Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine
Feline Health Center

Vol. 19, No. 10 ❖ October 2015

CatWatch®

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

INSIDE

Tracking Night-roaming Cats 2
Motion-sensitive cameras show they stick close to home and avoid coyotes.

Watch a Cat Video — Get Happy 2
A study finds positive feelings will outweigh guilt about procrastination.

How to Avoid Acid Reflux 3
Keep large and high-fat meals off the menu. They increase the risk.

Ask Elizabeth 8
The difficult choice: declawing or relinquishing to an animal shelter.

IN THE NEWS . . .

If He Doesn't Explore the House Like He Used To . . .

Some signs of stress in cats are obvious — loss of appetite, increased urine marking, hair loss from over grooming. Other signs may be more subtle and easy to overlook, according to a study by the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

A review by veterinarians there, published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery,* cautions owners to be aware of changes such as reduced exploratory behavior and hiding for long periods. "Regardless of how cats display signs of stress, it has a detrimental effect on their welfare," the researchers say.

A veterinary exam is the first step to rule out a medical problem causing a change in behavior. The Barcelona study also recommends enhancing the physical and social environment: Hide food in several places around the house. Provide toys that mimic prey, high shelves or cat trees safely away from stressors and calming synthetic feline facial pheromones. ❖

Special Renal Diets Can Lengthen Lives

The challenge is to recognize early signs of chronic kidney disease — increased water consumption and urination

Chronic kidney disease is common in older cats, with nearly a third of them over 12 affected and the prevalence increasing with age. The disease is incurable, involving the gradual loss of kidney function; however, owners can help slow its progression.

Studies show that therapeutic renal diets can lengthen patients' lives compared to those fed adult maintenance diets. "Nutritional management is the cornerstone of treatment of CKD in dogs and cats," says Meredith Miller, DVM, ACVIM, a lecturer in small animal medicine at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "Clinical trials have shown that the diets improve quality of life and at least double the survival times for dogs and cats with CKD."



Bigstock

Some studies have found Abyssinians to be more affected.

Loss of Function. The challenge for owners is recognizing the warning signs of the disease — increased water consumption and urination — early on. By the time more dramatic signs, such as vomiting, lack of appetite, weight loss and lethargy are evident, loss of kidney function may already have begun. When indicators of CKD appear in urine tests, 66 percent of kidney

(continued on page 4)

When They Ingest Non-food Objects

It's a rarity but can indicate a medical problem and also lead to potentially fatal GI blockages

Your cat's playing with shoelaces or nibbling on an old sweater may look YouTube-worthy, but the results can be decidedly different. If he ingests an odd object, it can lead to life-threatening internal blockages. In veterinary medicine, eating non-food items is known as pica.

"I had a patient who loved to lick plastic bags," recalls Pamela Perry, DVM, Ph.D., behavior resident at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "This was not a problem until the cat began chewing and ingesting the plastic. After that, her owners had to make sure all plastic bags were securely hidden from her."

Although pica is relatively uncommon in cats, when it does occur, it can be worrisome for owners because of its health risk. If your cat's menu includes any of the following items, your worry is justified. While damaged or destroyed possessions are annoying, they are replaceable. Your cat is not. Non-food oddities that cats have been known to ingest include:

- Wool sweaters
- Rubber bands
- Balloons
- Pencil erasers
- Shoelaces
- Pieces of cardboard boxes
- Wooden sticks
- Electrical cords
- Plastic

(continued on page 6)

CatWatch

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Bruce G. Kornreich, DVM, Ph.D., Dipl ACVIM

EDITOR
Betty Liddick

ART DIRECTOR
Mary Francis McGavic

ADVISORY BOARD
James A. Flanders, DVM, Dipl ACVS, Associate Professor, Clinical Sciences

Margaret C. McEntee, DVM, Dipl ACVIM, DACVR, Professor of Oncology

William H. Miller, Jr., VMD, Dipl ACVD, Professor, Clinical Sciences

Pamela J. Perry, DVM, Ph.D. Lecturer, Clinical Sciences, ACVB Behavior Resident

Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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

