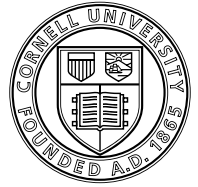




Cat Watch

March 2020 - Vol. 24, No. 3



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

THIS JUST IN

Craving Italian Food

Kitty's tastes were a clue to disease

One kitty's craving for Italian food proved to be a symptom of a serious illness, according to the trendy news website metro.co.uk.

Fortunately, the cat's owner, a veterinarian in the United Kingdom, realized her cat wasn't just being "naughty" when he stole Italian food from her plate. She noticed his cravings for foods like pizza, pasta, meatballs, and mozzarella were so strong that there had to be more behind it.

She also noticed that the cat was consuming more water than normal, was much more irritable and less affectionate, and was losing a lot of weight, despite his cravings for Italian food.

A blood test revealed that the 15-year-old cat had hyperthyroidism.

The cat's strange eating habits may have saved his life, as some symptoms of hyperthyroidism, which is common in older cats, can be easy for even experienced owners to miss. ■

<https://metro.co.uk/2019/12/26/cats-obsession-pizza-pasta-mozzarella-actually-sign-strange-condition-11962735/>



Dino Igratenco | iStock

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New Transitional Cell Carcinoma Treatment

A retrospective study shows surgery and NSAIDs may be best

Transitional cell carcinoma (TCC) is an aggressive, often metastatic, cancer. While a cure is not yet possible, veterinary care can slow its spread.

Symptoms include:

- ▶ dysuria (difficulty urinating)
- ▶ urination in small amounts
- ▶ hematuria (blood in urine)
- ▶ straining to urinate
- ▶ urinary incontinence

For diagnosis, your veterinarian may use bloodwork, chest/abdominal x-rays, and abdominal ultrasound. He or she may also recommend a biopsy, which is the gold-standard for diagnosis. Treatment options usually include chemotherapy, radiation, and surgical resection.

But these options might now change a bit. Researchers from multiple institutions collaborated on a retrospective study that looked at treatments and outcomes of 118 cats diagnosed with TCC over 27 years. The average age of the cats was 15 years with an equal split between spayed females and neutered males. All the cases had verified TCC through cytology or histopathology. Almost 80% of the cats had urinary tract symptoms over their lives, ranging from idiopathic cystitis to urinary stones or crystals.

The study showed that a variety of treatments had been tried for the cats. The use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as piroxicam, meloxicam, and robenacoxib was included for most cats as part of a multimodal treatment plan. Chemotherapy was incorporated into therapy for many of the cats, with mitoxantrone being the primary agent. Three cats were treated with radiation therapy. Twenty-eight cats had a partial cystectomy, which is the surgical removal of the bladder.

After analyzing the cases, the researchers found that cats who underwent surgical resection of the tumor and received NSAIDs had a longer survival time and better prognosis than cats who received other treatments for TCC. ■

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31721288>



alobayram | iStock

A cat who strains when using the litterbox needs immediate veterinary attention.

Gallstones in Cats

Know the symptoms

For most cats, gallstones are rare and, even if a cat has them, the gallstones may not cause any problems.

However, that changes if the gallstones are associated with an infection or inflammation, and they can be life-threatening if they cause an obstruction that ruptures or blocks the bile duct or the gallbladder itself.

Signs of an obstruction include:

- ▶ abdominal pain
- ▶ lack of appetite
- ▶ jaundice
- ▶ weakness
- ▶ vomiting
- ▶ fever

Gallstones are more common in middle-age and senior cats, but any cat with these symptoms should be seen by a veterinarian. ■



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Measuring Chronic Stress in Cats

Levels in cortisol can tell the story

Researchers at Colorado State University and Western University in Ontario, Canada, set out to find a way to measure feline cortisol levels over time and evaluate them as an indicator of stress.

Blood, urine, saliva, and stool samples reflect cortisol levels over a period of about 24 hours, but hair and nail clippings can give a picture of a cat's stress over a longer period of time. In addition, donating hair or nail clippings is less stressful for cats than having a blood or urine sample taken at the veterinary hospital.

Researchers gathered hair and nail clippings from 47 cats and asked owners to fill out an extensive questionnaire that covered possible sources of stress in a cat's life. The questions included typical feline stressors like how many cats in the household, the presence of other pets, and medical issues.

