THE FELINE HEALTH CENTER • CORNELL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

CatWatch

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

THIS JUST IN

Blood in Urine Samples

Its presence may affect urinalysis results

Urinalysis (UA) is an integral part of clinical veterinary practice, and the use of dry reagent urine-testing strips is an essential component of UA in most veterinary practices.

Hematuria (blood in the urine) is commonly encountered, and the effects of hematuria on dry reagent strip results and on urine specific gravity (SG) have not been previously investigated in a controlled fashion.

A recent study published in the *American Journal of Veterinary Research* using feline and canine blood added to pooled feline and canine urine samples, respectively, suggests that any degree of blood contamination in the urine of either species affects not only the dry reagent score for blood, but also for bilirubin, pH, and ketones. Scores for glucose were not affected. The ability to evaluate urine concentrating ability was unaffected in hematuric samples except except for those with a fairly high urine concentration.

This study highlights the fact that any degree of hematuria can affect dry reagent results on feline and canine UA, and that hematuria may result in high urine protein readings on these tests in both species. ■

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Smart Pet-Insurance Decisions

Avoid disappointment—choose the plan that fits you

In August, the American Veterinary Medical Association encouraged veterinarians to educate their clients about pet health insurance, saying it "may be an important approach for the veterinary profession to continue to provide high-quality veterinary services."

That's because, as with human medicine, cutting-edge expertise, technology, and medicines are available, but the cost can put needed care out of reach. According to the American Pet Products Association, the cost of veterinary care increased 6.1% in 2018 and is expected to go up another 4.8% in 2019. The need for pet health insurance—and the need for pet owners to understand what it can offer—has never been greater.



Veterinary care involves multiple staff and advanced diagnostic equipment, all of which adds to the cost.

Cost vs. Coverage

There are many pet health insurance companies to choose from, and their rates can vary significantly. The North American Pet Health Insurance Association (www.naphia.org) lists 20 insurers in its roster. Remember that monthly premiums should not be your only deciding factor and that possible out-of-pocket costs, policy caps or limits, and any excluded benefits should be carefully considered.

Out-of-pocket costs include deductibles and co-insurance. Co-insurance is the

Insurance continues on p. 3

Thoughts on Laser Play

The fun may morph into frustration

Laser pointers catch your cat's attention, and rare is the cat who doesn't chase that red dot. But it may not be all that fun in the end. While a bouncing laser causes the cat to leap and run, it doesn't give the cat a satisfying finale: He can't catch that beam, and he may end up feeling frustrated.

Most cat play is based on instinctive activity, like hunting, and cats enjoy the satisfaction of catching the object they are chasing.

Instead of a laser, consider interactive toys that can be captured, like a small "fishing pole" with a feathery "critter" on the end. The bouncing object more closely mimics the movement of prey. ■



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A toy your cat can grab is often more satisfying.

Pets May Reduce Need for Pain Medications

They increase positive feelings in seniors with chronic pain

An article in the June 2019 *Journal of Applied Gerontology* looked at using pets to help senior citizens with pain. Cognitive behavioral self-management strategies are used to help seniors deal with chronic pain, and this study looked to see if pets might be incorporated into these strategies with a positive end.

Researchers examined the sleep, mood management, relaxation/distraction, physical, behavioral, and social activities of four focus groups composed of people over 70 years of age. The goal was to see if pets could help to reduce dependence on pharmaceutical management of pain.

"Overall, pet owners reported that their animals increased positive feelings, had a soothing presence, encouraged activity through walking, motivated activity even when they were in pain, facilitated socializing, and encouraged a regular daily routine and sleep routine. They described their pets as sources of comfort, patience, support, and protection. Importantly, pets 'kept them going' and helped them to avoid a downward spiral of inactivity, which can lead to mood problems and more pain," according to the study.