Belvoir

CatWatch® (ISSN: 1095-9092) is published monthly for $39 per year by Belvoir Media Group, LLC, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713. Robert Englander, Chairman and CEO; Timothy H. Cole, Executive Vice President, Editorial Director; Philip L. Penny, Chief Operating Officer; Greg King, Executive Vice President, Marketing Director; Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial Officer; Tom Canfield, Vice President, Circulation.
©2015 Belvoir Media Group, LLC.

Postmaster: Send address corrections to CatWatch, P.O. Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535.

For Customer Service or Subscription information, visit www.catwatchnewsletter.com/cs or call toll free: 800-829-8893.

Express written permission is required to reproduce, in any manner, the contents of this issue, either in full or in part. For more information, write to Permissions, CatWatch, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, Connecticut 06854-1713.

Free-ranging Cats Stay Close to Home and Avoid Coyotes

Students and volunteer "citizen scientists," using motion-sensitive cameras at more than 2,100 sites in six Eastern states and the city of Raleigh, N.C., collected millions of images of domestic cats roaming outdoors at night. The result of North Carolina State's exhaustive analysis of the images showed that the cats avoided parks and protected areas frequented by coyotes. Instead, they remained in residential areas, small urban forests and city trails.

"We detected cats 300 times more often in residential yards, where coyotes are rare, than in parks," says zoologist Roland Kays, Ph.D., with the university's College of Natural Resources and the N.C. Museum of Natural sciences.

"The more coyotes in an area, the less likely cats were to venture nearby," the study concludes. The significance relates to free-roaming cats' impact on wildlife, says Dr. Kays, lead author of the study reported in the *Journal of Mammology*. "Domestic cats are estimated to kill billions of birds and small mammals each year. Knowing where they hunt helps assess the risk to wildlife."

Recent estimates of the number of birds and mammals killed by cats have drawn heated response, often pitting owners against wildlife advocates. Two years ago, research from the Wildlife Management Institute, in collaboration with the University of Georgia and National Geographic, suggested that nearly one-third of free-roaming house cats are capturing and killing wildlife.

The North Carolina study is part of the eMammal project, enabling volunteers to collaborate with the Smithsonian Institution and N.C. State to document animal activity.

Watch a Video — Get Happy

Don't feel guilty if you peek at one or many of the 2 million cat videos on YouTube when you should be working. The emotional reward in positive feelings will outweigh anxiety, and you'll also have increased energy.

Those were among the findings of a survey from Indiana University Media School, published in *Computers in Human Behavior*. Other results showed viewers had fewer negative emotions, such as annoyance and sadness, after watching cat media. Mike Bridavsky, owner of the popular online cat personality Lil Bub, helped distribute the survey to 7,000 people via social media.

"Some people may think watching online cat videos isn't a serious enough topic for academic research, but the fact is that it's one of the most popular uses of the Internet today," says Jessica Gall Myrick, Ph.D., who conducted the study. She calls cat videos a pop culture phenomenon. "If we want to understand the effects the Internet may have on us as individuals and on society, then researchers can't ignore Internet cats anymore."



Mike Bridavsky/www.lilbub.com

Lil Bub, the smallest kitten in a feral litter discovered in a tool shed, is one of the stars among cat videos on YouTube.

Views of cat videos on YouTube alone reached nearly 25 billion in 2014, according to Reelseo.com, a video maketing guide. Dr. Myrick's survey found that Facebook, Buzzfeed and I Can Has Cheezburger were also favored sites.