Initial results showed that hair cortisol concentration was correlated with nail cortisol concentration. However, hair cortisol concentrations varied greatly within each cat, including by body location from where the hair was clipped, type of hair, and portion of hair sampled. Nail clipping results were more consistent and, therefore, more useful.

The study found a significant association between raised hair cortisol concentration and front declawing. With nail cortisol concentrations, significant associations were found in cats with:

- ▶ declawed front paws
- ▶ unkempt fur
- ▶ chronic illness
- ▶ litterbox issues
- ▶ increased age

Owner-reported stress assessments of cats did not have a significant association with measured hair or nail cortisol concentrations, which may indicate the owners weren't good at measuring stress in cats. ■



Learning More About Nasal Problems

Study names lymphoma as the most common cancer

A study in the October 2019 Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery looked at 405 samples submitted to a pathology laboratory to see what feline nasal problems were identified. The three most common problems found in the samples were rhinitis (inflammation of the nasal mucosa, found in 215 samples), cancers of various types (133), and nasal polyps (81 of the samples).

The most common cancer was lymphoma. Adenocarcinoma and undifferentiated carcinomas followed in prevalence. Tumors were almost always malignant, with few benign growths found. Lymphoma was found in 68 cats and adenocarcinomas in 51 cats. Only two cats had benign cancers.

The researchers were looking for any correlation between anatomy and nasal problems. Anecdotally, cats with long faces are thought to be predisposed to nasal cancers, while brachycephalic (short-faced) cats are believed to have a predisposition to rhinitis. This study did not bear out either of these beliefs.

Nasal polyps were mostly found in younger cats, with an increased incidence in males. These are treatable by surgery and generally have a good prognosis (see "When a Nasopharyngeal Polyp Makes an Appearance," February 2018, available at catwatchnewsletter.com). If your cat has a nasal discharge, seems to sneeze often, has a disfiguration of the nose or muzzle, or shows signs of any respiratory problems such as wheezing, she should be seen by your veterinarian promptly. ■

Ferguson S, et al. A retrospective study of more than 400 feline nasal biopsy samples in the UK (2006-2013). J Feline Med Surg. 2019 Oct 21.



CatWatch

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Feeding Human Foods: The Facts

Just because they will eat it doesn't mean they should

Everyone loves a treat, and that includes your cat. Sharing your food with your cat can be fun for both of you, but you need to remember that human foods should not completely replace a nutritionally balanced diet prepared specifically for your cat.

→ **Tuna is a common, well-loved ingredient in cat foods.** Tuna is high in protein and moisture content, which will help to keep your kitty hydrated. But be careful when feeding your cat tuna intended for human consumption. Tuna and other canned fish usually contain mercury, and consuming too much can lead to mercury poisoning.

Check what the tuna is packed in. The most common options are oil and salt, or water. Oil and salt can be problematic because they can cause stomach upset and can worsen kidney and/or heart problems. Opt for tuna that has been packed in water, and better yet, give it an extra rinse before serving to your cat.

The water from canned tuna can be useful to entice a sick cat to eat, however. If your cat is ill and not eating well, ask your veterinarian if a little tuna juice is worth trying to stimulate her appetite.

→ **Pictures of a cat drinking milk from a saucer of milk are misleading.**

Many adult cats are lactose intolerant and can't digest it properly. Just like lactose intolerant people, these cats can suffer from diarrhea and GI upset if they consume milk. If that's not enough, remember that the fat in whole milk and cream can contribute to obesity in cats prone to snacking a bit too much and exercising a bit too little.

Raw milk can be contaminated by pathogens including Salmonella and Listeria, potentially causing serious illness for your cat.

If a young kitten requires supplementation, kitten milk replacer is a better choice than cow's milk. The kitten milk replacer or kitten formula has been formulated to meet kittens' special nutritional needs.

→ **Deli meats are a tasty treat that many cats enjoy.** The problem is that



We might opt for the cat's dish and hold the lettuce and bun, but hamburger usually is an OK treat for your cat.

they often have a high sodium content. This can exacerbate heart and/or kidney disease and can theoretically lead to sodium intoxication (this is rare). Whole cuts that have been cooked and sliced are better options than processed products such as salami.

