

Your Aging Cat

With the advancements in nutrition and vaccinations available, cats can live a lot longer now days than even twenty years ago. Indoor cats can easily live to be 15 to 18 years old, some even passing the twenty year mark. That was not the case for previous generations of our feline friends. Because indoor cats are not exposed to the hazards of outdoor life such as feral cats carrying disease and avoiding cars, their wellness examinations are often neglected when they seem perfectly healthy. Older cats can exhibit subtle symptoms that are written off to "old-age". It is forgotten that there are physical causes of these changes, and when recognized early, the onset of disease can be significantly delayed. Detecting and treating age related problems can not only extend a cat's life but also improve the overall quality of their life. Wellness examination is the veterinary term for preventive medicine. In human healthcare, preventive medicine is a very important tool for detecting underlying disease such as diabetes, heart failure, and liver dysfunction. It only makes sense that as responsible and loving cat owners, we give our pets the same benefit.

When you take your cat in for a wellness exam, the veterinarian will want to know about any changes you've noticed in your cat's behavior. Changes in water consumption, grooming, activity, frequency of vomiting, loose stools, amount of urine production, and appetite are all very important to discuss with the doctor.

Anyone who has owned a cat for its lifetime is familiar with the appearance of the "skinny old cat". It is not normal for an older cat to lose interest in food and drop in body weight. In fact, by the time weight loss is observed, significant changes are already occurring. Usually, other symptoms preceded the weight loss. In some cases, the cat is still eating normally, or even ravenously, but they continue to lose weight. When a ten pound cat sheds two pounds, or twenty percent of its normal weight, that is the equivalent of a 200 pound man losing 40 pounds!

Some of the ailments and organ dysfunctions seen in older cats that can be treated, delayed, or prevented are listed here along with the symptoms associated with them. The symptoms alone are not a diagnosis of disease. Examinations, blood-work, and radiology are used in conjunction with history to confirm a disease.

Senility	Decreased appetite, aggression, inappropriate elimination, reduced grooming, howling and vocalization, wandering
Renal (Kidney) Failure	Increased water consumption, increased or inappropriate urination, weight loss
Inflammatory Bowel Disease	Vomiting or diarrhea, increased frequency or blood in stools, weight loss, inappropriate elimination
Hyperthyroidism	Weight loss despite normal to increased appetite, decreased grooming of the coat and nails, vomiting, pounding rapid heartbeat, increased aggression or affection
Diabetes	Increased thirst and urination, bladder infection, weight loss

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Arthritis, Degenerative Disc Disease	Muscle wasting due to decreased activity, excessive sleeping, avoidance of being petted, aggression, reluctance to jump and play, hiding
Periodontal Disease	Halitosis (bad breath), tooth loss, pain and pawing at face, decreased appetite and weight loss
Hypertension (high blood pressure)	Sudden blindness, symptoms associated with renal failure or hyperthyroidism