Results of the research suggest that future work could explore how online cat videos might be used as a form of low-cost pet therapy, Dr. Myrick says. She donated 10 cents for each response to Lil Bub's foundation, raising almost $700. Lil Bub's Big Fund for the ASPCA has raised more than $100,000 for homeless pets with special needs. ❖

The Key to Avoiding Acid Reflux

Keep large and high-fat meals off the menu — they can increase the propensity for the disorder

Here's a compelling reason never to serve fatty meat scraps to your cat or kitten: You could put him at risk for acid reflux. Also known as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), acid reflux occurs when gastrointestinal fluids back up into the esophagus. The fluids, which include stomach acid, bile and pepsin, can cause inflammation and a burning sensation to this tube that connects the throat to the stomach.

"Feeding large or high-fat meals will increase the propensity for acid reflux. High-fat foods take longer to leave the stomach," says Meredith Miller, DVM, ACVIM, board-certified internist and lecturer in small animal medicine at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Acid reflux can strike any cat at any age, but kittens are at greater risk because their airways and esophageal sphincters are still developing.

Difficult Diagnosis. "Because it can be difficult to truly diagnose or is often treated empirically, the true prevalence of GERD is unknown in dogs and cats," Dr. Miller says. "However, if the acid reflux condition goes untreated, your cat's esophagus can become inflamed and damaged — a condition called esophagitis."

Some disease conditions can predispose your cat to GERD, such as inflammatory bowel disease or intestinal motility disorders. GERD and esophagitis can also occur secondary to giving your cat pills. "Cats in particular are notoriously difficult to pill, and the pills can remain in the esophagus for a long period of time if not followed by food or water. The medications can irritate the esophagus and lead to signs of reflux and esophagitis and in severe cases esophageal stricture. Doxycycline and clindamycin (both antibiotics) are especially likely to cause esophageal issues," says Dr. Miller.

When possible, a liquid medication can be used rather than a dry tablet. If tablets are dispensed, they should be followed by a treat or a syringe/dropper of water to ensure the pills traverse the esophagus and enters the stomach.



Bigstock

Acid reflux may cause excessive licking of the lips, along with drooling and regurgitating.

A cat suffering from acid reflux may display any or all of these signs:

- Excessively licking his lips
- Gulping
- Salivating and drooling
- Fever
- Suppressed appetite
- Weight loss
- Regurgitating food
- Halitosis (foul-smelling breath)

Surprisingly, acid reflux can occur when a cat is under anesthesia for a surgical procedure. "Anesthetic agents may reduce the lower esophageal sphincter pressure, causing an opening between the stomach and esophagus," Dr. Miller says. Cats who aren't prevented from eating and drinking water for a prescribed period before surgery are at risk.

For suspected GERD cases, veterinarians will take blood and urine samples for a complete blood count and urinalysis. They also will likely order X-rays to look for abnormalities of the esophagus, stomach and intestine. If an obvious cause cannot be found, empiric treatment — one based on clinical experience — may be instituted.

Specialist Referral. If veterinarians have concerns and think your cat needs further diagnostics or if he doesn't

(continued on bottom of page 7)

LOW-FAT, MODERATE-PROTEIN DIETS WORK BEST

Cats on the mend — or ones prone to acid reflux — fare better when they consume low-fat diets designed to strengthen their esophageal sphincters and moderate-level protein diets that seem to lessen the production of stomach acids. Meredith Miller, DVM, at Cornell also recommends:

- Feeding your cat small, frequent meals. This will help keep the stomach volume small and allow it to empty more easily.
- Discontinuing giving table scraps, especially fatty gristle, meat drippings and heavy cream. These trigger foods can spark an acid reflux episode.
- Serving your cat's dinner early so he has time to digest the food before going to sleep. His esophageal sphincter relaxes then, which can worsen acid reflux episodes the next morning.
- Providing clean water served in clean bowls daily.
- Working with his veterinarian to select quality commercial diets best suited to acid relfux.

KIDNEY... *(continued from cover)*

function is already gone. When the most commonly used indicators in the blood become abnormal, about 75 percent of function is gone.