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Having pets as a senior can cause some complications as well, however. Concern about the costs of pet ownership, providing for a pet once the owner has passed on, and being capable of providing the necessary care can cause anxiety. Still, pets provided more pluses than minuses and can be an important part of the strategy for senior human health care. ■

Pets May Help Older Adults Manage Chronic Pain, Medscape, July19, 2019

Acute Upper Respiratory Infections Study

A study looked at the addition of a herpes medicine

Upper respiratory infections are common in cats. Treatment can be frustrating, especially since the primary culprit is often feline herpes virus (FHV). While FHV infections aren't usually life-threatening, infected cats sneeze, may develop corneal ulcers, and have nasal discharge and conjunctivitis. Currently, treatment is aimed at supportive care, with antibiotics added if there are signs of secondary bacterial infections.

A study from University of California at Davis published in the June 2019 issue of the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* investigated the addition of the antiviral drug famcyclovir to an FHV treatment regimen that included the antibiotic doxycycline.

Twenty-four kittens with naturally occurring upper respiratory infections were included, with random groups receiving either doxycycline alone or doxycycline plus famcyclovir. All the cats were sneezing and over 90% had nasal and/or ocular discharges. About a third of the cats were positive for feline herpes virus.

The hope was that the addition of famciclovir would resolve clinical symptoms more quickly and completely than doxycycline alone, but that was not the case. This was a limited study with only a third of the cats testing positive for herpes infections, so it is not surprising that adding famciclovir did not help. More studies—especially looking at clinical signs that reflect herpes infections such as conjunctivitis and corneal ulcers along with general respiratory signs—are recommended. ■



J Feline Med Surgery, June 27, 2019. Effects of famciclovir in cats with spontaneous acute upper respiratory tract disease

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Insurance continued from p. 1

percentage of the covered fee that you need to pay. For example, a 70/30 policy means that the insurance will pay 70% of the allowed amount (which may or may not match your veterinarian's bill, more on that later), leaving you responsible for the remaining 30%. Consider that many cancer treatments, for example, can ultimately cost $10,000 or more, and that a 30 percent co-insurance on $10,000 is over $3,000, not counting any remaining deductible amounts you need to pay.

Deductibles generally range from $50 to $1,000. Carefully read your contract to see how the deductible applies. Some policies issue a per-incident deductible instead of an annual deductible. With a per-incident $250 deductible, for example, you must pay the first $250 of every claim you submit. With an annual $250 deductible, you pay the first $250 for the entire year's claims.

Be aware that most veterinarians require you to pay for service up front and be reimbursed by the insurance company. While a few companies will reimburse the veterinarian directly, few practices will accept that as payment.

Tricky Traps

Check the policy to find out if the insurer reimburses based on actual cost/fee or on a "reasonable and customary" fee schedule. Actual cost refers to what is marked as the charge on your bill when you leave the veterinarian's office. A fee schedule is a ballpark pre-determined payment, usually based on geographic area. It is also a good idea to check whether the policy covers drug costs.

No pet health insurance company will cover pre-existing conditions, and most have a waiting period before coverage kicks in. This means if you sign up for a policy with a 14-day waiting period on Monday and Fluffy is diagnosed with cancer on Tuesday, that policy will not cover Fluffy's cancer treatment.

Some insurers have incident caps (maximums), annual caps, and lifetime caps on how much they will pay out. These caps may keep your premium down, but overall caps can be frustrating. If chemo treatments, for example, cost $10,000, but your per-incident cap is $5,000, you will pay the remaining $5,000 yourself.

Be sure that you understand what your responsibilities are, too. Not only do you have to pay the monthly premium, but a company may require proof of routine veterinary care. For example, most policies state that they do not provide coverage for a disease that is preventable by vaccination. However, some policies do not list which vaccines are required, so be sure you ask and get the answer in writing.

Also, be aware that not all policies cover the veterinarian's office examination fee. Some only cover things like diagnostic tests, surgeries, and medications. The examination fee can range from about $50 to over $250 for a specialist. If you're the type of person who frequently takes your cat to the veterinarian, you may want to consider a policy that covers examination fees.

