

## **Feline Hypertension**

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a common condition in older cats suffering from kidney disease, hyperthyroidism and various heart diseases. These are the three most common causes of hypertension in cats. Symptoms may include dilated pupils and/or blood in the eye chamber. This is caused by a build-up of blood in the eye due to increased pressure and can lead to detached retinas and blindness if not treated quickly. Other symptoms of hypertension may include an increase in water consumption and increased urination due to kidney disease. A heart murmur caused by various cardiac diseases is another sign of hypertension. All of these symptoms are serious and should be given prompt attention by your veterinarian.

Kidney disease and hyperthyroidism are more common causes of high blood pressure in cats than heart disease. Aging kidneys tend to develop scar tissue and shrink causing less space for blood flow. This can subsequently cause blood to become backed up in the arteries, which causes the blood pressure to rise. Hyperthyroidism is caused due to an overproduction of thyroid hormone and is a common disease in geriatric cats. The thyroid regulates metabolism in the body and when the thyroid is producing excessive hormone and the body's metabolism is elevated, this causes the heart to pump blood even faster resulting in hypertension.

Hypertension can be tested for by your veterinarian. A sphygmomanometer is a device used to test a pet's blood pressure. Several tests may need to be performed to establish an average. Treatment of high blood pressure is normally approached by treating the underlying disease. Although kidney disease and heart disease cannot be cured, they can be significantly controlled with medications and this will normally lead to a more stable blood pressure level. Approximately twenty five percent of cats have hypertension associated with hyperthyroidism. Fortunately, hyperthyroidism can be treated and cured, which leads to a normal blood pressure. Humans have several medications available for the treatment of hypertension, but there are no drugs currently approved for the specific treatment of hypertension in cats.

There are many things we can do as pet owners to help prevent the conditions that lead to high blood pressure. It is very important that our pets receive a healthy, well balanced diet as recommended by your veterinarian. All of the diseases mentioned above can develop due to obesity. A healthy diet coupled with regular exercise is often all it takes to avoid your pet from becoming overweight. If your cat stays indoors, try to encourage play behavior that will help him to get the exercise he needs to stay healthy. Regular visits to the veterinarian are very important to monitor your cat's overall health and blood pressure!