"The goal for owners is to change the cat's diet when they first see signs of kidney disease," says nutritionist Joseph Wakshlag DVM, Ph.D., at Cornell. "Whenever your cat is drinking and urinating more, see the veterinarian for blood work and a diagnosis."

Two important caveats: Commercial senior diets are not the same as therapeutic diets and do not help manage CKD, says Dr. Wakshlag, president-elect of the American College of Veterinary Nutrition. And eating a renal diet will not prevent CKD. "There is no reason to start feeding a kidney diet just because a cat is older," he says.

Therapeutic renal diets generally contain less protein, phosphorous and sodium than adult maintenance food. They are also more calorie-dense and contain more potassium, alkalizing agents, B-vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids. Some of the essential ingredients and their roles include:

- *Lowered protein* at 26 percent, or so, reduces stress on the kidneys and limits the breakdown of protein in the bloodstream into toxins that make cats feel sick and lose appetite. The reduction requires a delicate balance, Dr. Wakshlag says. "You don't want to restrict protein too much in cats because they have a higher protein requirement." Inadequate protein can lead to skin and coat problems, muscle loss, impaired wound-healing and immune functions.
- *Lowered phosphorus* in the food is directly correlated to an increased lifespan. High phosphorus concentration in the blood coupled with calcium loss increases the release of the parathyroid hormone that contributes to calcium and phosphorus leaching from bones. Excess phosphorus and calcium also collect in tissues, causing mineralization of the kidneys and other organs, with toxic effects.
- *Additional potassium.* "Potassium is an electrolyte that helps cells function properly," Dr. Wakshlag says.
- *Reduced dietary sodium* helps prevent hypertension (high blood pressure).
- *Alkalizing agents* avoid a buildup of acid, which can tax kidney function.
- *Omega-3 fatty acids* and B vitamins may help maintain heart health.

Cats on a renal diet must eat adequate amounts to get the benefits of each nutrient, Dr. Wakshlag says. "Cats are more finicky, and we tend to have more problems with them eating." He recommends that owners discuss increasing their cat's appetite with a nutritionist through homemade diets or making food more palatable by warming or adding flavorings. Appetite-enhancing drugs include cyproheptadine and mirtazapine, which has been shown to increase weight in cats with CKD in a study at Colorado State.

STUDY INVESTIGATES STEM CELLS' ROLE IN HEALING

Studies on kidney disease at Colorado State are focusing on whether stem cells can reduce kidney inflammation in cats. "Any cat over 10 is likely to develop kidney disease, and by age 15, I'm generally very surprised if it hasn't," says researcher Jessica Quimby, DVM, Ph.D., ACVIM.

Injecting stem cells to combat inflammation and scarring is experimental, Dr. Quimby says, but because studies show that adult mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) promote healing and reduce inflammation, they are central to studies treating many chronic inflammatory, degenerative and autoimmune diseases. "We're trying to fight kidney inflammation and fibrosis with stem cells, not grow new kidney tissue," she says.

Her research focuses on differences in stem cell effectiveness when MSCs are injected into the bloodstream, near the kidney or the abdomen. Three studies using intravenous injections have showed mild improvement, Dr. Quimby says.

Uremic Gastritis Study

In dogs with with chronic kidney disease, vomiting, reduced appetite and weight loss result partly from stomach acid and uremic toxins causing stomach inflammation and ulcers. "Consequently, patients often are treated with antacids and gastrointestinal protectants," Dr. Quimby says. Cats with CKD show the same signs possibly for different reasons.

Analysis of stomach fluid and stomach lining from cats who died of CKD found no inflammation or ulcers of the stomach, Dr. Quimby says, "but we did find mineralization of the stomach," related to excess phosphorus and hyperparathyroidism from CKD. "This may lead to different reasoning about why cats lose appetite and could lead to better treatment," both medical and nutritional.

Supplying fresh water with additional bowls and fountains can increase the intake of fluids to help impaired kidneys.





