

catnip

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The newsletter for caring cat owners

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One Step at a Time

Sometimes, we have to consider what's best for our cats before we make big decisions.

This summer, I witnessed the happy adoption of adorable kittens into families living in my neighborhood — a couple of brown tabby siblings born to a feral mother, and another few adopted from a local animal shelter.

Nothing is quite as fun as a bundle of kittens. The idea certainly tempts me in certain ways — but I quickly realize that adding any new four-legged members to our established family is likely an idea relished only by me. My three middle-aged cats are happy right now. The status quo is just fine by them, and our article this month on rehoming cats was a perfect reminder.

I was in that position once, many years ago, and bringing a cat into one's home — only to realize a month or two later that the "fit" was a very, very bad one — is a painful experience. There's a lot of guilt swirling around, upset for all cats involved, and it basically taught me that there has to be an emergency plan in place if things prove to be impossible. Because it's not really helping to save the life of one cat if it makes the lives of you and your other cats completely miserable. Which it truly did.

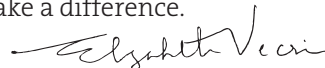
So if you ever find yourself in that position, please realize that you're not alone. Sometimes, we make decisions that come from a very good place without being able to anticipate the ultimate outcome. Luckily, there are increasingly more ways for us to stay connected and branch out via social media when we need help with our animal crises (just remember, though: It's very

important to check out future homes, and giving away animals for "free" is never a good idea unless you know and trust the people well).

And while it's good to be a person that your animal-loving friends quickly turn to in times of trouble, don't be the one who can't say "no." Taking in an endless stream of needy animals isn't doing your household any favors, either. The article on page 11 of this issue is a great resource if you — or a person you know — is experiencing the emotional strain of needing to rehome a pet.

Another topic to share that may not apply to your life as a pet owner right now — but may be exactly the type of advice a friend needs — is the growing popularity of hospice care for pets. When you reach a point where there is no cure for a serious disease or illness, yet your beloved pet is not quite ready for euthanasia, there is now an in-between time where you can focus on gentle care, comfort and quality of life.

It wasn't so long ago that the idea of providing such care for our pets would be considered implausible. Let's be thankful that we are living in a more understanding and kind world as far as animals are concerned. Yes, we have a long, long way to go! But we are making strides, nevertheless. I am sure that the readership of *Catnip* represents the very best of the animal lovers out there who are trying to make a difference.



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Hospice Care for Our Pets

It's not a place — it's a philosophy of care that turns the focus from cure to comfort. Here's how it may one day benefit you and your beloved pets.

In today's culture, pets are commonly considered to be beloved family members, and the decisions we make regarding their care often reflect our own philosophical views regarding nutrition, emotional well-being and healthcare. With improved nutrition and medical advances, our pets are living longer, healthier lives — and receiving the type of care once thought out of reach for animals.

While these medical advancements certainly give us hope, they also raise a number of decisions we must make on behalf of a beloved pet regarding a thoughtful, compassionate end-of-life plan. Until recently, pet owners primarily had two choices for terminally ill pets: expensive, aggressive treatment or euthanasia. Now there's another choice that bridges the gap between treatment and euthanasia — hospice care.

What is hospice care?

It's important to realize that hospice is not a place; it's a philosophy of care that turns the focus from cure to comfort and providing improved quality of life for patients in the last stages of an incurable disease. Palliative and medical care, which can be provided at any point during an illness, can help to relieve pain, symptoms and stress from a serious illness.

Both use an interdisciplinary team that offers emotional, physical and spiritual support for the patient and family members. Animal hospice mirrors the human



Caregiver Tom Lawrence assisting hospice house call veterinarian, Dr. Tina Ellenbogen, with a quality of life exam for Gabby.

hospice philosophy and, as a field, is new and rapidly growing in demand as pet owners increasingly seek hospice and palliative care for their pets giving them not only a “good death” — but more importantly, giving them a good life until their death. In other words, it's not about prolonging life, but enhancing the life that's left.

“Currently, the biggest challenge

for veterinarians regarding hospice care is the concept of how to talk to owners about discontinuing chemotherapy, treatment, X-rays or ultrasounds. That your cat's cancer has not been adequately controlled and that continuing those things merely causes your cat more pain and distress; that it's time to just focus on the quality of time

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Photo courtesy of Ingrid AHELP Project

left right now, no more thinking about how to extend life,” explains pain medicine specialist Alicia M. Karas, DVM, MS, DACVAA, an assistant professor at Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. “I believe that if you could ask your cat, ‘Do you want to continue treatment because you might live for three more months?’ the answer would be ‘No.’”

Hospice considerations

The first step to hospice care is recognizing that the patient is in the last phase of life. This is emotionally difficult for the veterinarian and pet owner alike, and it needs to be discussed with sensitivity. Often when we think of end-of-life, we think of geriatric pets — but that’s not the only time hospice would be considered.

“Certain diseases and medical conditions that warrant hospice care can include cancer, organ failure (kidneys, liver and heart), general slowing down, a recommendation for interventions like surgery that are unacceptable to the family’s wishes or any life-limiting condition that contributes to an excessive burden of caregiving for a family,” explains Michelle Nichols, MS, Executive Director and Co-founder of Animal Hospice, End-of-Life and Palliative Care Project (AHELP) in Seattle and board member of the International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care (IAAHPC).

