Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine
Feline Health Center

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CatWatch®

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



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IN THE NEWS . . .
Searching for Genetic Clues in Siamese and Related Breeds

The Winn Feline Foundation has awarded a grant to help University of Missouri researchers determine the genetic cause of amyloidosis. Their work could lead to a test to identify affected cats, allowing "breeding away" from heritability in future generations.

Amyloidosis is found in Oriental shorthair, domestic shorthair, Siamese, Burmese and Abyssinian breeds. The disease develops when the abnormal protein amyloid, a fibrous substance, collects for unknown reasons in tissues and organs. The disease can become fatal if amyloid is deposited in the tissue of critical organs, such as the kidneys, liver or heart. The disease also affects humans.

At the request of several concerned cat breeders, the foundation established a special donation fund for research on amyloidosis in the "slinky breeds" this past summer. Principal investigators are Leslie Lyons and Barbara Gandolfi, both Ph.D.'s at MU. ❖

Shelter Alternatives Can Save Lives

They help owners keep rather than surrender their cats, providing counseling, food banks and veterinary care

A family member left the door open, and in a flash the cat ran outside where a dog attacked and badly injured him. His owner loved the cat but was out of work and had no money to take him to the veterinarian. She approached the shelter, sobbing, prepared to give up her cat to be euthanized. Then she met Lori Weise.

We can help you, Weise told her. We'll pay for your cat to get care. Weise is the founder of Downtown Dog Rescue (DDR), which despite its name, also helps cats. The organization helps low-income and homeless people in South Los Angeles care for and keep their pets.



FieldHaven Feline Center

Rascal, formerly feral, now neutered and vaccinated, works as an adopted Rodent Ranger, Page 5.

Vital Services. Weise, author of the new book *First Home, Forever Home: How To Start and Run a Shelter Intervention Program,* is among those leading

(continued on page 4)

Simple Steps to Ease Their Arthritis

Diet, exercise, pain management and alternative therapies can go a long way in making our cats more comfortable

As the cat population ages, with some living into their 20s, the number of cats diagnosed with arthritis is growing as well. Advances in veterinary medicine and better reporting may have contributed to what Banfield Pet Hospital's 2015 State of Pet Health report found was a 31 percent increase in feline arthritis in the last five years.

Whatever the reason, this much is certain: early detection and owner management of their cat's pain can provide a better life for cats with this incurable disease.

"More severe cases may involve multiple levels of pain management, from diet and exercise plans to medications, nutraceuticals and other alternative therapies," says Liz Wilcox, DVM, at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Helping Mobility. Owners may need to make changes in the home to accommodate cats with limited mobility. They may also choose to explore integrative treatments such as laser therapy and may need to adjust to changes in their cats' personality as a result of pain. But their commitment — and in some cases veterinarians' prescribing multiple pain medications

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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/.

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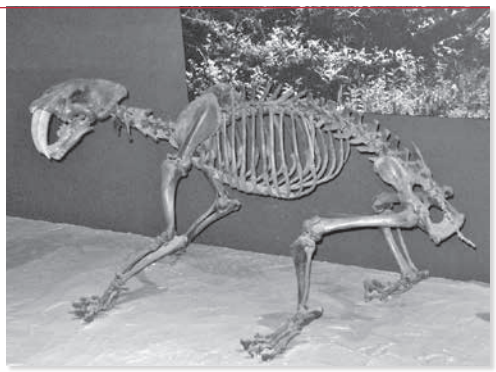
SHORT TAKES

In Prehistoric Competition for Food, Cats Prevailed

A team of scientists analyzing more than 2,000 fossils has made a surprising discovery, one they describe as "contrary to current expectation." More than the effect of physical size and climate change, they found evidence indicating that early members of the cat family, arriving in North America from Asia, contributed to the extinction of 40 ancient dog species.

One reason was the carnivorous animals' rivalry for prey as food in the same areas, the researchers say, adding that another could simply be that the cats were more efficient predators than most of the extinct species in the dog family. The results of the study show that competition for food "can actively drive the displacement and extinction of entire lineages," says the report in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. The website PNAS.org provides details, including other carnivorous species present in North America.