Bigstock

Because of the prevalence of chronic kidney disease in older cats, veterinarians recommend that those 10 years of age and older have twice-a-year exams, including blood and urine tests.

Veterinarians diagnose CKD with blood tests and urinalysis. The tests can reveal elevated phosphorus, high levels of creatinine, a by-product of muscle metabolism excreted by the kidneys, and the amount of blood urea nitrogen that comes from the waste product urea.

They assess CKD's severity using staging guidelines, ranging from mild stage one, when cats may not show signs, to severe stage four, when 90 percent of kidney function is lost.

Gauging Prognosis. "The stage of the disease gives the most information about prognosis," says Dr. Miller. "The higher the stage, the shorter the survival time. I see severe CKD as a cause of death in both cats and dogs, but cats often have stable CKD for months to even years before the disease progresses to severe. I've managed some cats with a good quality of life for over four years."

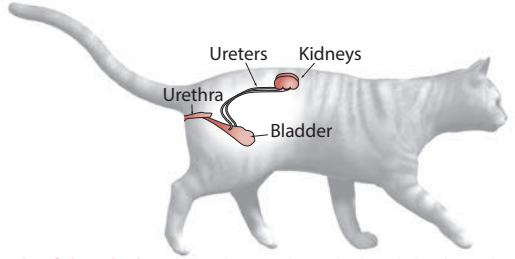
Treatment can be complicated by common co-diseases, including anemia, hyperthyroidism, hypertension and heart disease, and underlying problems such as urinary infections.

CKD is managed with supportive care, including potassium supplements, anti-nausea drugs, acid reducers, fluid therapy and feeding tubes. Increasing fluids offsets dehydration and helps impaired kidneys concentrate urine. Subcutaneous fluid injections help, as does feeding canned food, supplying fresh water, adding water bowls or fountains and flavoring water with low-or-no-salt broth.

HOW THE KIDNEYS FUNCTION

The kidneys accomplish many crucial tasks, even when one or both are failing:

- They filter toxins created by the breakdown of proteins, which are excreted in urine. The waste products include urea produced by the liver and creatinine converted by the muscles. When the kidneys malfunction, the toxins circulate in the bloodstream.
- They filter and regulate blood and recycle nutrients, constantly regulating the balance between water and electrolytes (sodium, calcium, potassium and phosphorus).
- They regulate blood acidity and pressure.
- They produce the hormone erythropoietin that helps create new red blood cells, which is why anemia often accompanies advanced kidney disease.



Marty Bee

The feline kidneys are located just behind the last rib.

NOT ONLY THE OLD ARE AFFECTED

While chronic kidney disease is common among older cats, an estimated 1 to 3 percent of the general feline population also develops CKD. Young cats can develop the disease, usually from a congenital problem. Male and female cats seem to be equally susceptible.

Some studies have found that Maine Coon, Abyssinian, Siamese, Russian Blue and Burmese breeds are more commonly affected, but those findings haven't been consistent across all studies.

The causes of chronic kidney disease aren't always evident but can include cancer, kidney infections and blockages and advanced dental disease.

Some veterinary hospitals around the country offer hemodialysis and kidney transplants, but they're rarely used for feline CKD because of the cost, the limited number of centers and stringent qualifications.

In part because older cats frequently develop CKD, the American Association of Feline Practitioners and the American Animal Hospital Association advise that cats 10 years of age and older have twice-a-year veterinary exams, including blood and urine testing.

In addition, Dr. Miller says she can't stress the importance of owners of pets with CKD scheduling routine follow-up exams enough. "Most pets with mild CKD can be checked every four to six months, but if they have severe CKD, they should be seen every two to three months."