The length of hospice care has many variables, including factors specific to the individual pet and his or her medical conditions. It could last for days, weeks or months, and sometimes years with certain chronic conditions. The decision to stop treatment and provide hospice is a deeply personal decision based the individual pet’s overall circumstance, the family’s personal beliefs, budget and schedule.

If you choose hospice care for



Photo courtesy of Ingrid and Tom Lawrence

Caregiver Tom Lawrence enjoying some time with his cat, Gabby.

your pet, you will be an integral part of the hospice triad along with your veterinarian. The heart of the triad is the patient, and physical comfort is paramount. “Preparing to care for your aging, ill or dying pet is similar to caring for a child or older adult. You would take time to learn about your loved one’s condition and ways to ensure the highest degree of comfort possible. You would learn how to monitor your loved one’s quality of life, and then regularly communicate his or her condition with the hospice team,” describes Nichols.

Take on some responsibilities

Dr. Karas explains that some of the responsibilities include learning how to safely administer medications and subcutaneous fluids, and how to recognize signs of pain (see related article on page 8 of this issue). She emphasizes, “It’s actually more than just pain — I don’t

think owners are always aware of the amount of suffering that pets goes through. Nausea can be a really potent and distressing thing that’s hard to live with; difficulty breathing; helplessness, etc.

“If the cat can no longer, or barely, respond to humans, or responds with anger because all they can think of is what’s happening in their own body, then it’s time for very drastic measures. That would include very strong pain management, very strong anti-nausea management or even euthanasia,” continues Dr. Karas.

It’s during this time that you can start making aftercare plans. There are many considerations that include cremation, burial and memorialization, as well as making emotional preparations for the final goodbye. It is better to decide earlier than confront the decisions later when emotions are running especially high.

The team approach

The veterinarian acts as the medical director of the hospice team, and medical treatment must be done on the order of a veterinarian. This may be your own veterinarian, a hospice-focused veterinarian, or the two of them working together. Not all veterinarians are equipped to offer the full spectrum of hospice care services, so it is appropriate to refer out to a veterinarian who offers hospice services.

Notably, both Nichols and Dr. Karas explain that veterinarians are not currently taught about hospice care in veterinary programs. Yet, there are veterinarians choosing the special niche that requires a particular grace and skilled expertise. There are goals, guidelines and policies established by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) and IAAHPC for animal hospice services that can be provided, but currently there is a shortage of qualified hospice and palliative care providers.

What to look for

“When interviewing a hospice-focused veterinarian, you should ask what training, education and experience he or she has had in end-of-life care,” says Nichols. “Performing home euthanasia is just one service offered by a hospice focused veterinarian, so ask what else they offer.” Some complementary veterinary services considered to be potentially appropriate include acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine and herbs.


Remember, hospice care extends help to the caregiver and family, plus the hospice team has to be well coordinated and have good communication.

“Best practices speak to the need for emotional and spiritual ‘care for the caregiver’ so that families can find benefit from mental health professionals, chaplains and spiritual counselors. Pet

sitters skilled in senior care are important logistically, and veterinary technicians who come to the home to nurse the animal patient, and/or teach and assist the family to do so themselves are ideal,” explains Nichols.

“As our animals’ life energy diminishes, the gentler, alternative therapies can be extremely effective in preserving quality of life. Other team members’ services that can contribute to comfort for both the animal and the family are: massage and bodywork, aromatherapy, energy work, acupuncture, flower essences and music therapy.”

Historically, many veterinarians have been practicing hospice and palliative care to alleviate pain, suffering and discomfort. Until recently, it hasn’t formally been given a name. As more pet owners become aware of other options besides curing or euthanizing a beloved pet, veterinary hospice services are becoming increasingly more common.

Educating pet owners of more modern options can help when it comes to making difficult end-of-life decisions for pets that honor the human-animal bond with compassion, grace and dignity. — Ramona Marek, MS, Ed 

Information Resources for Readers

The concept of hospice care for pets is a relatively new field, and it’s experiencing a meteoric rise as more and more pet owners seek an alternative away from cure or early euthanasia to focus on a quality end-of-life. Even though the number of veterinary hospice practices is increasing — and many are mobile — the flip side is that people aren’t yet aware of them or are confused about the services they offer.

Here’s a list of resources to learn more about animal hospice care. To find a hospice-focused veterinarian team and services in your area, search the online resources listed below.

- *Animal Hospice, End-of-Life and Palliative Care Project (AHELP)* (in Seattle) — www.ahelpproject.org
- *The International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care (IAAHPC)* — www.iaahpc.org
- *Lap of Love* — www.lapoflove.com/Services/Veterinary-Hospice
- *The American Association of Feline Practitioners* — www.catvets.com/public/PDFs/PositionStatements/HospiceCare.pdf
- *The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)* — www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Guidelines-for-Veterinary-Hospice-Care.aspx

Understanding Feline Hypertension

Here's what you should know about this potentially serious — but usually manageable — disorder that is most commonly seen in older cats.