Researchers included scientists from Gothenburg, Sweden; São Paulo, Brazil; and Lausanne, Switzerland. "We usually expect climate changes to play an overwhelming role in the evolution of biodiversity. Instead, competition among different carnivore species proved to be even more important for canids," says lead author Daniele Silvestro, Ph.D., at the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences at the University of Gothenburg.



Scientists studied the Smilodon in researching early competition for food. Though called a "saber-toothed tiger," the Smilodon wasn't closely related to tigers. A skeleton at the National Museum of Natural History shows strong forelimbs and long upper canine teeth adapted for what the museum describes as "precision killing." The largest type of Smilodon weighed a robust 620 pounds.

Cat Treat Recall

Blue Buffalo Co., Ltd. has voluntarily recalled a cat treat out of "an abundance of caution." The company says a single bag of Blue Kitty Yums Chicken Recipe Cat Treats may have contained low levels of propylene glycol, which the FDA does not permit in cat food.

The synthetic liquid substance is used to make polyester compounds and de-icing products. High doses in cats may cause depression, incoordination, muscle twitching and excessive urination. Owners should contact a veterinarian if their cats have consumed the product and show any of those signs.

The treats, packaged in 2-ounce, plastic stand-up pouches, were distributed nationwide in the U.S. and Canada through pet specialty stores and online. ❖

Cornell Seeks Samples for Coronavirus Study

Virologist Gary Whittaker, Ph.D., a professor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, and his colleagues in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology are asking veterinarians and cat owners throughout the U.S. for clinical samples to help with research on the feline coronavirus.

Certain strains can trigger feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), a viral disease that is the leading infectious cause of death in cats under the age of 2 years. The way the usually mild coronavirus develops into often-fatal FIP remains a mystery. Dr Whittaker is in need of additional samples to refine hypotheses regarding mutations in the viral genome that lead to FIP.

The Cornell Feline Health Center, Morris Animal Foundation and Winn Feline Foundation are among sources that have provided support for Dr. Whittaker's research on feline coronavirus.

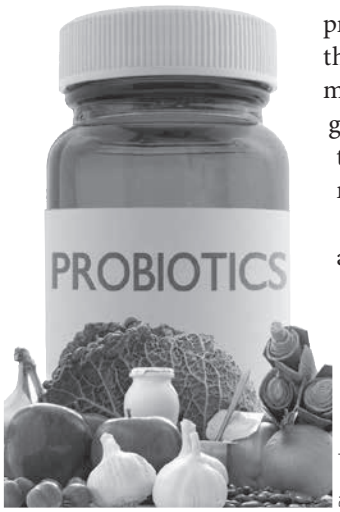
The next step is to evaluate samples, including blood and fluid from cats suspected of having FIP, those who have succumbed to the disease, and from healthy feline housemates of the above two groups. Details on cost-free shipping of the samples are available at fcovstudy@cornell.edu.

Are Probiotics Right for Your Cat?

They may enhance digestion and immunity, but the burgeoning industry is largely unregulated

Your cat's gastrointestinal tract, like yours, is home to billions of bacteria. A healthy GI tract allows the absorption of food, while excluding toxins and disease-producing organisms. Yet malfunctions can sometimes occur. Perhaps your cat slipped outside and ingested a mouse or bird containing parasites that can cause vomiting and diarrhea.

Given the growing interest in probiotics — live bacteria primarily intended for digestive health — you might wonder if these tiny organisms can help your cat. Probiotics now account for 20 percent of annual sales in the $541 million pet supplement market, sharing the No. 2 spot with hairball products. (Omega fatty acid supplements are No. 1.)



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Probiotics are live bacteria primarily marketed for digestive health.

Research Continues. Studies on probotics' efficacy are ongoing. Accurately labeled probiotic supplements have been shown to boost the population of resident beneficial bacteria while lowering the number of disease-causing bacteria. A peer-reviewed Nestle Purina study on GI bacteria in kittens and puppies found probiotics to be effective in regulating the immune system.

However, nutritionist Joseph Wakshlag, DVM, Ph.D., associate professor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, issues a caution about probiotic products: "Anyone can take some bacteria, package it and put it up for sale, so quality control is lacking."

The FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine doesn't regulate supplements like probiotics as it does pharmaceuticals, so the consumer doesn't know if bacteria in their supplements are alive or dead, says Dr. Wakshlag, president-elect of the American College of Veterinary Nutrition. "This is an important distinction because live bacteria can stimulate the immune system to release more antibodies, as well as improve the GI flora [bacteria]. Dead bacteria may stimulate the immune system but will not change the gut flora."

As part of its effort to improve animal supplements, the National Animal Supplement Council, an industry group, initiated a certification program for members meeting quality standards.

Standardization has been a problem in the industry. A 2009 study at Ontario Veterinary College found that only two out of 25 probiotics were labeled properly and had the "good bacteria" that they claimed to contain. "That's how haphazard these products can be," Dr. Wakshlag says. "There are also no clinical trials or efficacy trials required for these products. But as long as the product labels are not making any outrageous claims, the manufacturers are free to sell their product — and pet owners are free to buy it."

In some cases, consumers might not know the number of bacteria in each capsule or even if they're an appropriate type. "For example, the products could contain other bacterial strains than the one that they are selling which is usually a good bacteria like *Lactobacillus,*" says Dr. Wakshlag.

On the other hand, while he hasn't heard of any miraculous recoveries, Dr. Wakshlag says, "I have heard that probiotics have helped in some cases. Pet owners try probiotics when gastrointestinal problems surface in their cat. They may be looking to get a handle on their pet's diarrhea and/or vomiting. The cat's gut bacteria may be out of balance, and they are seeking to re-establish the 'good' bacteria and return their pet to regularity."

Dr. Wakshlag recommends probiotics for mild GI problems. "They are another tool in the veterinary toolbox. Perhaps they are more like a chisel than a hammer, but they are a tool nonetheless." ❖

PROBIOTICS AREN'T FOR ALL CATS, ALL CASES

Many owners like to feel they're enhancing their pets' health with probiotics, but their first course of action should be a veterinary consultation. The supplements may enhance immunity and digestion — but not in every cat, says nutritionist Joseph Wakshlag, DVM, Ph.D., at Cornell. "As an example, owners may simply add probiotics to their pet's diet without first knowing what is causing their pet's diarrhea."

The cause could be stress, inflammatory bowel disease or something else entirely. "Some veterinarians prefer to hold off on recommending probiotics in instances of inflammatory bowel disease," Dr. Wakshlag says. "If the immune system is already revved up, it may not be advisable to use probiotics, which can further stimulate it.

"However, kittens may have depressed immune systems due to their immunity not being fully developed. Similarly, older cats may have depressed immune systems because of the general aging process. In these cases, probiotics can be helpful."

ALTERNATIVES... *(continued from cover)*

the development of what are called shelter intervention programs, or SIPs. They offer ways to help keep pets out of shelters and in the homes they already have with people who love them.

"These programs are providing a vital service to pet lovers and to the humane shelters that are inundated by the burgeoning population of companion animals that are in need of homes and care," says cardiologist Bruce Kornreich, DVM, Ph.D., Associate Director of the Cornell Feline Health Center.

Successful pet retention programs can help people keep their pets in a number of ways, says Holly J. Putnam, DVM, a faculty clinician with Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. They may provide food banks, training and behavior counseling, grants for veterinary assistance or boarding of a pet after a housefire or owner illness, and microchips and collars with identification to help reunite pets and owners if the pet becomes lost.

At the Jacksonville Humane Society in Florida, Louisiana SPCA, Downtown Dog Rescue and other shelters and rescues throughout the country, SIPs help people by:



Destinie Hammond, Louisiana SPCA

"The Louisiana SPCA provides training, food, litter, bottles and formula, a carrier, medical support and extremely cute kittens," says Lynn Coatney of New Orleans, who's fostered more than 125 neonatal kittens.



Amy Pierce, Jacksonville Humane Society.

"If you really love your pet, we will do whatever we need to do to keep that pet with the people who love him," says Denise Deisler, director of the Jacksonville Humane Society.

- Paying license fees or fees to reclaim pets from the shelter
- Paying for veterinary care
- Providing pet food, bedding or other needs
- Operating community clinics that offer low-cost or free spay/neuter surgery, vaccinations and microchips
- Repairing or installing fences or gates
- Helping find pet-friendly housing and paying the pet deposit on a new apartment.