Keep in Mind

One of the most important things to look for is "continual coverage for chronic conditions." Without this stipulation, you could find yourself out of luck if your cat gets cancer or diabetes. Make sure that a company will not cancel your policy because your cat becomes chronically ill and that the coverage will continue in full if this occurs.

Prepare for increases in premiums as the years go on. Although most policies have limits on ages they will cover, the scope of veterinary technology continues to expand, and the costs associated with care continue to rise, making pet health insurance a very attractive option.

Finally, when applying for your policy, make sure you answer all the insurer's questions (i.e. cat's age and medical history) honestly. All policies require a veterinary exam before being approved, and failure to fulfill this requirement may result in a company refusing to cover veterinary fees or, in the worst-case scenario, policy holders being charged with insurance fraud. ■

Insurance Jargon

It's important you understand what the terms in your policy really mean

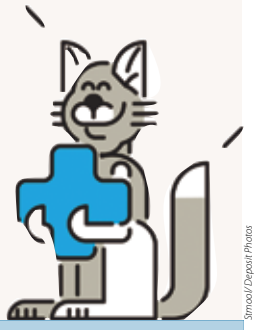
Illness coverage takes care of veterinary expenses when your cat is sick. Beware of specific policy limitations.

Accident coverage covers your pet if he is injured, such as can occur after being struck by a motor vehicle or falling from a high place. Accident-only policies are generally less expensive because the chances of your cat being hurt in an accident aren't as high as him becoming sick.

Drug/prescription coverage isn't always included. It's impossible to predict which medications your cat may need or the cost of drugs. Avoid limitations here.

Alternative therapy and herbal treatments are covered in some plans, but most offer it as a rider. Policies can be very specific as to what they will cover so look for things like hydrotherapy, acupuncture, and chiropractic treatment, which are being more commonly recognized as viable rehabilitation and pain-control therapies.

Wellness coverage refers to routine care, including vaccinations, heartworm tests, neutering, and dental cleaning. This is usually only offered as a rider, and there's a lot of variation among insurers in this regard. Many policies have caps on the amount they'll pay for wellness coverage.



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Exclusions will be spelled out in your policy. Read this section carefully before you sign, and question any vague descriptions. If possible, get your questions answered in writing (one of the great things about email—you can print out the answer and tuck it away with your policy).

Not Really Insurance Options

Some companies offer "discount cards" for veterinary services for a low monthly fee. These are usually not insurance companies. Rather, these are entities that negotiate with the veterinarians to accept the card. For many clinics, you may be able to negotiate this rate on your own, especially if you are a frequent customer.

IBD Is Chronic GI Inflammation

Frequent vomiting is a telltale sign kitty is ill

It's a common misconception that vomiting is normal in cats. Cats should not routinely vomit more than once per week. The possible causes include everything from gastrointestinal (GI) parasites to dietary indiscretion to foreign bodies. In middle-aged to older cats, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a frequent culprit.

IBD refers to a group of connected gastrointestinal disorders that manifest as vomiting, diarrhea, decreased appetite, and weight loss. In IBD, the GI mucosa (the lining of the intestinal tract) at varying sites within the tract is infiltrated with white blood cells that cause inflammation. In response to this, absorption of nutrients is impaired, GI bacterial populations may change, intestinal motility may be altered, and inflammation of other organs, like the liver and the pancreas, may occur.

The cause of IBD is unknown, although allergies to diet, alterations of GI bacterial populations, genetic predisposition, and other environmental factors have been proposed as causes. The symptoms of IBD may include:

- Weight loss
- Lethargy
- Decreased appetite
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Bloody stools

Diagnosis

The diagnosis of IBD can be challenging and often involves a series of tests. Initially, a thorough physical exam will be performed by your veterinarian and a history will be taken. Since food allergy is a possible underlying cause for IBD, knowing your cat's dietary history is an important part of that history.