As a cat reaches the age of eight or nine — the feline equivalent of age 40 or 50 in a human being — he is likely to begin experiencing signs of one or more age-related physical disorders. If unnoticed or untreated, such disorders are likely to intensify over time and may eventually prove lethal.

Hypertension (abnormally high blood pressure) is one of these disorders. Without treatment, it can potentially lead to blindness and even fatal damage to the heart, kidneys and brain. Fortunately, if diagnosed at an early stage and treated appropriately, hypertension can be a manageable feline disease condition.

Primary hypertension

In rare cases, a cat's elevated blood pressure has no discernible cause. This is known as primary — or essential — hypertension, according to Arnold Plotnick, DVM, the owner of Manhattan Cat Specialists, a feline-exclusive veterinary hospital in New York City. "It just happens, and we don't know why," he says.

On the other hand, veterinarians frequently diagnose secondary hypertension, which is a consequence or byproduct of a separate physical disorder. Occasionally, for example, the condition can stem from the presence of a heart disorder or a tumor that is producing excessive amounts of certain hormones, such as epinephrine.

It's also possible for some



Hypertension — abnormally high blood pressure — can potentially lead to blindness and serious damage to the heart, kidneys and brain.

medications to raise a cat's blood pressure. Although fear, anxiety or sudden physical trauma may cause a spike in an animal's blood pressure, random occurrences such as these have not been linked to chronic feline hypertension.

In the great majority of cases, Dr. Plotnick points out, feline hypertension is a consequence of either chronic kidney disease (CKD) or hyperthyroidism. And of those two conditions, kidney disease is seen significantly more often. (See related article on earlier diagnosis of CKD in *Catnip*, August 2016.)

Complex factors converge

Several complex factors can result in the development of kidney-related feline hypertension. For example, the kidneys are responsible for maintaining the proper amounts of fluid and salt in the body. They also produce hormones that help regulate blood pressure. But diseased kidneys often produce abnormal amounts of these hormones, or they inappropriately retain salt and water.

The resulting fluid retention leads to congestion in the circulatory system and, in turn, a buildup

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of pressure in the arteries. This is especially problematic, he notes, in older cats.

In hyperthyroidism, there is an overproduction of thyroid hormone and a resulting elevation of an animal's metabolic rate. Due to this acceleration, the heart beats faster and more forcefully. This phenomenon — referred to as “excessive cardiac performance” — results in increased pumping pressure, greater output of blood into the arteries and sometimes a corresponding rise in blood pressure. An estimated 25 percent of cats with hyperthyroidism have high blood pressure.

In addition to chronic kidney disease and thyroid gland hyperactivity, says Dr. Plotnick, feline hypertension can be caused by cancer of the adrenal gland. “An adrenal tumor secretes a hormone called aldosterone,” he notes, “which causes a rise in circulating sodium. And this will result in elevated blood pressure.”

It is indirectly age-related

There is no recognizable predisposal for high blood pressure in terms of gender, he notes. On the other hand, he points out, “Most cats with kidney disease, hyperthyroidism or adrenal tumors are older — so hypertension is indirectly age-related.”

Cats with either advanced primary or secondary hypertension will exhibit problems associated with the systems that are typically affected by the condition: the ocular system (sudden blindness or retinal hemorrhaging); the renal system (poor appetite, weight loss, increased drinking and urination); the neurologic system (seizures, disorientation); and the cardiovascular system (fluid retention, difficulty in breathing).

The clinical signs of systemic hypertension are often vague and nonspecific, except for the ocular and neurologic problems that may

In almost all cases, two relatively non-invasive methods will be used to measure a cat's blood pressure: the Doppler or the oscillometric technique.

suggest high blood pressure. General malaise and poor appetite, for example, are signs of various conditions. In order to arrive at a diagnosis, it is essential that an animal's blood pressure be measured in an appropriately equipped veterinary facility. In extremely rare cases, says Dr. Plotnick, the blood pressure will be measured by placing a catheter directly into a cat's artery. In almost all cases, however, either of two less invasive methods will be employed: the Doppler technique or the oscillometric technique.

■ **Doppler technique:** This technique involves placing a small ultrasound probe over one of the large arteries, usually in a cat's tail. An amplifier connected to the probe produces audible sounds for every pulse beat. A blood pressure cuff is placed just above the probe and is inflated until the pulse sounds can no longer be heard. The cuff is then slowly deflated, and the pressure at which the sound of the pulse can be heard consistently is the systolic arterial blood pressure.

■ **Oscillometric technique:** This method utilizes a cuff containing a small sensor that detects small oscillations in an artery with each pulse.

The way it's recorded

Blood pressure is recorded in cats the same way as it is in humans. That is, two values are taken into account: the higher one being the blood pressure in the arteries that is recorded when the heart beats (systolic pressure), the lower when the heart rests between beats (diastolic pressure).

For humans, these two values are written one over the other, separated by a slash mark. (Normal human blood pressure is 120/80 mm Hg, which stands for millimeters of mercury). For cats, says Dr. Plotnick, a normal reading would be 160/100.

Anything above either of those numbers would be considered high blood pressure. If a cat is diagnosed with hypertension using one of these techniques, other tests will be done to identify the cause — complete bloodwork, for example.