→ **Meat meal is fine.** Pet food marketing is awash with boasts that the diet contains "real meat" and no meat meal. The truth of the matter is that chicken and chicken meal come from the same place—a chicken. The quality of that original chicken (or other animal) will determine the quality of the resulting meat or meat meal. Meat meal often contributes to higher protein content in pet foods because it is concentrated and doesn't have the water content of whole meat.

→ **Limit coconut oil.** While it's no miracle cure-all, small amounts of coconut oil will not harm your cat. Large quantities could cause stomach upset and diarrhea. Coconut oil is calorie-dense, making it a poor choice for hefty cats.

→ **Yes, your cat can have hamburger!** Hamburger is a great source of protein and usually easily digestible. But skip the seasonings and don't feed hamburger exclusively. Hamburger is not a balanced diet on its own. Hamburger should always be cooked, even for your cat, to prevent infections by bacteria and/or parasites that may be in raw beef.

Perk: If your cat is having diarrhea, plain hamburger may be a good option

for a bland diet to give her GI tract a break for a day or two.

→ **Skip grapes and raisins.** These are known to cause acute kidney failure in dogs. The potential for this problem in cats is less well understood, but it is better to avoid feeding grapes and raisins to your cat just in case (she probably wouldn't seek them out anyway).

→ **Onions and garlic.**

Misinformation about "healing powers" of onions and garlic is everywhere. In reality, onions and garlic, along with chives, irritate the GI tract and can damage red blood cells in cats.

If your cat eats a bunch of onions, your veterinarian will probably look at a blood smear to check for Heinz bodies, bits of denatured hemoglobin in red blood cells that can be caused by oxidation by compounds found in onions.

Small amounts of onion or garlic powder in a sauce or treat are unlikely to cause harm unless those foods make up a large part of your cat's regular diet. For example, using meat baby food seasoned with onion as a treat is unlikely to be a problem for your kitty, but feeding it every day could cause anemia (due to red blood cell damage) over time.

→ **Eggs are a great food for your cat to enjoy.** They are easily digestible and contain lots of protein and amino acids. Make sure the eggs are well cooked to prevent bacterial infection, and skip the salt and pepper. As with everything else, cooked eggs can be a nice treat for your cat, but should just be part of your cat's balanced diet.

→ **Corn is nutritious.** Pet-food marketing likes to pick on corn, calling it a cheap filler. In reality, corn is a great source of energy and other nutrients for your cat, including essential amino acids, fatty acids, linoleic acid, and protein. Corn is also a rare culprit for food allergies in cats.

→ **Organic choices.** We still don't really understand the impact of organic foods on people, let alone cats. Much more research needs to be done to evaluate whether organic foods truly make a difference in the health of our cats. Hopefully, it will appear soon. ■

Avoid Getting Your Dander Up

Simple management changes can keep dandruff down

Your cat is kneading in your lap and you notice some dry flakes. Then she rolls over and you realize how little hair there is on her belly. When your cat is shedding more flakes of skin than normal and/or is losing hair, it's time to look for a cause. This could be related to excess oil production by the sebaceous glands in the skin, which leads to an "oily" dandruff or seborrhea.

"When we talk about dandruff, we have to consider whether it's itchy or not," says William H. Miller Jr. VMD DACVD Professor Emeritus of Medicine, Section of Dermatology at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine. "If it's itchy, did the itching start first, followed by the flakes? And to make life more interesting, is the flaking localized to a spot or two, a region of the body like the rump, or generalized? If the dandruff is generalized and not itchy, then low environmental humidity or dietary issues are at the top of the list. If it is itchy and generalized, then allergy, especially food allergy, rises to the top of the list. If it is itchy and regionalized, external parasitic diseases such as fleas and *cheyletiella* (a type of mite) must be considered first. If it is localized, with or without itching, infectious causes such as ringworm and staph infection get considered first. All of the various forms of dandruff and dry skin, with or without itching, can also have oddball causes like autoimmune skin diseases."

Find Out Why

Good detective work, history, and diagnostics will be required to determine the cause of your cat's problem.

