately. Your cat will require emergency treatment to keep his brain from overloading and to prevent him from developing a potentially fatal rise in body temperature.

For more information, visit [http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/health\\_information/neurologicdisorders.cfm](http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/health_information/neurologicdisorders.cfm). ■

## What You Can Do

The Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine Feline Health Center shares suggestions to help you protect your cat:

- ▶ Keep your cat indoors as much as possible to reduce her chances of being hit by a car or being infected with a virus
- ▶ Be sure any new cats are vaccinated
- ▶ Immediately take a cat with a head injury to the nearest emergency veterinary facility
- ▶ If your cat experiences seizures that occur less than 10 or 15 minutes apart, seek immediate veterinary consultation
- ▶ Watch for signs your cat may be suffering from a neurologic disorder, such as a reluctance or refusal to use her litter box, altering the way she interacts with others, or changes in her gait or balance

## Seizures are Multi-Faceted Events

*From start to finish, learn the different stages of a seizure*

**Pre-ictal or aura:** Usually within minutes to an hour before a seizure, your cat may act nervous, lick her lips, or drool. Some cats will hide.

**Seizure or ictus:** Your cat loses consciousness, generally falls to one side, legs may move, urination or defecation may occur, there may be vocalization. This description fits a grand mal seizure.

**Post-ictal:** After the seizure activity stops, your cat may be very tired or do some nervous pacing. Her appetite may be increased. This period can last up to a day, but is generally only a few hours long.

# Avoid Common OTC Medicines

*Be wary about giving your cat drugs made for humans, no matter what “Dr. Google” tells you to do*

It can be tempting when your cat seems to feel just a “bit off”—maybe sniffing or a little sore—to use an over-the-counter (OTC) medication to give her some relief. Is this OK? The response of veterinary experts is a resounding “NO!”

Cats have a somewhat unique system for metabolizing drugs in their livers. Cats lack certain enzymes, which means that some medications are either processed very slowly by the liver or virtually not at all. As a result, toxic concentrations of those medications can build up in your cat’s system fairly quickly.

## Better Safe Than Sorry

Leni K. Kaplan, MS, DVM, of the Community Practice Service at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, stresses that some common medications can be harmful to cats. “I would recommend avoiding all OTC medications unless otherwise directed by a veterinarian. Owners should absolutely avoid pain and fever-relieving



medications including, but not limited to, Tylenol (acetaminophen), Advil (ibuprofen), and Aleve (naproxen).” While many owners have gotten the word on acetaminophen, Dr. Kaplan points out that almost any common pain medication can have harmful effects on your cat.

Other problems also can result from using OTC medications in your pets without veterinary guidance, including that the medication may not be beneficial for the problem your cat has. In addition, if your cat is on other medications or supplements, the OTC drug may not

be compatible. “Though there are OTC medications that can be safely used in cats, no medications should be used unless directed by a veterinarian,” says Dr. Kaplan. “If an owner is considering using an OTC medication for their cat, they should call or see a veterinarian first to make sure the product is truly safe, its use is indicated for the given ailment, and to find out the appropriate dose for that patient. ‘Safe’ medications can have untoward effects in a given patient even when used at appropriate doses; inappropriate doses can produce toxic side effects.”

## Getting Proper Help

So what do you do if your cat has a minor problem that you feel an OTC medication you have on hand might help? Call your veterinarian. A clear description of the problem, along with an accurate weight of your cat plus a thorough history of your cat’s health and a listing of any medications or supplements she is currently taking might lead to a handy choice. Or your veterinarian may need to call in a prescription for a safer, more effective choice.

Don’t count on “Dr. Google!” For one thing, many OTC formulations have changed in recent years. An example is the standard Kaopectate. This medication now contains a salicylate (think aspirin). This is not a suitable option for your cat.

While aspirin is occasionally used for pain and to prevent blood-clot formation in cats, the dose is carefully monitored. For example, in people, aspirin can be taken up to every six to eight hours. In cats, it should only be given every 48 hours and at a very low dose. Cats on aspirin require close monitoring for gastric irritation and liver problems.