How its treated

Primary treatment for feline hypertension, according to Dr. Plotnick, currently centers on classes of drugs including calcium channel blockers and angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, both of which work to reduce blood pressure by relaxing and dilating an animal's blood vessels. “My drug of choice for treatment in cats is amlodipine, a calcium channel blocker that is given once a day,” says Dr. Plotnick. “It is very effective in cats.”

At the same time, Dr. Plotnick points out that amlodipine or other prescribed medications must be given consistently throughout an affected cat's lifetime, although dosage may be altered depending on fluctuations in the patient's blood pressure. He advises that an affected cat's blood pressure should be measured every three months or so, and the medication dosage be adjusted accordingly. — Tom Ewing 🐾

Recognize and Manage Feline Pain

Cats will typically try to conceal an injury or an illness, but there are ways for an owner to recognize that a pet needs some assistance. Here's how.

Stub your toe, bump your head or cut your thumb while peeling an apple, and you're apt to give out a yell that will clearly indicate you're in pain. And then you might spend the next hour or two discussing the incident, lamenting it and seeking the solace of those who are near and dear to you.

When it comes to dealing with pain, however, our cats aren't like that. Eons of experience in the wild have taught cats to conceal any sort of physical disability as best as they can from potential enemies. A part of their natural survival instinct is to hide the fact that they have been injured or otherwise weakened, which could render them susceptible to attack by a predator.

"Because cats cannot speak for themselves," says Michael Stone, DVM, a clinical professor of small animal medicine at Tufts, "owners must look for signs of pain that they might be exhibiting. And then the owners must act as their cats' advocates."

Observation is key

How can an owner tell whether a cat is suffering pain in his bones, joints, ligaments, muscles or internal organs? According to Dr. Stone, "Observing a cat's behavior is the most accurate method of evaluating his pain. An owner should note both the absence of normal activities and the development of new behaviors that may emerge as a response to pain.

If a cat is experiencing pain, the owner is apt to notice behavioral



Withdrawal from company and the avoidance of brightly-lit areas are two signs that your cat is experiencing pain.

changes such as a decline in grooming, a tendency to hide and an abnormal sensitivity to normal handling." Other possible signs include soiling outside the litter box, aggression when approached, unusual posture, uncharacteristic vocalization, an altered sleep pattern and reduced appetite.

Although these behaviors — and many others as well — may be prompted by pain, they may also be exhibited by healthy, happy cats that are free of physical discomfort. Consequently, the signs should be considered by an animal's owners in the context of what is normal for that individual cat. At the same time, says Dr.

Stone: "You can assume that your cat might be experiencing pain — even if he's not exhibiting dramatic behavioral signs — if you notice him withdrawing from normal activity, showing lameness, or having difficulty jumping onto or off of elevated surfaces."

A veterinary exam is in order

If an owner observes any such indicators of pain, the affected cat should be examined by a veterinarian. Although behavioral signs may be more telling than physiologic signs, a veterinarian will examine the cat for such potential indicators of a significant disorder as abnormal heartbeat, body temperature,

respiratory rate and blood pressure, as well as an elevated level of certain stress hormones in the patient's blood. The veterinarian is also likely to ask the owner about such details of the patient's routine activities as the cat's typical eating and grooming habits, his normal sleep patterns, the use of his litter box and the way he typically interacts with his owners and other animals in the household.

Pain serves a purpose

Unpleasant as it is, pain can play an important role in maintaining a cat's well-being by alerting her brain to the fact that something, somewhere in her body, has gone awry and needs attention. Pain is a protective mechanism, enabled by sensitive receptor cells located throughout the body — in the skin, the bones, joint surfaces, artery walls, just about everywhere.

These specialized cells — which are stimulated by harmful forces or substances (pressure on a limb or internal organ, extreme heat or cold, the consumption of a poisonous substance, inflammation in

a joint, for example) — transmit electrical impulses along nerves to the spinal cord and then to the cat's brain.

In some situations, the initial five or 10 minutes of pain can be life-saving, due to increased cardiovascular output, certain muscle reactions and the triggering of the fight-or-flight instinct that will prompt a cat to escape from the source of the pain. But if the pain persists for an appreciable length of time, or occurs without a readily identifiable cause, it will serve no positive purpose.

Types of pain

Dr. Stone notes that feline pain, like human pain, can be acute (or adaptive) — the kind of intense but comparatively short-term discomfort that may be caused, for example, by a bite wound or surgical incision. Or it can be chronic (or maladaptive), persisting constantly or intermittently for an extended period as a gradually intensifying consequence of an injury or long-standing physical disorder, such as severe dental disease or arthritis.

Pain can also be categorized as visceral, neuropathic or musculoskeletal. "Visceral pain means that it is deep within the body," says Dr. Stone. "The discomfort might stem from, for example, intestinal upset or pancreatitis. Neuropathic pain originates from direct nerve involvement, resulting from trauma to the head, say, or a slipped vertebral disc. And musculoskeletal pain can result from such problems as a sprain, a muscle strain, or arthritis."

During the examination

"I will use gentle manipulation to assess a cat's reluctance to having a particular area touched," says Dr. Stone. "Some animals are more stoic than others. Some are more timid. I try to integrate my findings with what the owner is noticing at home."