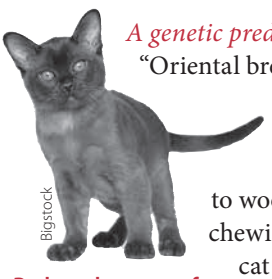
Diligent follow-up can help identify emerging complications of kidney disease that are better treated before they make cats feel sick, Dr. Miller says. "Developing a strong partnership with a veterinarian can help you make the best decisions to keep your cat feeling well with CKD for as long as possible." ❖

PICA *... (continued from cover)*

The cause of cats' dietary indiscretion is a mystery, even to veterinarians. Possible reasons for pica include:

An attempt to correct an inadequate diet. "Some cases of pica may be due to a nutritional deficiency or dietary imbalance — for example, a lack of roughage," says Dr. Perry. "Switching to a high-fiber commercial diet may help." Check with your cat's veterinarian for a recommendation on a special diet.

An unidentified health problem. "Cats exhibiting pica may have underlying nausea, parasites or other disorders," Dr. Perry says. Medical causes such as GI, metabolic or neurological disease should be investigated before treating pica as a behavioral problem.



Bigstock

Perhaps because of a genetic predisposition, Oriental breeds such as Burmese are more prone to wool-sucking and chewing than other breeds.

A genetic predisposition. "Oriental breeds such as Burmese and Siamese cats are more prone to wool-sucking and chewing than other cat breeds," Dr. Perry says.

Major life changes. Have you recently moved to a new house, had a child, experienced a death or divorce, or adopted a new pet? "Compulsive ingestion of non-food items can develop from anxiety or stress," Dr. Perry says. "In addition, stress may exacerbate pre-existing pica in cats." Cats are creatures of routine; chewing might serve as a self-soothing technique for those whose routines have been disrupted.

Compulsive personalities. "Some animals are genetically predisposed to developing compulsive disorders if they are repeatedly exposed to conflict, frustration or anxiety," says Dr. Perry.

"Compulsive disorders occur most often in cats who live exclusively indoors, presumably because indoor cats get less mental stimulation and physical exercise," according to the ASPCA.

Attention-seeking. Your cat may interpret scolding as attention, believing it's better than none at all. If engaging in pica results in social interaction between you and your cat, the behavior may be reinforced. Pets may also learn to engage in undesirable behavior when their owner is absent.

Youthfulness — curiosity can kill the kitten. "Pica in young animals may be due to exploratory behavior," says Dr. Perry. In fact, pica is most commonly seen in young cats. The pica behaviors may begin as play with the kitten first investigating and chewing on non-food objects. Eventually, he may start ingesting them.

"The ingestion of non-food items can lead to toxicity, asphyxiation from ingesting plastic and intestinal blockages requiring surgery," Dr. Perry says.

8 SIMPLE STEPS TO STOPPING PICA

1. **Prevent access to tempting items** by hiding them. Even if your cat doesn't have pica, it's a wise idea to keep items like yarn, rubber bands, and tinsel and Venetian blind cords out of reach. Instead, offer a variety of safer toys.
2. **Play with your cat.** He may be bored or lonely. When you're home, set aside 10 minutes twice a day for interactive playtime.
3. **Make his environment more interesting** by providing fish tanks and treat balls to keep him entertained and cat trees to climb. Build or buy an outdoor enclosure where he can watch birds and chase insects. Train him to wear a harness and go for walks.
4. **Block his view of the outdoors** if seeing roaming cats causes him stress.
5. **Make appealing items unappealing.** Apply strong-smelling or foul-tasting aversives to objects your pet loves to chew on. Cayenne pepper, Bitter Apple, Bitter Cherry spray, hot sauce or other condiments can serve as deterents.
6. **Try behavior modification.** If your cat's pica is stress or frustration related, a board-certified veterinary behaviorist may be able to help. Many offer remote consultations and can work together with your veterinarian to solve the problem. Veterinarians can often provide referrals.
7. **Catch him in the act** with a loud noise or a spray of water. If possible, don't let your cat see that these surprises come from you. He may associate you with the noise or spray and become fearful of you. Then praise him extravagantly when he leaves a non-food item alone.
8. **Be patient.** Because pica behavior varies in cats and every environment is different, there's no "one-size-fits-all-cats" cure.