"It's kind of a quiet storm that's been moving, and now it's coming in full force," Weise says. "People are starting to say, 'Hey, this does make sense. Why haven't we been doing this?' Sometimes people just need to know what to do and where to go."

Often, pet owners simply don't realize they have options. A shelter or rescue counselor can help them make an action plan, refer them to resources or coach them through conversations with landlords. When that's not enough, a counselor may help them review alternatives or suggest ways to raise money to help cover costs. That might include applying for a grant, starting an online GoFundMe account or selling items at a swap meet.

"For us, it's almost anything goes," says Jacksonville Humane Society director Denise Deisler. "If you really love your pet and want to keep your pet, we will do whatever we need to do to keep that pet with the people who love him."

In many situations, Weise and Deisler emphasize that the cat owners needing help are "people who just run into circumstances they didn't foresee and weren't equipped to deal with," Deisler says.

Emergency Boarding. Recently, the Jacksonville shelter was contacted by a man serving in the Navy who had gotten short notice that he was being deployed overseas and then stationed in Washington, D.C. He had two cats, and he was panicked, because he didn't know anyone who could take them. "We got them into a boarding kennel, and when he returned and got settled in D.C., he drove back down to Jacksonville and got his two cats and took them back with him," Deisler says.

Foster homes are another important aspect of keeping pets out of shelters. Foster families take in pets who need a place to stay for a day, a week, maybe months, depending on the situation. They raise kittens until they are old enough to be adopted and give special-needs cats such as seniors or shy animals a softer landing spot than a noisy, crowded shelter.

Foster care is a critical component of the shelter system, says Rich Avanzino, the recently retired president of Maddie's Fund, which supports and promotes life-saving shelter programs. He envisions foster care becoming not just an adjunct to

shelters but also a gateway to adoption for people who want to test-drive pet ownership before jumping into it. "Some people say, 'I don't know if I have time. I do too much traveling.' They get involved in the experience and then they say, 'This is part of my life. It's part of what I want to do.' "

'Kitten Krewe.' Lynn Coatney of New Orleans has been a foster mom to more than 125 neonatal kittens from the Louisiana SPCA for more than a decade. She says her role in the program known as the Kitten Krewe (a nod to the city's famous Mardi Gras clubs) prepares them to be the best cats they can be.

"My husband often refers to them as 'Coatney Custom Cats,' as each kitten played with and exposed to children, adults, and other animals," she says. "The Louisiana SPCA provides foster training, food, litter, bottles and formula, a carrier, medical support and extremely cute kittens. I bottle-feed, transition them to wet and dry food, socialize them and nurture them."

Grants from foundations and individuals often provide help in supporting shelter alternatives. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals awards grants to nonprofit organizations for what it affectionately calls "Peticaid." Up to 60 percent of DDR's budget is funded by the Found Animals Foundation. The Banfield Foundation provides veterinary assistance to pet owners in need.

The Requirements. It takes more than happy thoughts and pixie dust to get SIPs off the ground. Many require time and effort to establish and maintain, Dr. Putnam says. Among other things, they need people who can write grants, stock food banks and counsel owners. "Sometimes, despite the shelter's best effort, these programs may not work for every animal and owner, depending on their particular situation," she says.

But when SIPs work, the benefits are many. People are able to keep their pets. Pets are less at risk of entering shelters and are not exposed to the physical and behavioral stress of being in one. And shelters have fewer animals entering their facilities. That means resources can be redirected to other animals in need.

It's likely pet retention programs will play a larger role in the future, Dr. Putnam says. That's because fewer kittens are entering shelters, thanks to spay/neuter programs and kittens being cared for in foster homes until they're placed. That allows shelters to focus on the problems of adult animals in shelters who are there because of health or behavioral problems or owner issues such as poor health or loss of housing or jobs.

"Shelters are beginning to look at these reasons for relinquishing adult animals and instituting programs which give owners an alternative to giving up their pet," Dr. Putnam says. "These programs create a win-win situation because the owner and animal may be able to stay together." ❖

OTHER EFFORTS TARGET FERAL CAT POPULATIONS

It's not only pet cats who benefit from shelter intervention programs. Most feral cats taken to shelters don't come out again. Unadoptable, they are usually euthanized.