What methods and pharmaceuticals will a veterinarian typically use or suggest for the treatment of feline pain? "Drugs, physical therapy, cold or heat treatment, ultrasound and dietary adjustment

continued on next page

The Most Common Signs of Pain

In an effort to identify the most common signs of feline pain, a team of animal behaviorists in Great Britain conducted a year-long series of in-depth interviews with 19 veterinary experts. According to the researchers' findings — published in February 2016 in the scientific journal *PLoS ONE* — the signs listed below are considered to be the most reliable pain indicators. The most prominent signs include the avoidance of brightly lit areas, growling, changes in feeding behavior, closed eyes and groaning.

- Absence of grooming
- Reluctance to move
- Abnormal gait
- Difficulty in jumping
- Frequent licking of a specific body region
- Withdrawal from company
- Hiding
- Avoidance of brightly-lit areas
- Decrease in appetite
- Overall decrease in activity
- Decrease in rubbing against people
- Closed eyes
- Frequent shifting of weight
- Dislike of palpation/petting
- Lowered head posture
- Frequent and involuntary blinking
- Change of behavior while feeding
- Reluctance to play
- Groaning, growling
- Hunched-up posture
- Straining to urinate
- Tail twitching

therapy for weight control might be used,” says Dr. Stone, “as well as resolution of a specific underlying problem, such as removal of a painful growth. Each cat’s treatment will be individualized.”

Two types of analgesics

Currently, feline pain is treated primarily with two types of analgesics: opioids, which function as numbing agents that dull pain; and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which reduce inflammation. A veterinarian will select a painkiller that is appropriate, depending largely on the source of the pain, the intensity of a cat’s discomfort, and the length of time that is prudent and desirable for an animal to be given the drug.

Owners must be aware that some pain-relieving medications that have been formulated for humans (such as Tylenol) could be fatal to a cat and must never be used to treat feline pain. In fact, no painkiller should be given to a cat unless the medication has been specifically prescribed by a veterinarian, and that you have been instructed on how and when to administer it. Medications for dogs can sometimes be dangerous for cats, as well.

Multimodality treatment

Regarding current progress in the treatment of feline pain, he adds: “Longer-lasting pain medications have recently become available; the use of acupuncture is becoming more common as well. Overall, multimodality treatments, which use a combination of drugs and techniques, have become the new approach to pain control.”

Dr. Stone advises owners never to ignore clear indications that a cat may be experiencing sudden-onset, acute pain; veterinary consultation should be pursued without delay. Owners should also be aware that a cat with long-lasting chronic pain may develop coping strategies for concealing

Experts Find New Ways to Assess Pain

A modern concept used in recognizing and assessing acute pain in cats is the use of a facial pain expression scale, modeled after the neonatal facial scales which shows the changes in a baby’s facial expression from happy to painful.

According to Alicia Karas, DVM, MS, DACVAA, pain medicine specialist

and assistant professor at Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, pain researchers designed similar scales for mice and rats, and have now done the same for cats. According to the study, areas that showed differences between painful and pain-free cats are the eyes, ears, mouth and muzzle.

Caricatures of the expressions were drawn based on the mathematical differences and distances between the anatomical points to compare pain-free and painful cats — for example, changes in the whiskers and ears as well as nose and cheek flattening. The study is the first to specifically show how facial features can be used to differentiate between pain-free and painful cats, and could potentially become a viable tool for assessing acute pain in cats.

Another tool for assessing pain in cats is the Composite Measure Pain Scale — Feline (CMPS-F). This scale assesses behavioral changes in six categories that include: vocalization, posture, attention to a wound, response to touch and response to people. Each category is scored for a total possible score of 16. For a score of four or higher, intervention with pain medication is recommended. However, further studies are needed for universal validation.


Other acute pain scales include the Colorado State University Feline Acute Pain Scale and the UNESP-Botucatu Multidimensional Composite Pain Scale. An example of a pain scale can be found at ivapm.org/for-the-public/animals-and-pain-articles/how-we-assess-your-felines-pain-level/. — *Ramona Marek, MS, Ed*



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discomfort; in that case, a routine veterinary checkup could reveal the presence of osteoarthritis or some other source of persistent pain.

The good news is that with proper veterinary care and

at-home treatment by her owner, a cat’s acute or chronic pain can be significantly reduced, emphasizes Dr. Stone. Indeed, he says, “Feline pain can be lessened with appropriate care in almost every situation.” — Tom Ewing 

When You Need to Rehome a Cat

When you love cats, it may feel like, “The more, the merrier!” But unfortunately, there are times when the feline dynamic just doesn’t work. Here’s some help.

A certain amount of conflict and discord is natural in any group living situation. Owners of even the most mellow and congenial cat families know just how quickly conflict can erupt as group members experience the normal ups and downs of life.

Wise owners understand how powerfully even seemingly insignificant changes can affect their cats and disrupt the group’s harmony. They also know how important it is to address the effects of changes positively and immediately, before the situation spins out of control.

Some of the trickiest situations to manage are those when a new family member enters the picture, and when a family member leaves the group. Loss of a human or feline family member — especially a sudden loss — can trigger a cascade of alterations in the group’s structure, upset existing relationships, or even bring to light previously hidden conflicts.