Bigstock

Making life more interesting, such as training your cat to go for walks on leash, may help prevent pica. An enclosure where he can safely enjoy the outdoors would be a bonus.



Bigstock

Deflated balloons are among the many objects ingested by cats prone to pica.

"If owners know or suspect that their cat has consumed a non-food item, they should call the veterinarian and give as much detail as possible regarding the item consumed."

"Repeated ingestion of non-food items, especially those that are dangerous to the cat, warrants veterinary attention," Dr. Perry says. "If an animal is persistently trying to ingest items and must be supervised constantly, consider seeking the help of a veterinary behavior professional."

Try Diversions. One recommendation is to divert your cat's need to chew toward safer items. Provide an indoor garden, including cat grass and/or catnip, so that he has something appropriate to ingest.

"Cats can be fed free-choice, part of which can be from food-or treat-dispensing toys," Dr. Perry says. While feeding according to a cat's discretion can increase the risk of obesity in food-oriented cats, switching to a high-fiber, low-calorie cat food can help avoid excessive weight gain.

However, behaviorist Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., professor emeritus at Cornell, points out that, "Euthanasia for destruction of property or because owners cannot afford the GI surgery bills is much more of a threat to the cat's life than obesity."

About Dr. Perry's case of the cat who ate plastic bags: It later played a role in her cure. "When this cat went through a chronic illness — which was stressful because of frequent treatments at the veterinary hospital — she appeared to be looking for something to lick," Dr. Perry says. "I gave her a plastic Elizabethan collar. The plastic was hard enough that she could not consume it, yet it seemed to satisfy her need to lick." ❖

MAYBE HOME ENVIORONMENT *ISN'T* TO BLAME

Research on pica in cats has found that the behavior does not appear to be the result of a suboptimal environment, early weaning or increased appetite. A report on the "Characterization of pica and chewing behaviors in privately owned cats: a case-control study," published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* and based on research at the University of Montreal Veterinary Teaching Hospital, sought answers about pica via owner questionnaires.

Emphasis was placed on the item ingested, behavioral development, environment and general health. Owners of healthy cats not exhibiting pica were recruited as a control group.

The behavior was found to most commonly involve shoelaces or threads, followed by plastic, fabric, rubber, paper or cardboard, and wood. Some cats ingested specific items but only chewed others. A positive association was found between sucking fabric and ingesting it. The prevalence of self-sucking behavior was significantly higher in the pica group than the control group.

Cats with pica were less commonly fed *ad libitum* (having food available at all times), compared to cats in the control group. And cats with pica vomited significantly more often than control cats.

ACID REFLUX... *(continued from page 3)*

respond to therapy, they may refer you to an internal medicine specialist to perform esophagoscopy to rule out other conditions with similar signs, such as the presence of a foreign body in the esophagus, or a mouth or throat disease. During this procedure, a device with a small camera (endoscope) scans the lining of the esophagus to reveal inflammation, bleeding or other problems.

"Esophagoscopy is the best way to diagnose esophagitis secondary to the acid reflux condition," Dr. Miller says. X-rays and contrast studies, which use substances to enhance the image of structures and fluids in the body — may not be conclusive.

The most effective treatments for acid reflux may involve correction of any underlying cause. Adjustments to your cat's diet and feeding regimens are also commonly necessary.

While it is safe for you to cope with heartburn and indigestion by taking over-the-counter antacids, some contain saliclyates, ingredients that are unsafe for cats to consume. Consult your cat's veterinarian about safe antacids and supplements, including digestive enzymes. He or she may also prescribe drugs known as gastrointestinal pro-kinetic agents, designed to move stomach contents smoothly through the intestines and bolster the gastroesophageal sphincter. "We also sometimes use motility modifiers to speed up the time it takes for the stomach to empty. They include metoclopramide or cisapride."