Initial testing may include a complete blood count, chemistry panel, a thyroid level, urinalysis, fecal evaluation, and blood pressure measurement. Chest x-rays may be recommended to rule out the spread of cancer (i.e. lymphoma) from the GI tract.

If the initial testing does not reveal an obvious cause, the next step is often abdominal ultrasound, which allows a thorough evaluation of the internal organs. The radiologist will evaluate for thickened/abnormal bowel and will look for changes in the lymph nodes and internal organs. In some cases, aspirates of enlarged lymph nodes and /or masses in the abdomen may be obtained during the ultrasound.

A GI panel, which evaluates several parameters including cobalamin (vitamin B12), folate (vitamin B9), and pancreatic enzymes, is also commonly obtained. Cobalamin is a critical vitamin for many systems, particularly the formation of red blood cells and the health of nerve tissue.

In IBD, the distal small intestine (ileum) is often inflamed, and as a result, cobalamin is not absorbed from the diet normally, resulting in low cobalamin levels in the blood. A 2006 study carried out at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University showed that 49 out of the 80 cats diagnosed with IBD in the study had low cobalamin levels.

Folate levels may be decreased due to poor absorption secondary to IBD or elevated if small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) of non-beneficial GI bacteria occurs.

Pancreatic enzymes are also commonly evaluated, as IBD may occur in combination with pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) and hepatitis (inflammation of the liver), a condition called triaditis. Triaditis requires extensive investigation and care, as many cats with it are extremely ill.

The gold standard for diagnosis of IBD is biopsy, which can be done by endoscopy or exploratory surgery. In the case of endoscopy, a small, flexible fiberoptic camera is passed into the GI tract while the cat is under anesthesia.

Everything is visually inspected and then small biopsy samples are taken using specialized instruments. In rare cases, the diagnosis of IBD can be missed if endoscopic biopsy thickness is not sufficient, but this technique is generally considered to be a viable option to obtain intestinal biopsies.

Full thickness biopsies can only be obtained during an exploratory

What You Should Know

- A cat who vomits more than once a week may be battling IBD
- Middle-aged and older cats are more likely to have IBD
- Allergies, disrupted GI bacteria, genetic predisposition, and environmental factors are considered probable IBD causes
- A definitive diagnosis requires biopsies
- Anticipate changes to your cat's regular diet, as IBD disrupts the absorption of important nutrients
- Probiotics/prebiotics may be recommended
- IBD requires lifetime medication and regular checkups at the veterinary clinic
- Ruling out cancer may be necessary



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A lethargic cat who is vomiting and not eating should be evaluated for IBD.



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Expect your veterinarian to do a thorough initial examination and take a full history from you about what you're seeing.

abdominal surgery (sometimes called a laparotomy). This requires general anesthesia and facilitates more in-depth exploration of the abdomen for evidence of disease in other organ systems. Biopsies of other organs, including the liver and abdominal lymph nodes, may also be obtained during laparotomy.

Treatment

The treatment of IBD must be tailored to each individual cat, but generally includes some combination of dietary modification, anti-inflammatory medication, probiotics, vitamin supplementation, and, in some cases, chemotherapeutic agents.

Parasites such as hookworms and roundworms can incite significant inflammation in the bowel, so eliminating this cause is always a good idea. Remember that one negative fecal evaluation does not mean a cat isn't infected with parasites. Common cat parasites may intermittently shed eggs into the feces, so even if a fecal examination is normal, deworming anyway is a good idea and is relatively inexpensive.

Antibiotics (usually metronidazole and/or tylosin) may be helpful, as certain bacteria are believed to play a role in IBD. Metronidazole is an antibacterial and antiprotozoal drug, but it also has immunomodulating effects that can decrease inflammation in the intestines. Tylosin is another option, although its bitter taste means it should be compounded for use in cats, usually made into a capsule.