Be prepared for anything

Life is full of surprises, and even the most prescient owner cannot anticipate how a loss or change in the group’s composition will affect his cats and their relationships. With cats, though, it’s always best to be prepared for just about anything: A minor change might cause a major upset, while something human family members see as monumental hurricane might pass through the cat group like a spring breeze.

So it is with introductions. Many introductions — whether of kittens or adult cats — simply go off



To a cat, an unfamiliar animal is not necessarily a potential friend, but a possible threat to prized resources. These can include food, territory and attention from us.

without a hitch. But difficult introductions, more than any other household change, are what can, too often, bring the cat owner’s most dreaded word — rehoming — into the conversation.

Why does introducing a new cat to a group so often cause such consternation? To a cat, an unfamiliar cat is not a potential friend but a possible threat, in a way that a member of any other species is not. Cats see other cats as direct competitors for the resources they prize the most, such as food, space (territory), social status and attention from favorite humans.

Wise cat owners know how to manage feline introductions to maximize their chances of success. “The ‘yellow’ brick road’ of cat

introductions, if carried out religiously, should work most of the time,” says Nicholas Dodman, BVMS, Professor Emeritus at the Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine.

The best laid plans

But sometimes, even when an owner does everything right, some or all of the cats refuse to go along with the program. “Cats, like people, have different personalities,” says Dr. Dodman. Sometimes it’s the new cat who just refuses to fit in and get along; other times one or more of the resident cats make it abundantly clear that they have no intention of accepting the newcomer as a family member — ever.

continued on next page

“Maybe the cats are incompatible, personality wise. No matter how slowly you go, you still see ears flat back, dilated pupils, hissing, and charging — all the hallmarks of angry cats.”

The domino effect

Weeks and months go by and the fur continues to fly. If you continue to press the point, the situation can deteriorate badly: Previously mellow cats are snarling. Friendly cats are now hiding under the bed. Former friends refuse to cuddle. And someone is missing the litter box more often than not. If the situation has deteriorated to that extent, it's time to back up and reassess before the group's harmony is totally destroyed.

No matter how much you want the introduction to work, at some point, it may not be worth putting all your cats under that much continuing stress. That's when thoughts of rehoming start to assert themselves for some people. Here's some help in making this difficult decision.

Deciding to Rehome

If all else has truly failed, and you're unable or unwilling to compartmentalize your home and/or break up your cat group, you may be forced to conclude that finding a suitable new home for the cat is the kindest and most sensible path forward.

If you obtained the newcomer from a breeder, that breeder should be the first person you turn to. Many breeder contracts require that the breeder be notified if you can't keep the cat for any reason, and that they be given the opportunity to take the cat back.

If you adopted the newcomer from a shelter, you might choose to ask the shelter if they'd be willing to take the cat back. Obviously, a lot depends on the particular shelter, their management practices and philosophies, and how you feel about the shelter. But if you're

comfortable with the shelter, and feel that the cat has a good chance of finding a more suitable home through them, this can be a comfortable option.

One caution, though: Unless you're quite sure that the newcomer's own particular quirks were the cause of his failure to be accepted by your cats, resist the urge to take another cat home to “try again.” It might be better to wait awhile, and think more deeply about whether you and your cats are ready for any new addition. It may be that trying to adopt one more cat put your home past its natural cat-carrying capacity.

If neither a breeder nor a shelter return is an option for you, your task becomes much more difficult. Now you need to turn to your friends, family, social networks, and other like-minded contacts. Finding a home for a cat through these channels can be a difficult, lengthy process, calling for diplomacy, tact, transparency, honesty and understanding.

There are always lots of cats seeking homes, and many questions — sometimes uncomfortable questions — will doubtless be raised. Your motives, your commitment to cats and even your character may be called into question. You need to tread a fine line between generating feelings of guilt and obligation in others, and doing the right thing for the cat. You need to paint the cat in the best possible light, while being absolutely honest about any personality, medical or behavior issues involved.

Single-cat status can help

It may be best to seek out a new home where the cat will be an only cat. “If the cat is going to a home with no other cats, your only task is to vet the people, in the same way you would judge a daycare for your child,” explains Dr. Dodman. “Make sure they're decent people who will take good care of the cat.”

If a single-cat home isn't available, notes Dodman, tread carefully. “If they have cats, propose a ‘trial marriage.’ Put all the cats in crates, put them together in a room and see how they react. If you see interest and curiosity, that's a good sign — proceed with your introductions. But if you immediately see hostility, spitting, etc. — well, you don't want to start on the bottom of that ladder again!”

Helping a friend or relative

If more than a few people know you love cats, you've probably received many phone calls like this: A friend of a friend of an acquaintance has a cat (or two or three) who need new homes immediately — by this weekend! The owner has exhausted all her options, she's at wit's end — and now you are the cats' only chance. The only alternative is a crowded municipal shelter — and you know what that means for the cats. This is a very difficult situation that immediately produces, in any caring cat lover, an almost overwhelming sense of guilt and obligation.

Although your first instinct is probably to take the cats, think it through very carefully. What do you know about the cats and their history? Do they have any special medical needs? Behavioral issues? How will taking on the burden of one or more additional cats affect your own cat group? Is your own home already at its maximum cat-carrying capacity?