Fortunately, Dr, Miller says., "With proper dietary and medical intervention and a careful search for underlying diseases, most cats with acid reflux can be successfully managed or even cured." ❖



Elizabeth

Elizabeth is thankful for the assistance of ***Bruce G. Kornreich, DVM, Ph.D., DACVIM,*** *Associate Director of the Cornell Feline Health Center, in providing the answer on this page.*

PLEASE SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS

We welcome questions on health, medicine and behavior, but regret that we cannot comment on prior diagnoses and specific products. Please write *CatWatch* Editor, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713 or email catwatcheditor@cornell.edu.

COMING UP . . .

- COUNTER SURFING
- GLAUCOMA
- HOME HOSPICE
- VESTIBULAR SYDROME

Balancing the Difficult Choice of Declawing or Shelter Surrender

Q *I was very surprised to read that you consider declawing an option (as a very last resort) in a recent issue of* CatWatch. *I consider this practice to be inhumane, and it should never be an option, in my opinion.*

There are many more no-kill shelters around now than there were in the past. Most use foster homes, so that room in the shelter is not an issue. Anyone who will keep a cat only if he is declawed is not fit to own cats. Such a person should seek a different type of animal to adopt. They should return their cats to shelters rather than have them declawed.

Can you give me some insight regarding why you feel this way about this important issue?

A Thank you for contacting us regarding your concerns. It is clear that you are passionate about the welfare of cats, and I appreciate your passion and hope you understand that we share your concerns and are working hard to improve the welfare of all of our feline friends.

The issue of declawing is quite controversial, and I completely understand that there are many people who share your sentiment that it should never be done. I understand the origin of these feelings and that they are in the best spirit of doing what these individuals feel is best for cats. I respectfully disagree that owners who want to pursue declawing as an option to address destructive behavior should instead return their cat to a rescue facility, if all other options (as mentioned in the article you are referring to in November 2014, "A New Emphasis on the Risk of Declawing") are tried without success.

The shelter cat population is a major problem in the United States (and other countries), and many (if not most) shelters are operating at capacity or beyond capacity. This situation may make conditions less that ideal with respect to the welfare of resident animals in these shelters, and overcrowding is often particularly intense in no-kill facilities. It is true that foster programs have provided some relief with respect to the overcrowding problem in shelters, but in spite of the excellent work of these programs, overcrowding of cats in humane shelters continues to be a major issue.

While I understand your strong feelings regarding the issue of declawing, it is my view that the desire not to subject cats to this procedure must be balanced with the knowledge that returning cats to facilities that are already significantly stressed may, in many cases, be detrimental to the well-being of the feline population.

"I respectfully disagree that owners who want to pursue declawing as an option to address destructive behavior should instead return their cat to a rescue facility . . ."

I view my position as one of choosing the lesser of two evils, with one being having a very small percentage of cats declawed and retained in loving homes, and the other being the return of these cats to shelters, which will result in exacerbation of overcrowding in these facilities and, ultimately, the euthanasia of more shelter cats. Destructive behavior by cats is a common reason for them to be relinquished to shelters, and I think that it is crucial that we do everything that we can to decrease the cat population in shelters, even if it means declawing a very small percentage of cats.

I realize that this view may be controversial, and I wish that we never had to declaw any cats, but I also feel that my position is realistic and I hope you can appreciate that while you may not agree with me, I truly have the best interests of all of my feline friends in mind in formulating it.

I hope, too, that you can appreciate my philosophy, as I have spent many hours contemplating the practice of declawing. I respect where you are coming from and thank you for your passion and intelligent debate on this important issue.

—Best regards, Elizabeth ❖

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor
CatWatch®
535 Connecticut Ave.
Norwalk, CT 06854-1713
catwatcheditor@cornell.edu

SUBSCRIPTIONS

$39 per year (U.S.) • $49 per year (Canada)
For subscription and customer service information,
visit www.catwatchnewsletter.com/cs
or write to: *CatWatch*, P.O. Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535.
CALL TOLL FREE: 800-829-8893