Dietary modification is important as well. Food allergy may play a role in IBD, and proteins are usually the cause of dietary allergies, so trying a novel protein source diet or a hydrolyzed protein diet might improve clinical signs. The food should be highly digestible and palatable to encourage acceptance.

The ideal diet is low in fat, moderate to high in protein, and moderately low in carbohydrates. The newer, hydrolyzed protein diets are made by breaking down protein into such small fragments that the immune system does not recognize them, minimizing inflammation.

Anti-inflammatory drug choices may include the steroid prednisolone and other immune-modulating drugs. Prednisolone, a corticosteroid, is usually the initial drug of choice. Most cats tolerate corticosteroids well, without significant side effects. These drugs suppress the immune system and dampen inflammation, the primary problem in IBD. Side effects include increased drinking, urination, and appetite, as well as weight gain and behavioral changes.

At higher doses, prednisolone can induce diabetes and possibly pancreatitis. In cats with heart disease, prednisolone may predispose them to developing heart failure, although this is controversial.

Most cats tolerate prednisolone well. In cases where side effects are severe or heart disease or diabetes are concerns, budesonide, a locally acting corticosteroid, may be administered.

Cobalamin is often poorly absorbed from the inflamed intestine, and it is critical for several functions in the body. When given as an injection, cobalamin can act as a mild appetite stimulant, which can be beneficial in IBD patients.

In cats that do not respond to steroids or that become refractory to them with long-term usage, chlorambucil or azathioprine, both chemotherapeutic agents, may be tried. These must be handled with gloves, and pregnant women should not administer them due to risk to the unborn fetus. Because of their potential negative effects on bone marrow, blood counts must be monitored while a cat receives these medications, as they can develop low red blood cell and white blood cell counts.

Bottom Line

Cats with IBD can be tricky to manage, and they often require repeated veterinary visits and close monitoring, but most can be managed with diligent care and coordination with a veterinary professional. ■

A Lifelong Commitment

IBD treatment is lifelong and can be challenging at times. Frequent veterinary visits are needed to monitor weight and response to therapy, so it is vital to establish a trusting relationship with your veterinarian.

IBD vs. Lymphoma

The symptoms of IBD overlap with gastrointestinal (GI) lymphoma (a cancer of the lymphatic system that affects the GI tract). Distinguishing between the two requires intestinal biopsies. In some cases, abnormal concentrations of certain B vitamins in the blood may suggest IBD, as the inflammation seen in IBD often occurs at the site in the GI tract where B vitamins are absorbed. It is possible that IBD can eventually lead to GI lymphoma, likely as a result of chronic inflammation.

Probiotics and Prebiotics

Because the gastrointestinal microbiome (bacterial population) is usually disturbed in cases of IBD, prebiotics and probiotics should be considered as a supplement.

Probiotics are live microorganisms that can help establish and maintain healthy GI bacterial populations. Since the gut flora is disturbed in IBD, probiotics can be very beneficial. Prebiotics are complex carbohydrates that help maintain normal, healthy bacterial populations by encouraging their growth.

Probiotics only offer dietary support. It is important to get an accurate diagnosis and discuss the use of probiotics with your veterinarian. Ask your veterinarian for product recommendations.

Blood Types and Donor Cats

Cats have blood types that should often not be mixed

Does blood type really matter other than as a matter of curiosity? Yes! Any time a cat needs a blood transfusion, that cat ideally should receive blood of the same type.

Blood types in cats are labeled as A, B, or AB. Cats with type B blood usually have high levels of natural antibodies to type A blood, which means even one incorrect transfusion may result in a reaction that causes the rapid destruction of red blood cells.

Cats with type A blood have low levels of naturally occurring antibodies to type B, so they usually can accept one transfusion of type B without problems. They may subsequently produce antibodies to Type B blood, however, and a second transfusion may lead to a reaction with destruction of blood cells.