And — most importantly — has the owner truly exhausted all alternatives? I've found that by asking a few gentle, but pointed, questions, I can almost always determine that the owner has indeed not exhausted all the other alternatives available to her. That's when I'm ready to suggest several other options, such as looking into temporary boarding, widening the search for a new home to friends and relatives she may not have considered, and contacting local, privately-run shelters and

sanctuaries that may be willing and able to take in the cats in return for a generous donation.

Whatever you do, don't just impulsively agree to take the cats in yourself. If you become known as someone who does this, your reward will likely be more cats who need homes by this weekend! Think through the problem, make suggestions and stand ready to help — but don't be a pushover.

But what if it's dear Aunt Tilly's beloved pets — cats you've known for years — who need a new home, or the cats of a close friend who has had a sudden run of extremely bad luck? In this case, your feelings of obligation and guilt can run immeasurably higher. Again, think carefully about the ramifications of taking in the cats yourself. You'll know if it's the right thing to do, both for the cats and for yourself.

If you conclude that you're just unable to make a lifetime commitment to those cats in addition to the commitments you've made to your own cats, be honest about it. Explain your rationale, and explain how it would not be the best thing for the cats. Then step up to the plate.

How to network

Throw your energy into finding those cats a good, permanent home. Use social media, put the word out to your networks, use your connections to shelters and rescue organizations to find the perfect home for the cats. As in any rehoming situation, honesty and transparency are essential. Be clear and up-front about the cats' history, medical needs, and any known behavior issues.

One important note: Beware of large, privately run "cat sanctuaries" that offer to take in virtually any and all comers for a fee or donation. These organizations, while they can sound like an ideal solution, tend to be run by well-meaning individuals or small groups who really think they can care for as many cats as they can take in.



If you're known as a compassionate animal lover, you may be called into service if the people around you ever need to rehome their pets.

But the supply of cats needing new homes is endless, and these outfits, too often, soon find themselves in over their heads. Some of them have blown up scandalously and very publicly, after revelations that the cats were living in atrocious conditions and were not receiving anything like adequate care. These situations are tragedies, for the people and the cats involved, and offer important lessons about what happens when good intentions gallop ahead of good sense.

If you're considering a private shelter or sanctuary, do your homework. Investigate the organization, learn its history, and find out who's in charge. It's best to make repeated, leisurely visits to any shelter or sanctuary in which you are considering placing cats. That's why working with local organizations is so important.

A continuing working relationship with your chosen shelter or sanctuary is your best guarantee that the cats you place there will enjoy long, safe, happy, healthy lives.

A regular volunteer commitment, plus regular donations of money and needed supplies, will go a long way towards helping insure that the shelter will welcome any cats you absolutely need to place.

Plan ahead for your pets

What about your own cats? If something were to happen to you, what would happen to them? Have you made provisions for their long-term care? If not, you may be putting your own friends and family in the very difficult position of deciding what to do about your animals if you're unexpectedly unable to care for them.

There are organizations such as "2nd Chance 4 Pets" (visit them at www.2ndchance4pets.org) to help you get started on this vital planning. Some states also allow for legal "pet trusts" that let you make legally-binding arrangements for your cats' care if you become unable to care for them. For more information, consult an attorney well-versed in animal law. — *Catnip* staff 🐾

Little is known about whether or not certain supplements actually benefit our cats

Cosequin and its effects

QIn the July 2016 of *Catnip*, there was an article on the value of joint supplements, highlighting the fact that there has not been any research focusing on the value of glucosamine and chondroitin in cats. While I have not seen any research papers either, I have had positive personal experience with these supplements with multiple cats.

One of my cats, a large and healthy male, suddenly lost interest in food and was acting as if he was in pain. X-rays at my vet's office showed arthritis of the spine. We put him on 'Cosequin for Cats,' a glucosamine and chondroitin supplement in measured caplets. I gave him two a day for the first 30 days. After the first dose, he started eating again.

After about a week, he was jumping up on the bed again and acting normally. I cut back to one caplet a day after the first month, then cut back to once a week after that — and finally cut back to only giving him one when he seemed to be stiff or sore. As my other cats aged and starting showing signs of joint problems, I would give them Cosequin daily for a week or two, then cut back to only as needed. When the joint issues became chronic, I would keep them on a twice-per-week dosage. It appeared to be effective with all four cats I have given it to so far.

I hope you find this information useful, and can share it with other *Catnip* readers.

Phoenix Von Hendy

ADear Phoenix: Thank you for your interesting letter. I have a few observations to make about the subject of analgesic supplements and medications in general.



Well-designed studies are essential to help us understand what works.

Firstly, we are more inclined to use a nutraceutical product because of the impression that it may be associated with fewer serious adverse effects than a drug. And when a cat's mobility and personality improve specifically related to administration of any substance or procedure, it is quite reasonable to attribute the response to the substance or procedure itself.

Scientists have conducted scores of clinical experiments in both humans and animals investigating the pain and mobility improving effects of glucosamine and chondroitin containing supplements. Glucosamine has been shown to alter inflammation in both in vitro and in "whole patient" studies, and this may be why some patients seem to find relief from this particular nutraceutical. In fact, in humans, a European prescription glucosamine formulation has been found to be especially effective, whereas other types do not appear beneficial in studies.