Dry Air. Just like people tend to get dry

Normal Dander

Dandruff is excessive and obvious shed flakes of skin, as opposed to dander, which is normal and barely visible. Dander is the term used for your cat's normal shedding of skin cells, and it's virtually unnoticeable unless you have allergies to cats. The dander, along with dried saliva from grooming, is what stimulates allergic reactions in some people. Normal dander is not associated with itching or obvious flakes.



Most cats are fastidious groomers, so coat problems signal something's amiss.

skin and suffer from dandruff when humidity is low, the same can happen to your cat. During winter months, especially if you have "dry" heat, such as a wood stove or forced hot air, your cat's skin will suffer from a loss of humidity. Dr. Miller offers these suggestions, "If we're talking low humidity, humidify the house if possible and don't bathe the cat. When the humidity is low, a wet body (you or your cat) acts as a humidifier and the moisture from you is drawn into the environment. Gentle combing to remove the flakes is the standby, but moisturizer sprays also are good if your cat will put up with them." Only use products labeled as safe for use in cats.

You can help from inside out by encouraging your cat to drink more. Feeding canned food will add some liquid to her diet. If your cat doesn't seem to be a big water drinker, try a pet water fountain to see if your cat will drink more from "moving water." Experiment to see if she prefers cold or room-temperature water. Make sure the water bowls are always clean, and that the water is fresh by completely replacing it every day.

Fleas. Even if your cat is an indoors-only cat, fleas are possible. Pets are willing to share fleas, and fleas are equal opportunity parasites.

To diagnose fleas, look carefully at the hair around your cat's tail head. You might notice tiny brown bugs running or jumping. If you roll your cat over, you might spot these parasites running across the groin area.

If you don't see any parasites but are

still suspicious, have your cat stand on a white sheet of paper or white cloth. Scratch her hair; especially around the tail area. Then check the paper or cloth for what at first looks like salt and pepper. If you add a drop of water, you will now see red streaks. That debris you scratched off consists of flea poop (composed largely of host blood) and flea eggs.

Be sure to check all your pets.

Even if a pet seems flea-free, you will need to treat all the animals and the environment, including your house. Flea infestations are often characterized by more than just dry skin. Many cats will have some degree of reaction, with inflamed skin and excoriations from biting or scratching.

Mites. *Cheyletiella* is a mite dubbed "walking dandruff." These mites live on the surface of your cat's skin and feed on skin flakes. Cats can have two types of these mites: *Cheyletiella blakei* and, especially in tropical areas like Hawaii and Florida, a fur mite called *Lynxacarus radovskyi*.

Cats with *Cheyletiella* may develop reddish yellow crusts. *Lynxacarus* mites tend to hang onto hair shafts, usually in the tail area. The cat's haircoat may look rusty in color, and other clinical signs may be apparent, including gastrointestinal upset, gingivitis, and a loss of appetite.

Mite infestations are usually diagnosed by your veterinarian, who may be able to identify the mites. Treatment usually consists of medicated shampoos followed by topicals that will kill mites with drugs such as moxidectin, fipronil, or selamectin.

Diet Issues

Food allergy dermatitis can appear as intense itching, often around your cat's head and neck. Ears may be inflamed as well. The dermatitis can advance to generalized itching with related flaking skin or even sores.

Diagnosing a food allergy requires time and a dedicated owner. Food allergies are due to improper reactions by your cat's immune system to food proteins. You will need to feed a diet with novel (new to your cat) proteins for six to 12 weeks to get her skin to "cool down."

Your veterinarian may prescribe steroids for a short period of time to help your cat get comfortable quickly. Once things are back to normal, add one previously fed protein at a time and

watch for any reaction by your cat. You may see itching start up in a day or it might take two weeks. This “challenge” then lets you know what proteins to avoid in the future.

Sometimes confused with food allergies, nutritionally deficient diets can lead to flaking, dry skin and a brittle hair coat. Vitamin E and fatty acid supplements may help a cat with minor skin problems, but your cat’s diet needs the right balance between omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids. Too much or too little of these nutrients can lead to skin and other health problems. Before reaching for a supplement, discuss this with your veterinarian.