Trap/neuter/return (TNR) programs run by individuals or rescue groups have led to what are called shelter/neuter/return (SNR) programs. Shelters take in feral cats, spay or neuter them, notch an ear — to indicate they have been sterilized and vaccinated — and return them to their colony location.



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Individuals and rescue groups operate trap/neuter/release programs to keep feral cats out of shelters.

These programs have been the source of controversy, but the tremendous dedication and efforts of those involved with these programs cannot be denied.

With its program Future Five, Alley Cat Allies is helping five shelters implement TNR or SNR programs in their communities. According to the organization, a shelter-sponsored TNR program — or even just underwriting a spay/neuter program for community cats — will almost always cost less than catching, receiving, housing, feeding and then euthanizing the cats.

"We have proven that when shelters stop the cycle of impounding and killing healthy cats, particularly feral cats that are unowned and live in colonies, cats can be protected and resources are redirected to life-saving programs," says ACA president Becky Robinson.

When shelters simply remove cats from the environment, it creates a vacuum, and more cats move in, Robinson says. Removing cats and euthanizing them doesn't stop the reproduction of the cats in a community, she says, but spaying and neutering them and leaving them in place can. "This is a new way of coexisting," she says. "It's humane, and the animals are no longer breeding."

Other programs such as FieldHaven's Rodent Ranger in Lincoln, Calif., the San Diego Humane Society's Wild at Heart and Lexington Humane Society's Horse Country Barn Cats in Kentucky give feral cats a safe haven and a job keeping barns, sheds and other buildings pest-free.

Cats in the Rodent Ranger program, for example, are adopted out after they have been have been spayed or neutered and vaccinated.

ARTHRITIS... *(continued from cover)*

— can make cats more comfortable. "It is difficult to quantify the level of pain cats are experiencing with arthritis," says Dr. Wilcox, who studies the genetic bases of feline disease at the Cornell Veterinary Biobank, a repository of DNA and medical information. "However, if cats are displaying changes in behavior that may be attributable to arthritis, they are very likely to be experiencing significant pain."

An estimated 60 to 90 percent of cats develop arthritis. "The incidence increases with age, but a direct cause and effect relationship hasn't been established," Dr. Wilcox says. Cats with previous trauma or conditions such as hip dysplasia typically develop arthritis at a younger age. Although any breed of cat may develop the disease, arthritis that develops secondary to hip dysplasia is well documented in the Maine Coon.

Arthritis is a degenerative condition of any freely moving cartilage joint, including hips, elbows, knees, lower back, shoulders and ankles. "However, rarely will an arthritic cat show overt lameness," Dr. Wilcox says. "The most important diagnostic tool is the owner's ability to detect the subtle behavior changes that may indicate arthritis in their cats and then inform their cat's veterinarian." The signs include:

- *Decreased mobility.* Arthritic cats may jump less frequently or jump smaller distances with less ease.
- *House soiling.* Arthritic cats may be unable to posture normally in a conventional litter box and may miss the box or dismiss it entirely because of difficulty entering and exiting.



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Although any breed can develop the disease, arthritis secondary to hip dysplasia is well documented in Maine Coons.

- *Personality changes.* A typically easy-going cat may become irritable, less interested in being petted and may exhibit increased or decreased vocalization.
- *Reduced activity,* playing less and/or sleeping more.
- *Neglected grooming,* leading to an unkempt appearance.

A thorough orthopedic examination can help determine the cause of the behavior changes and identify the affected limbs or joints, but it can sometimes prove difficult. "Cats are often nervous and tense during examinations and may disguise their pain levels," Dr. Wilcox says. Fortunately, proper handling techniques specific to cats are becoming more widely recognized and practiced.

While X-rays are important in diagnosis, the images may not reflect the degree of pain a cat is experiencing, Dr. Wilcox says. "Cats showing mild degenerative joint changes on radiographs may experience significant pain and vice versa."

Owners will need to devote time and financial commitment to treatments. They can include:

- *Weight management.* Overweight or obese cats will have additional strain on affected joints. "So a cat who has mild arthritis may improve substantially with weight loss alone," Dr. Wilcox says. "However, overweight cats should lose

FIVE ESSENTIALS TO IMPROVE DAILY LIFE



Thermo-Kitty Bed, K&H Pet Products

Several firm beds around the house can relieve stress on arthritic joints, and if one is heated, so much the better.