Cats with the rare AB blood type do not usually have antibodies to either type A or B, and can usually receive transfusions from either type A or type B donors with no problem.

Blood type incompatibility can be a problem for kittens who have a different blood type than their queen. Once they start nursing, they can develop fatal destruction of red blood cells (see upcoming article on neonatal isoerythrolysis).

Type A Is Prevalent

The frequency of blood types varies both among cat breeds and geography. Over 90% of all cats are type A, including nearly all domestic shorthair and longhair cats, Siamese, and other Oriental breeds. Siamese, Burmese, Russian Blue, Ocicat, and Oriental Shorthairs are believed to be only type A.



tkronalter9.gmail.com | Depositphotos

Most other cats are type B, with a lower prevalence of type AB. A survey by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania showed that the breeds with the highest percentage of type B cats were the Devon Rex and British Shorthair. Ragdolls had the highest prevalence of type AB in this survey.

A Winn Feline Foundation report looked at the geographic distribution of blood type of cats in North America: "The frequency of the feline blood groups in non-purebred cats varies both by breed and by location. In North America, the lowest frequency of type B cats is in the Northeast and North Central/Rocky Mountain regions. Higher frequencies of type B cats are found on the West Coast, peaking in the Northwest with 6% type B cats. Frequencies also vary worldwide, with portions of England and Australia having up to 35% type B cats."

Donor Cats

You may want to consider having your cat "work" as a blood donor to help save the lives of other cats. Some hospitals collect and maintain blood supplies or have in-house donor cats, while others have blood donors on call to come in and donate when needed. Most donor cats are used no more than four times a year, so there's often need for another.

Ideal donor cats weigh around 10 lbs. provided that their body condition is healthy. Donor cats should be young adults, generally 1 to 8 years old. Ideally, they should be friendly cats with a low stress level. They should be healthy, vaccinated, and not on any medications other than flea, tick, and/or heartworm preventives.

Donor cats should be indoor-only cats and should only live with other indoor-only cats to avoid exposure to many pathogens. They should have been tested for and be negative for feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus as well as mycoplasma.

At the time of a donation, blood tests will be done to evaluate your cat's kidneys and liver, and blood counts will be done to make sure she is healthy. Cats are often sedated or anesthetized to donate blood to minimize stress, and about 40 to 50 ml of blood is withdrawn. The donor cat is then given intravenous fluids to help restore her fluid balance and monitored carefully during recovery.

Some hospitals offer special perks for donor cats, like free screening bloodwork and possibly free vaccines or preventive medications. And, of course, these cats and their owners get tremendous gratitude from the owners of the cats whose lives they helped save. ■

Want to Know Your Cat's Blood Type?

You can get your cat blood typed, and many clinics will do this to have donor cats of known blood type available. The Cornell Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory can do blood typing using a blood sample collected by your veterinarian. You can read more at http://bit.ly/CornellBloodType. If you'd like to do blood typing via a genetic test, ask your veterinarian about the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory, University of California, Davis. Go to http://www.vgl.ucdavis.edu/.



The Cornell Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory requires only a tiny 1 to 3 milliliters of whole blood to test for blood type.

Have a Question For Elizabeth?

Send Ask Elizabeth questions and letters to the editor to:

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We welcome digital photos of your cat to consider for use with your question.

Temperament for Therapy Cats

Does your feline have what it takes?

While dogs are the best-known therapy animals, cats can help humans who are ill or stressed, too, by promoting relaxation and healing. Therapy cats visit nursing homes, hospitals, courthouses, and schools (some colleges organize therapy animal visits as stress-relief during exams). Therapy visits may also be referred to as animal-assisted interventions (AAI).