Most commercial diets are balanced for these nutrients, but some cats will benefit from special “skin care” diets, including prescription ones. Prescription diets may include extra supplements, novel proteins in case food allergy is involved, or hydrolyzed proteins that allow for easy and non-reactive digestion.

When making a diet change to improve skin health, expect to wait a month or possibly more to see any dramatic improvements. It takes time for skin to heal and new hair to grow in. Dr. Miller points out, “If your cat is itchy, a response to the supplement should be seen within 14 days. For non-itchy flakes, the trial needs to be continued for a full 30 days.”

If you choose to feed a home cooked diet for your cat, you need professional assistance to get the diet properly balanced. A referral to a veterinary nutritionist can provide a recipe that will keep your cat in tiptop condition.

Careful Considerations

Autoimmune causes are possible, but they’re much less common. In order to diagnose these problems, your veterinarian will require a biopsy and special testing to identify the disease.

Obesity can result in dandruff (dry or oily), as obese cats can’t groom well, so hair tends to mat and block skin glands. Obviously, a weight loss and exercise program can help, but you may need to shave matted areas and possibly bathe your cat to help restore healthy skin.

Luckily, most causes of dandruff and dry skin in cats are reasonably easy to diagnose and treat. If you try one or two simple treatments at home with no results, however, schedule a veterinary visit to get to the bottom of your cat’s problem and give you a solution. ■

Ringworm Causes Dry, Itchy Skin

Mistaking ringworm for dandruff is risky

If you notice that your daughter who sleeps with her cat closely cuddled up has some red, round patches on her skin, think ringworm. This contagious fungal infection may be difficult to detect on your cat, so visit your veterinarian for a diagnosis and call your dermatologist for human symptoms.

On cats, ringworm may appear as localized areas of dry skin, with or without itching. While the classic round patches are often seen, even irregular areas could be ringworm. Ringworm is a dermatophyte, which is a fungus that lives on the skin and requires keratin for growth. Keratin is a protective protein found in skin, hair, and nails.

The two most common organisms that cause ringworm in cats are *Microsporum canis*, which can survive in the environment and on cats and kittens with no clinical signs, and *Microsporum gypseum*, which lives in the soil. Both organisms can be found on dogs, too, and can spread to people, although the latter is usually only found in people with a weakened immune system. If one pet is positive for ringworm, all your pets should be checked since it can spread from pet to pet as well as pet to people.

Classic ringworm lesions in cats are circular areas of hair loss, though with time, the hair may start to grow back in the center. There may or may not be itching. Some cats can carry the fungus with no clinical signs, but other pets and people in the house may develop the round skin lesions. Infected areas may be red due to skin irritation, and there may be broken hairs around the lesion due to cuticle damage of the hairs.

Your veterinarian may use a Wood’s lamp, which is a hand-held black light (*M. Canis* will fluoresce), and/or do a trichogram. A trichogram involves using a microscope to look for fungal spores on hairs plucked from the affected area. While these two tests are quick, each can return false positive or false negative results.

Doing a fungal culture is important to determine the type of fungus to guide treatment. To do this, some hairs are carefully plucked from within or next to an affected area and placed on a culture plate. Cultures are checked daily for growth and color changes. Spores from culture growth can help identify specific fungi.

Treatment is commonly a two- or three-tiered process. Topical medications are often all that is necessary. Some veterinarians like to combine topicals with a shampoo to help reduce environmental contamination. Systemic medications can be given, although cats may suffer from side effects to these drugs.

Thorough cleaning of the environment (bedding, etc.) should be done, and affected pets should be isolated to limit contamination. ■

You Should Know

Signs of feline ringworm:

- ▶ short, broken hairs
- ▶ crusty skin
- ▶ excessive grooming
- ▶ hair loss, usually circular
- ▶ inflammation
- ▶ itchiness
- ▶ red skin



Top, ringworm on a cat’s foot. Bottom, ringworm on a human leg.

Grinding Your Cat's Nails

A grinder may make both of you more comfortable

Nail care should be a part of your cat's routine health maintenance. Many cats wear their nails down on their own, but others can be prone to overgrowth (see sidebar). Check your cat's nails regularly to monitor their length. You may also notice extra-long nails when your cat jumps on or off your lap and accidentally stabs you! Whatever the reason, if your cat's nails are overgrown, you must trim them back.