1. **Exercise:** When an arthritic cat is overweight, the additional strain on already compromised joints compounds the problem and the pain level. "Exercise in the form of play is excellent for improving joint range of motion and weight loss," says Liz Wilcox, DVM at Cornell. "Techniques that allow cats to stretch and balance can also be very effective. A veterinary rehabilitation specialist can help develop a precise exercise plan to suit your cat's needs."
2. **Bedding:** A variety of firm beds can relieve stress on their joints. And if one of those beds is heated, so much the better. "Senior cats are heat seekers," Dr. Wilcox says. "They may be utilizing their own form of heat therapy!"
3. **Litter boxes:** Limited range of motion makes it difficult to use boxes. Dr. Wilcox's advice: Use uncovered litter boxes with a lower entry cut-out and homemade "backsplashes." Some owners make them from plastic place mats and duct tape.
4. **Ramps:** "Cats appreciate being able to perch up high," Dr. Wilcox says. "Ramps and the strategic placement of supportive objects of varying heights can allow arthritic cats to continue to climb to their preferred resting areas."
5. **Special diets and supplements:** Many senior cats with arthritis have concurrent illnesses, such as kidney disease, that require carefully formulated diets. Certain weight-loss diets can aid in the management of more than one condition. Before making any dietary changes, be sure to consult your cat's veterinarian.

only 1.5 percent or less of their body weight per week. Weight loss that occurs too rapidly can be detrimental to your cat's health due to an abrupt change in metabolism." One example: hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver).

◆ *Physical therapy.* Cats often exercise on their own terms but can be guided by veterinarians trained in physical therapy and rehabilitation techniques, Dr. Wilcox says. Often physical therapy treatments are recommended more frequently initially; the frequency and duration can later be adjusted according to the cat's tolerance and response. Therapies offered at the Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Service at Cornell and other universities and specialty clinics include massage, exercise using ramps and perches, and — for some special cats — underwater treadmills.

◆ *Pain management.* Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), are often very effective in decreasing pain and inflammation associated with diseased joints in human and feline patients. However, the risk of side effects can be greater in cats, and NSAIDs should be administered under veterinary supervision, Dr. Wilcox says.

"Senior cats often have concurrent illnesses, such as chronic kidney disease, that may worsen with the use of NSAIDs. Therefore, laboratory testing prior to and during treatment as well as monitoring appetite and thirst are essential." Cats taking NSAIDs may experience GI problems, mainly loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhea.

Additional medications that may be prescribed include gabapentin, tramadol, buprenorphine, amitriptyline and amantadine. "These medications generally provide pain management that is inferior to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs; however, they carry a much lower potential for serious side effects, " Dr. Wilcox says.

In some cases, veterinarians may use lower doses of multiple medications in combination to help decrease side effects. "Each medication often works in a different way to combat pain," Dr. Wilcox says, explaining that the combinations cause synergistic actions, helping each other to work better.

Injectable polysulfated glycosaminoglycan, derived from bovine tracheal cartilage, may improve arthritis symptoms but has not been FDA-approved for cats. It's marketed as Adequan for dogs and horses, intended to stimulate cartilage repair. Veterinarians can prescribe it "off-label" for cats, meaning at their discretion. The supplement works best when used early in the course of arthritis, Dr. Wilcox says.



Michael P. Carroll, Cornell

"If cats are displaying changes in behavior that may be attributable to arthritis, they are very likely to be experiencing significant pain," says Liz Wilcox, DVM, at Cornell.

Human over-the-counter medications for pain are generally unsafe for cats. In fact, Dr. Wilcox points out that one regular Tylenol can be lethal to cats.

◆ *Alternative treatments.* "In general, alternative arthritis therapies are not as well-researched as nutrition, weight loss and NSAIDs," says Dr. Wilcox. "However, acupuncture has been growing in popularity and has a body of evidence to support its use in management. Massage, heat, laser and ultrasound therapy can also be effective, but these techniques may require adaptation for cats."