While therapy cats do not have the specialized training of service animals, they do need to have proper training and socialization to ensure that the humans involved are safe and that the cats themselves are comfortable and enjoy the experience. Many facilities require therapy animals to be certified by a therapy organization and covered by liability insurance. Two national groups that evaluate and certify cats and provide insurance coverage for therapy visits are Pet Partners (www.petpartners.org) and Love on a Leash (www.loveonaleash.org).

"The temperament of a potential therapy animal is the most important element," says Elisabeth Van Every, Communications and Outreach Coordinator for Pet Partners. "A good therapy animal must genuinely enjoy interacting with new people and be comfortable with new experiences. Be sure your cat genuinely enjoys meeting new people and new experiences." The ideal therapy cat is friendly, calm, gentle, and patient. She should be comfortable with people of all ages and sizes, as well as strange noises and smells. Reactive cats who are startled by loud noises or sudden movements often are not good candidates for therapy work.

Preparation

"Handlers who think their pet is a good candidate for therapy animal work can get started by acclimating their cats to being on harness and leash and to travel," says Van Every. Cats must wear a harness with a leash during therapy visits. "They can also work on taking their cats to a variety of pet-friendly locations, such as parks and pet-friendly businesses, gauging how they do with new experiences and contact with new people, along with how they react to the presence of dogs, since therapy cats are likely to encounter therapy dogs in the course of visiting. Get them comfortable with lots of petting and touch," she advises.

It is imperative that therapy cats be healthy, clean, and well-groomed to prevent spreading parasites or infectious agents. Make sure that your cat is comfortable with being brushed and bathed, as well as having her nails trimmed to prevent accidental scratches.

Teamwork

Your cat may be the star of the show, but you are her manager. "Build a really strong bond with your cat," advises Van Every. "Your cat will trust you to advocate for them when you're making therapy animal visits, and your ability to know their moods, reactions, and body language will serve your cat well in making sure they and the clients are safe and everyone enjoys the visits." Your cat's well-being should always be your top priority as a handler, as a stressed cat can be unpredictable and less effective for providing comfort to clients. When training or doing therapy visits, you must pay attention to your cat at all times, even when you are chatting with clients.

As well as knowing your cat's needs and moods, learn and follow the policies and protocols of the therapy organization that you represent, and the rules of the facility that you are visiting.



Photo courtesy Elizabeth Van Every

"A good therapy animal must genuinely enjoy interacting with new people and be comfortable with new experiences," says Elizabeth Van Every.

Setbacks

It is possible that you and your cat may fail a therapy evaluation. If this happens, consider what you can do to help yourself and your cat be better prepared next time. "Typical reasons we see for cat teams to have difficulty during evaluation are general nervousness (remember that the handler can communicate their nerves to the cat), discomfort with petting by multiple people or poor recovery from unexpected noises, reaction to the neutral dog, and lack of proactive handling," says Van Every.

While it can be frustrating, keep in mind that these evaluations and procedures are in place to protect both your cat from being put in a situation she can't handle and your clients from potentially being harmed by a scared cat.

Some cats just aren't cut out for therapy work—and that's OK! Allow her to stay home and do the things that she enjoys. If having a therapy cat is your dream, keep traits like friendliness and calmness in mind when picking out your next cat. ■

Benefits of Petting a Cat

- Reduces loneliness
- Reduces or relieves depression
- Reduces anxiety
- Lowers blood pressure
- Stimulates memories in patients with dementia
- Stimulates interactions for patients with autism
- Provides a sense of security for patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)



Budabar | Depositphotos

FIV Unlikely to Cause Blindness

Other causes, like hypertension, may be at work

Q Sebastian, a big orange longhair, was adopted in 2009. He tested positive for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), but had no symptoms. In 2017, he started to have eye symptoms and eventually appeared to be blind. He was eating, drinking, socializing, and had regular urination and defecation. Three months ago, he began bleeding from his nose and eventually from his eye and crusting.