Nail trimming is stressful for many cat owners for two reasons: an uncooperative cat and fear of hurting the cat. If your cat is not thrilled about having her paws handled, start by just working on that. Gently touch his paws briefly while he is resting by or playing with you, gradually increasing how much you handle his paws over time. You can also reward him with treats, petting, or play for letting you touch his paws. Work on it a little bit every day so it becomes part of your normal routine.

When to Use a Nail Grinder

If your cat is afraid of the click of nail

What You Should Know

- ▶ The humming noise may be scary to your cat.
- ▶ The grinders can get hot with use, so make sure to take breaks and don't spend too much time on any one nail.
- ▶ The ground-up nail bits have a pungent odor that some cats don't like. You can wear a mask to prevent inhalation of nail particles.
- ▶ The vibration of the grinder on the nail will feel strange to your cat and may take some time and gradual exposure to get used to.
- ▶ Long hair can get caught in the grinder, which hurts. Trim hairy feet or hold the hair back away from the nail with your fingers.
- ▶ If you sense your cat is losing patience with you, cut the session short and come back to it later.



A variety of small grinders are available that can do your cat's nails. If you can, try one out before purchase to see how it feels in your hands and how loud it is.

clippers or you are concerned about hitting the quick in his nails and causing him to bleed, nail grinders can help. Nail grinders are tools that grind down nails with a head that rotates at high speed.

Nail grinders do make noise, but rather than the sharp, sudden click of nail clippers, it is a constant hum, which some cats adjust to quickly.

You can still hit your cat's quick if you go too far with a nail grinder, but the high speed of the grinder head will often cauterize the blood vessels immediately and prevent bleeding (hitting the quick still hurts, though). Some nail grinder models have caps to limit how much of the nail can be ground off, but the success of these attachments depends on the size of your cat's toes and how grown out the quick is, so you still need to pay attention

as you work to prevent discomfort. Thankfully, most cats have white/clear nails, which makes it easy to see where the pink quick is.

Another benefit to using a nail grinder is that it smooths out the end of your cat's nails rather than leaving sharp edges that can still scratch your skin when your cat moves across your lap.

Choosing a Nail Grinder

Leni Kaplan, DVM, MS, Lecturer in Cornell's Community Practice Service, advises, "Pet owners should consider getting a grinder that has at least two speeds; most owners (unless very experienced) will want to use the slower speed to start, depending on the size of the nail and how close they are to the quick." Speed will also impact the intensity and frequency of the noise the grinder makes, so your cat may prefer one speed over another simply because of the sound it produces. Dr. Kaplan also recommends getting a cordless grinder. "This eliminates the hanging cord, which may scare the pet when it moves as the grinder moves. The pet will also not get inadvertently tangled in the cord during nail grinding with a cordless product," she says.

You may hear nail grinders referred to as "dremels" because Dremel is a popular and well-known brand of tools that use rotating heads. Most grinders come with a head made of a material like robust sandpaper, but you can also invest in a diamond bit for extra durability.

If possible, "test drive" a grinder before purchasing. This will give you a chance to see how the product feels in your hand and how loud it is on the different speed settings.

Introducing the Grinder

"GO SLOW and be patient," advises Dr.

Why Do I Need to Trim My Cat's Nails?

Many cats successfully wear their nails down by using scratching posts (hopefully the ones intended for that use and not co-opted furniture!), but others are either not as active or have been blessed (cursed?) with fast-growing nails. Older cats in particular are prone to thick, overgrown nails. Polydactyl cats (cats with extra toes) are also at risk for overgrown nails, as the nails on extra toes may not come in contact with the ground and the surface of scratching posts.

Nails allowed to grow unchecked can curl under and into your cat's paw, causing pain and promoting infection. As the nail pierces the paw pad or skin, it creates an open wound on the base of the foot. This wound is an easy entry point for any bacteria or other microbes that your cat may encounter, including when she steps in her litterbox.

If You Hit the Quick

If you hit the quick when grinding your cat's nails, she will likely jerk her paw away suddenly. Don't panic! Calmly pick your cat's paw up again and pet her and praise her for letting you hold it. Then turn the grinder back on and touch it to the outer edge of the same nail briefly before praising and rewarding. Touching the grinder to the outer edge will avoid contacting the sensitive quick in the center again, and gives you the opportunity to reinforce that nail grinding is not a scary event. After telling your cat how wonderful she is, do at least one more nail before quitting for the day.