If your cat is sick enough to warrant medication, she is probably sick enough for a veterinary visit. “If an owner feels their cat needs an OTC medication, the cat should be seen by a veterinarian. Delaying diagnosis and treatment by attempting at-home remedies with OTC medications will often impact treatment options and the pet’s response to therapy. Depending on the pet’s condition, the use of prescription medication may be warranted,” says Dr. Kaplan. Early diagnosis and treatment mean lower veterinary bills in the long run. ■

## © 5 THINGS

# Five Reasons Cats Are Natural Carnivores

*These points come to us from the Baker Institute of Health at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine*

- 1 **Protein.** Cats’ dietary protein requirement is 20 g/kg DM or 5 g/100 kcals, twice as much as dogs.
- 2 **No taurine conversion.** Unlike other mammals, cats cannot convert other amino acids into taurine, without which blindness, cardiomyopathy, and reproductive problems can occur.
- 3 **Vitamins A and D.** Cats lack the enzyme that converts beta-carotene into vitamin A, and they cannot synthesize vitamin D.
- 4 **Arachidonic acid.** Cats cannot metabolize the essential amino acid arachidonic acid from linoleic acid, like dogs can.
- 5 **No liver glucokinase or oral amylase.** These enzymes are necessary for efficient digestion of carbohydrates ■





# Cats Mourn Losses Just as We Do

*Knowing the signs of feline grief can help you develop the right strategies to help your cat overcome her loss*

**L**ike us, cats can mourn the loss of a loved one, such as a feline friend or their owner. They also experience stress over major life changes, like the loss of their home and moving to a new one. Each cat handles big changes in a different way, and while some cats will seem to go about their lives with no issue, others can exhibit dramatic behavior changes.

“Vocalizations and loss of appetite are the most common signs,” says Katherine Houpt, VMD, PhD, DACVB, Cornell James Law Professor of Behavior Medicine, emeritus. Cats can also exhibit signs of depression by “not playing or being as active as usual.” Other behavioral changes may also occur that indicate the cat is greatly saddened.

Dr. Houpt recalls a client who owned several Siamese cats that grew up and lived together. Gradually, each of the cats aged and died. One of the last two cats was blind and the other cat acted as a seeing-eye cat to guide the blind cat around the house. When the blind cat passed away, the seeing-eye cat was distraught and clearly mourned by meowing excessively, as if calling for the lost friend.

## Not Eating is Cause for Concern

When should owners be concerned? The most dangerous symptom of feline grief is anorexia, especially if the cat is overweight. When a cat stops eating, the cat’s body starts to break down fat stores for energy. This can lead to hepatic



*We all know cats own us, we don't own them. So, when a cat loses her person, it can be a difficult transition.*

lipidosis, also known as fatty liver disease, a life-threatening condition that requires immediate veterinary intervention (see our August 2017 issue for more information).

Try to entice the cat with tasty foods, such as canned food warmed up in the microwave to bring out its scent or bits of meat mixed in with her regular diet. If these methods don’t work, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian, who can prescribe medications to stimulate your cat’s appetite and will make sure that there aren’t any other underlying medical conditions.

Behavioral changes that last longer than 10 days also call for veterinary attention. Stress has a variety of detrimental effects on the body, so a medication may be necessary to break the cycle and alleviate the cat’s anxiety. There are a variety of medications that

can be used for feline anxiety, including fluoxetine and clomipramine.

## What You Can Do

How can owners help? There are a variety of things that you can do to help your cat if she is showing signs of grief. Pet her and interact with her. Try to alleviate stress by keeping her routine as close to normal as possible. For a cat who has lost her owner, see if other family members know her usual feeding schedule. Cats don’t like change, so in the face of a major life disruption, it is beneficial to keep as many of the smaller details consistent as possible.

Play is a great way to keep your cat busy and active. As we know from human research, exercise helps to reduce stress and anxiety. Playing will also distract your cat from thinking about her lost friend. Feathers and toy mice on strings are a great option, and rolling food-dispensing treats are excellent aids for encouraging predatory behavior and tuning in to your cat’s natural hunting instincts.

Don’t hesitate to ask your veterinarian about anti-anxiety medications if your cat’s behavior changes persist or are potentially endangering her health.

## Time to Adjust

For a cat unhappy about moving to a new home, patience is in order. “Cats often take several weeks to adjust to a new home,” says Dr. Houpt.

Keep feeding schedules the same as in the previous house and encourage your cat to play and be active. Keep all of her old beds and cat trees rather than getting new ones right away so that she has all of her things that smell familiar. Over time she will explore the new house and claim it as her own. ■

## Ways to Help Your Cat Adjust

*Think about what the loss caused to change in her life*

A cat who is lonely after the loss of an elderly owner might be happiest in a similar household because she is used to having a person around all day long as opposed to moving in with a working couple. While Dr. Houpt doesn’t generally recommend this approach, sometimes getting another cat is the best solution for a cat who has lost a friend. For the Siamese seeing-eye cat in our story, having a new buddy to interact with made a huge difference and resolved her loneliness.



*A new friend can help with grief, but it needs to be one your cat will accept, whether another cat, human, or a sweet dog.*

# My Ragdoll Snacks on Paper

*“Pica” is the proper term for cats who eat non-nutritional items, and it can be a worrisome habit*

**Q** My 10-year-old Ragdoll loves paper, especially newspaper and cheap paperbacks. She’s been eating paper since I brought her home at 4 months of age from the breeder.