◆ *Supplements.* "Of the nutraceutical supplements studied, omega 3 fatty acids seem to have the most consistent positive effect," says Dr. Wilcox. "Glucosamine also may provide mild positive benefits for a period of time." And while herbal therapy is becoming more common, Dr. Wilcox cautions, "It is imperative to first consult with your cat's veteriarian, as many herbs can be toxic to cats."

The prognosis for arthritic cats varies with the severity of the disease and their response to therapies, Dr. Wilcox says. "The encouraging news is that this is a condition that owners can really help their cat's veterinarians recognize and diagnose. Many of the interventions to mitigate pain can be accomplished at home, and treatments will often make cats feel young again and may help them regain their desire and ability to partake in some of their previous playful activities." ❖

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Ask your cat's veterinarian for a recommendation for a rehabilitation specialist. The American College of Veterinary Sports Medicine lists facilities and individuals offering services at http://vsmr.org.
- You can find certified acupuncturists at www.ivas.org or www.tcvm.com/Resources/FindaTCVMPractitioner.aspx.
- The American Association of Feline Practitioners offers a brochure on NSAIDs in pain management at www.catvets.com/public/images/Practice%20Guidelines/Client%20Brochures/NSAIDsHandout.pdf.



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.*

'Kitty Proof' the House to Minimize Common hazards

Q *I recently adopted a male kitten from the local shelter and I'm in the process of "kitty proofing" my house. I've been doing some reading about things in my house that can be dangerous to my new feline friend. Could you give me some advice about how to make my house safe for this cute little guy?*

A First, thank you for your wonderful decision to take in a kitty in need of a home. People like you make the lives of so many cats better in so many ways, and I think it is great that you have done this.

It is true that there are some common dangers in the household that can be mitigated by awareness, so let me mention a few of these. Cats, as you know, love to play with string, ribbon, dental floss and other linear objects. A common emergency in feline medicine is what is called a linear foreign body. This is a situation in which a cat ingests such an item, often resulting in the obstruction and/or strangulation of the intestines. This condition can be potentially life threatening and requires immediate intervention, ranging from endoscopy (the passage of a flexible camera down into the gastrointestinal tract) to abdominal surgery to remove the offending foreign body and restore normal intestinal function.

It is important to make sure that cats do not have access to linear objects. If any such items go missing and a kitty is showing signs of GI distress (vomiting, anorexia, diarrhea), make sure to seek veterinary assistance immediately and let your cat's veterinarian know about the missing item. A related problem with another linear object is the chewing of electrical cords, so please make sure that your cat does not have access to these sometimes tempting, but potentially fatal household items.

A number of plant species, including lilies, poinsettias, azaleas, dieffenbachia, are toxic to cats. Depending upon the specific species, ingestion of the flowers, stems or the whole plant may cause a variety of problems, ranging from relatively minor GI upset to potentially life-threatening kidney or neurologic disease, so make sure that your kitty does not have access to any of these. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals maintains a very good list of plants that are toxic to cats at: www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/cats-plant-list.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs can also be very toxic to cats. Acetaminophen ingestion is a medical emergency, and informing the veterinarian about the possibility of exposure to this common drug can be life saving. Of course, it is important that you keep all medications in a secure location and that you do not lose track of any doses that may accidentally fall to the floor where your kitty may ingest them.

A number of common foods can also cause problem in cats, ranging from mild GI upset to potentially life-threatening conditions. Ingestion of garlic, chives, grapes, alcohol, tuna (in large quantities), chocolate, liver (in large quantities), chicken/turkey bones, and a number of other foods can result in illness, so it is best to feed your kitty only food that is specifically formulated for cats. Please speak with his veterinarian about other potential foods to avoid and about any possibility of ingestion of these foods in the event of a medical problem.

You should also make sure that your kitty doesn't have access to rodent poison, antifreeze and flea and tick products intended for dogs. Never use dog products on cats! Of course, it is also important to make sure that there are no heavy items that your kitty can inadvertently knock down upon himself during his everyday wonderings through the house.

Although this is not a comprehensive list, I hope that it is helpful. Please check with your cat's veterinarian about other potential concerns, and best of luck with your new ball of fur!

—Sincerely, Elizabeth ❖

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 ...

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OILY HAIR COATS

❖

INHALANT ALLERGIES

❖

GALLSTONES

❖

LASER THERAPY

❖

CORRESPONDENCE

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