Kaplan. "Pets tend to be skeptical about this new object that makes a humming noise, gets hot with use, and produces a strange odor." Unless you have an extremely confident and relaxed cat, you will not be able to grind all of your cat's nails on the first day.

Use these steps to introduce the tool:

- ▶ After purchasing the nail grinder, put it on the floor and give your cat a treat every time he goes near it.
- ▶ Once your cat does not seem to care about the object, move it closer to his feet, and if he does not object, give him a treat.
- ▶ As he gets more comfortable, desensitize him to the grinder by touching his paws gently with the grinder when it is OFF and give him a treat as he learns to tolerate this.
- ▶ When he seems fairly comfortable with the grinder, start to turn it on for a few seconds at a time so he gets used to the humming noise. Remember to give him treats so he associates treats (a positive experience) with the grinder.
- ▶ Over time, keep the grinder on for longer periods, always giving positive reinforcement (treats, verbal praise) to your cat.
- ▶ When first using the grinder, trim only one or two nails at a time until he gets used to the grinder.

For some cats, this process may take months (especially if you need to get your cat used to having his feet handled first). But it's worth it! By the end of the process, you will have a relaxed cat who tolerates nail trims rather than fighting you and trying to escape. ■

A Pleasant Vet Visit in 5 Easy Steps

A little training and research makes a big difference

Cat owners and cats alike often dread veterinary visits. It's a struggle to get the cat in a crate, and you may listen to woeful meows all the way to the veterinary clinic. Nothing seems to assure your cat that everything will be OK. It doesn't have to be this way! With some foresight and preparation, you can make the trip easier on both of you. Use these steps:

1 Train your cat to be comfortable in a carrier ahead of time. Purchase a sturdy carrier. Avoid cardboard ones that can become a mass of shredded cardboard with an upset cat. Even a soft carrier can be a bad choice for a cat who can scratch through mesh. Once you've got a carrier, leave the door propped open in your house (if it has carrying straps or anything the cat can get caught on, remove them for this training time). Occasionally toss some extra special treats or a toy in the carrier. Once your cat is going in freely for the treats, close the door briefly, tossing in more tasty treats. Gradually build up the time the door is closed, starting with just a few seconds at a time.



If your cat is comfortable in her crate, she may arrive at the veterinary office less stressed.

2 Consider using helpers like feline pheromone spray or some catnip if your cat relaxes with catnip. Some cats get overly excited with catnip, however, which would make it a poor choice for them! The pheromone spray can be applied to a towel in the carrier.

3 Bring some of those favorite treats with you to give your cat at the clinic. (Obviously, if your cat is traveling for fasting bloodwork, you will need to wait until the end of the visit, but otherwise, ration those treats out over the time at the clinic.)

4 Find out if your veterinary clinic has a separate waiting area for cats or if there is a private waiting room. This is better than having your cat terrified by a curious or barking dog. Have a towel to cover your cat's carrier if you must be around other pets.

5 In the exam room, talk calmly to your cat in a normal voice. Avoid clutching your cat or invading her personal space. Avoid sounds like shhh that may mimic a hissing cat. ■

© DID YOU KNOW?

Mineral Levels

The AAFCO statement helps

Nutrition can be overwhelming, with all its nutrient minimums, maximums, and balances. For instance, recommended mineral levels seem to be small compared to levels of things like protein or fat, but they can have a big impact on your cat's health and the palatability of a food.

In addition, because the digestibility of minerals can vary dramatically, comparing labels can be confusing or even misleading. The wisest thing to do is check the food for the AAFCO statement. AAFCO is the American Association of Feed Control Officials, which makes nutritional recommendations for animal foods. The food should state it meets AAFCO recommendations for the life stage of your cat, which ensures the mineral levels (and more) in the food are complete and balanced. ■

L-lysine for Feline Herpes Virus

Expert opinions vary on this treatment

Q Recently my kitten was diagnosed with a corneal ulcer. After initial treatment and follow-up with an ophthalmologist, she was given a clean bill of health. Discharge instructions stated to continue to give her L-lysine on a regular basis. It was suspected the corneal ulcer was due to the herpes virus infection.