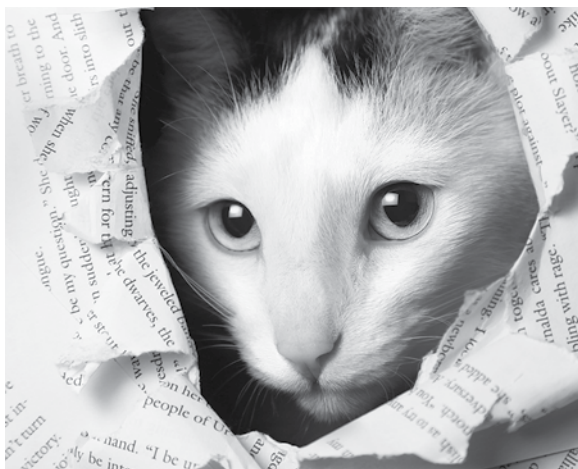
I try to limit her eating, but she purrs when she sees paper and while eating it. I am concerned about the chemicals she is ingesting with paper and print.

Can you please advise if you know of this type of behavior and its consequences for kitty’s health?

**A** Hmmm . . . gives new meaning to the term “food for thought”! Just kidding . . . I know that this behavior can be quite disconcerting to owners.

Thank you for getting in touch about your baby’s odd behavior, that may not be as odd as you might think. Pica is the term used for the ingestion of non-nutritive items, and it has been recognized as a feline phenomenon in veterinary literature for at least 50 years. While the definitive cause for this behavior is a subject of debate, a few points about proposed causes and management warrant review.

Cats with pica may eat a wide variety of items, including plastic, wood, rubber, wool, paper, and items of clothing; and while a number of potential causes, including boredom, premature separation from the queen, anxiety, nutritional deficiencies, and obsessive-compulsive



Odd habits like eating paper occur more frequently in indoor cats, possibly as a result of boredom.

disorder have been proposed, no definitive cause has been identified.

It’s important to make sure that there is not a medical cause for any cat that demonstrates this behavior, so taking your kitty to the veterinarian for an examination is a good idea. Of course, if a medical issue is identified, the first step is to appropriately treat that condition. In many, if not most cases, though, no medical cause of pica is identified in cats.

It is of interest to note that some studies suggest that pica is more common in cats housed solely indoors, raising the possibility of boredom, lack of social interaction, and redirection of hunting behavior playing a role. Another study found that cats that demonstrated pica were less commonly fed ad libitum (free

choice) than cats that did not.

Management of pica for which a medical cause is not identified generally involves taking measures to remove from the environment non-food items that cats may show a preference for ingesting, feeding a well-balanced and complete diet, offering acceptable alternatives for chewing/swallowing, reducing stress by establishing a routine for feeding, sleeping, grooming, and other activities, and minimizing boredom by dedicating specific times to interact play with appropriate cat-safe toys.

The major risks of pica in cats are the possibility of a kitty ingesting something that can obstruct the gastrointestinal tract and/or that is toxic. For this reason, any cat demonstrating pica that shows signs of vomiting, diarrhea, lack of appetite, lethargy,

or avoidance of contact with their owner/other pets should be evaluated by a veterinarian promptly. While I am not aware of any specific risks to cats eating paper with print on it with respect to toxicity, it is certainly possible for paper to obstruct the GI tract, so I think working toward resolving this behavior as best you can is a good idea. In some cases, consultation with a veterinary behaviorist may be beneficial.

I hope that this is helpful, and please drop me a line to let me know how things are going when you have the chance. Many cats that show this behavior live happy and healthy lives, so do not be dismayed. An ounce of prevention can be worth a pound of cure, though, so being as proactive as possible certainly can’t hurt the situation!

All my best, Elizabeth

## © HAPPENING NOW...

**New in Kitty Litter:** Move over, clay. You’re boring. *PetAge*, a pet-industry business journal, reports that kitty litter options are changing rapidly in 2018. From litters that claim to stop ammonia

buildup to diagnostic litters that monitor cat health to neon-colored litter to gel-based litter to reduce tracking, we can choose almost any attribute, assuming we’re willing to pay more for, well, litter.

We recommend you make any changes to your cat’s current litter gradually and monitor carefully. Cats are pretty picky about their litter, Elizabeth reminds us. That neon litter choice? Well, Elizabeth says, it all depends upon your decor; it’s only available in purple, pink, green, and orange. ■

### Coming Up ...

- ▶ Arthritis Supplements for Cats
- ▶ Senior Cats and Loss of Cognitive Function
- ▶ Can I Just Buy Whatever Cat Food is on Sale?
- ▶ Systemic Fungal Infections



Elizabeth works with the Cornell Feline Health Center in providing the answer on this page ([vet.cornell.edu/fhc/](http://vet.cornell.edu/fhc/)).