This finding underscores the fact that — as Dr. Heinze indicates in the article you mention — the effectiveness of the supplement may depend

highly on its precise source, the manufacturing process AND how it is stored and shipped. Check any pet store or catalog and you will find a wide array of products that purport to improve pain and mobility.

The reality is: Unless the product has been demonstrated to improve signs of disease compared with a placebo in a well-designed study, we must be cautious about concluding that the product does what it says it will do.

Also, products that undergo FDA approval must be screened before approval and then monitored continuously for potential adverse effects. It is common to find that some supplement manufacturers do not collect data and so have not reported adverse effects of their product — for example, gastrointestinal upset in some pets from glucosamine containing products. This is something that pet owners discover by chance and which resolves on discontinuation of the product, but may make its way only slowly into the medical literature.

Well-designed studies that help us understand what works and whether it causes harm are essential. We also would prefer not to spend money on non-effective strategies. Large scale clinical trials are the best way to get effective and safe products into our cats. So if you ever have the opportunity to participate with your cat in a clinical trial of a supplement, or to help fund research, you will help our aging cat population live comfortably without arthritis pain.

In the meantime, it remains trial and error and anecdote with our ouchy kitties. What matters most is that they seem to recover their

agility and essential “catness.” If they do this and have no side effects, then there is little reason not to continue giving the supplement.

But back to the placebo effect in animals — and whether there is such a thing or not. The placebo effect is an important feature of scientific studies, and a study is just not well regarded unless the product or procedure is compared with placebo treatment. “A placebo effect is any medical intervention that has a favorable, non-specific, psychological or psycho-physiological therapeutic effect, but without specific activity for the condition being treated” to quote one veterinary research group. (Jaeger et al, 2005).

In pain studies in humans, the percentage of people who report improvement in pain while taking the placebo pill or treatment is on average 30 percent (Price et al, 2008). One possible reason for improvement is that humans “expect” to get better and complex mental and physiologic explanations have been proposed. But your cat has no idea that the pill you are giving might or should make him better, you say. He has no such expectation.

However, veterinarians and pet owners alike must face this fact — in study after study of pain medications, the improvement in comfort or mobility reported by the dog owner ranges from 30 percent to 57 percent and that estimated by the veterinarian assessing the patient ranges from 40 to 45 percent in the placebo group!

We actually report an improvement in pain due to placebo that is greater than what humans report for themselves. In some cases, objective evidence (pain, weight-bearing and overall condition scores) demonstrates that the patient has NOT improved with the placebo treatment. This apparent improvement on placebo is known as the “caregiver effect” — and while it is a phenomenon that is not yet well

studied, there is widespread agreement among veterinary researchers that studies to prove the effectiveness of a variety of medications or treatments in animals must be conducted carefully and a successful treatment should prove better than how animals in the placebo group fare.

It is thought that the caregiver’s estimation of the degree of improvement is in fact due to our own expectations of the result of giving a medication, and so we over-interpret the result. But also,

many diseases and also veterinary therapies have the potential to be impacted by the ways a pet caregivers’ behavior may change. We ourselves may strongly influence the outcome when we treat our pets because of poorly understood mechanisms related to our interactions with them. This is an area of health care that deserves active research.

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The Aging Process in Cats

Our pets are living longer and healthier lives, but there is a lack of research on what constitutes healthy aging.



Likely, this will come as no surprise to readers, but according to recent research, cats are living longer and healthier lives than they were fifty years ago. In a study published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, researchers studied aging cats and concluded that improvements in healthcare and nutrition have helped to extend the life expectancy of the cat.

Today, it's common for cats to live into their late teens and even early twenties, and researchers estimate that more than 20 percent of owned cats living in the United States were 11 years old or older in 2011. It is estimated that a 21-year-old cat is the approximate equivalent of a 100-year-old person.

However, the study also uncovered the fact that while our cats are living longer, experts don't have a good handle on what healthy aging looks like. In an effort to provide better resources for veterinarians, researchers from various institutions compiled information from existing research to put together information on aging in cats, which was also published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*.

"An appreciation of normal



Our cats are commonly living into their late teens into their early twenties these days, so more research is needed to understand the normal aging process.

aging in cats is critical from both a clinical and research perspective. In this regard, it is imperative to be able to distinguish between what would be considered 'normal for age' versus unhealthy aging changes," wrote the researchers.

The 18-page review covers what is considered to be normal aging and physical symptoms that don't negatively impact the cat's quality of life — some weight loss, reducing grooming, a slightly thinned coat, etc.

While the paper is intended to be an informative guide for veterinarians, researchers acknowledge that there is much more we need to learn about aging cats. "Although we provide a thorough review of the current knowledge, it is clear that there is a great need for better understanding in this area," wrote the researchers.

You can access the study online at: jfm.sagepub.com/content/18/7/533.full.pdf+html — *Catnip* staff 🐾

ahead in catnip

Danger: Antibiotic Resistance

Medications designed to ward off feline bacterial disease may become ineffective over time. Here's why — and what you should know.

Domestic Violence and Pets

It can be challenging enough to escape an abusive relationship without adding a pet to the equation. Luckily, there is help.

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