During this time, our calico cat, Annie, was seen drinking from Sebastian's water bowl (we had tried to keep them separate). Drops of Sebastian's blood were occasionally in the bowl. Can she get FIV from drinking from the bowl with drops of blood in it? She has recently tested negative for FIV.

A Thanks for getting in touch, and I am very sorry to hear of Sebastian's problems.

Although we cannot ascertain this from afar, it may be that he is being affected by more than one disease process. The reason I say this is that the vision problems and bleeding from the nose and eyes are not common clinical signs of FIV infection. The most common signs of FIV in cats are chronic gingivitis/stomatitis (inflammation of the mucous membranes of the oral cavity), inflammation of the nasal cavity, lymph node enlargement, and weight loss.

The vision problems and bleeding from the oral and nasal cavities may be caused by a number of things, but one thing that comes to mind is hypertension (high blood pressure).



P-KDmitry | Depositphotos

Blindness is more likely due to something like hypertension rather than FIV.

Hypertension can cause retinal detachment that can lead to sudden blindness and may cause bleeding from the nose and/or eyes (the latter less commonly). Hypertension may occur as a primary problem in cats (i.e. without any other discernable diseases, called primary hypertension), but this is not common. More commonly, it is caused by other diseases, including kidney disease, hyperthyroidism, or diabetes.

Please discuss these possibilities with your veterinarian as soon as possible, and it is very important that you work with him/her to make sure that Sebastian's blood pressure is normal and that he is not experiencing any of these other diseases.

With respect to Annie becoming infected with FIV, while it is theoretically possible (some studies have shown that cats can be infected via the oral cavity if given high doses of FIV viral particles), it is very unlikely. FIV is generally considered to be passed from one cat to another via bite wounds, so the likelihood of cats passing the virus from one to another is very low if they do not fight. Even grooming each other does not seem to be sufficient exposure to result in transmission among cats living together.

It is also important to point out that while cats with FIV may suffer from the problems mentioned above, recent studies suggest that cats infected with FIV have a good chance of living a normal lifespan and that the quality of their lives can be excellent, provided that proactive veterinary care is provided.

Please discuss these important issues with your veterinarian, and make sure that you are bringing both cats in for regular check-ups. Sebastian should be brought to the veterinarian at least twice per year, as should all cats over 10 years of age. If Annie is otherwise healthy and is less than 10 years old, annual visits to the veterinarian are likely sufficient.

Thanks, and best of luck to you all. Please send us an update when you can.

All My Best,
Elizabeth



Elizabeth works with the Cornell Feline Health Center to provide answers on this page (vet.cornell.edu/fhc/). Write to her at catwatcheditor@cornell.edu or CatWatch 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854. We welcome digital photos of your cat to consider for use with your question.

Coming Up ...

- *Feeding the Cat with Cancer*
- *What You Need to Know about Rabies*
- *Handling Rival Cat Problems*
- *Annual CatWatch Index*

HAPPENING NOW...

"Cat" Burglar - According to the *Naples (Fla.) Daily News,* deputies responded to a possible burglary in progress only to find the culprit was a cat. The caller heard someone knocking at the door and then a kitten meowing. Thinking it was a ruse, she called 911. The cat was taken into custody, and the owner was contacted.

Kitty Microchips Work – *The Ionia Sentinel-Standard* says that Violet, missing for three years, was found injured and rushed to a vet clinic. The microchip information was out of date, but the owner was found through Facebook.

In another microchip success story, *UPI* reports that Tiger escaped from home 11 years ago. The family later moved, but the new house owners say they had watched a cat who hung around for years. When his condition deteriorated, they took him to a veterinary clinic. The microchip information indicated the owner.

Pet Stores v. Maryland – According to APNews.com, Maryland pet stores are suing to stop the January 2020 state law that would require them to only sell animals from a shelter/rescue group. The stores say the law is due to unfounded claims that pet stores promote puppy mills. They claim the ban will cause people to purchase from "unregulated sources, such as sellers placing ads on the internet or in newspapers." ■