I have since read a study indicating that L-lysine was not effective in treating ocular problems associated with the feline herpes virus. This study indicated it also can cause problems.

What is your opinion on the use of L-lysine to help prevent FHV recurrence/ transmission and to treat FHV symptoms/problems?

A Thanks very much for getting in touch, and I am very sorry to hear of your kitty's problems. I hope this letter finds her doing well. The first thing to note is that it is very important that you continue to follow the recommendations of your veterinarian, as he/she is most knowledgeable about your cat's health status and has regular contact with her.

As I hope you can understand, it would be inappropriate for me to contradict the recommendations of a veterinarian that has established a relationship with a patient from afar. Seeking a second opinion, perhaps



This adult cat has a herpesvirus infection.

from a veterinary ophthalmologist, is something that you may consider if you have any concerns, but it is likely that you will find conflicting opinions about this controversial issue among different veterinarians.

The understandable controversy surrounding this issue is primarily due to conflicting results of published studies addressing the effectiveness and safety of L-lysine in the treatment of ocular problems (primarily keratitis, or inflammation of the cornea) caused by feline herpes virus infection.

For example, while some studies have shown that L-lysine can inhibit the replication (production of virus particles) of herpes virus in cells grown in a culture dish, others suggest that it is not effective in treating the clinical signs (symptoms) of ocular problems caused by herpes virus infection in cats. Some studies have shown that L-lysine decreases the amount of virus shed by cats infected with herpes virus, presumably decreasing the likelihood of infection of susceptible cats by herpes virus. Other studies, though,

have shown that the use of L-lysine does not decrease the likelihood of infection of cats by herpes virus, thereby clouding the interpretation of available scientific evidence with respect to the clinical use of L-lysine in the treatment and prevention of feline herpes virus infection.

With respect to the risk of using L-lysine in cats, the possibility of deleterious effects has been raised by the results of a few studies, and the authors of these studies have proposed that these effects may be mediated by the negative influence of L-lysine administration on the levels of arginine, an amino acid that is vital to a number of metabolic processes. Other studies have refuted these claims, so the risk of using L-lysine in cats has not been well characterized.

It is important to note that despite the controversy surrounding the use of L-lysine, there are other antiviral drugs that been shown to be potentially useful in the treatment of feline herpes virus infection. There is also general agreement that in many cases, the ocular effects of feline herpes virus infection are ultimately self-limiting. Supportive care and prevention of secondary bacterial infections are important treatment goals in managing cats with the viral infection.

I wish I had more definitive advice, but the fact of the matter is that the current state of our knowledge of how best to treat this common infection is incomplete. This has caused the controversies noted above (and that you have encountered), but I am hopeful that ongoing research will shed more light upon this important issue.

In the interim, please continue to work closely with your veterinarian, and it is perfectly reasonable to discuss this with him/her in greater depth so that you are as informed as possible.

All my best,
Elizabeth

Elizabeth works with the Cornell Feline Health Center to provide answers on this page (vet.cornell.edu/fhc/). Write to her at catwatcheditor@cornell.edu or CatWatch



535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854. We welcome digital photos of your cat to consider for use with your question.

© HAPPENING NOW...

Move Over, Dogs—A Tonkinese cat entered the annual Christmas Eve Scotland Island Dog Race in Australia. The first cat to enter the 550-meter swim, Gus got first place in his category (OK, he was the only competitor). But, reports the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he beat most of the dogs under 5 kilograms (Gus weighs 4.6 kg). And, the crowd loved him: "At the finish line, there was this little cat

swimming among the dogs and the crowd went wild, they were chanting 'Gus, Gus, Gus,'" said owner Glenn Druery.

It's a Cat Thing, Dude—*The Mercury News* (California) was called to rescue a cat and German Shepherd stuck 25 feet up a tree. As the rescue workers arrived, the cat scurried down the tree, leaving his alleged chaser to fend for himself. ■

Coming Up ...

- ▶ Neonatal Isoerythrolysis
- ▶ Surgical Incision Complications
- ▶ Feline Allergies
- ▶ Solving Litterbox Mysteries