

WHAT IS FLUTD?

Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease, also known as Feline Urological Syndrome, is one of the most common medical problems of cats. It usually occurs due to the formation of crystals, made up primarily of magnesium, within the bladder. They are known as struvite, magnesium phosphate or triple phosphate crystals. These sand like crystals irritate the bladder lining, causing pain, and sometimes allowing bacterial infection to set in.

FLUTD affects both males and females, but due to the male anatomy it is a much more serious problem in male cats. Crystals and mucous clumping together can form a plug within the penis which blocks urination. A cat that is plugged and cannot urinate will become ill very rapidly. If not treated in time, the bladder will rupture and the kidneys will fail. Death usually occurs within 24 hours.

Female cats have a wider urethra, so they don't plug up as easily. They will, however, develop painful bladder infections (cystitis). Cats of either sex can also develop stones in the bladder or the kidneys.

As a cat ages, the pH and composition of the urine tend to change slowly. Middle aged and older cats are more prone to a different type of crystal, calcium oxylate. These crystals are less likely to block urination but are much more likely to form bladder or kidney stones. Stones in the bladder may be surgically removed. Those in the kidneys may not be removable. Special diets cannot dissolve these stones but they can help keep them from recurring or, in the case of kidney stones, getting larger. There are a few kinds of rare crystals and stones that are found occasionally as a cause of bladder problems in cats.

There is also a syndrome in cats that is poorly understood, but which leads to pain and inflammation in the bladder without the formation of crystals and in the absence of bacterial infection. The cat may have very bloody urine, and the bladder may be thickened and abnormal, leading to litter box avoidance and symptoms of urinary tract disease. Although many treatments for this syndrome have been tried, veterinarians don't know the underlying cause of this disease. It seems to wax and wane, often becoming less problematic as the cat gets older.

Signs of FLUTD in both males and females are bloody urine, straining to urinate (often confused with constipation), pain on urination, or frequent urination, often outside of the litter box. Male cats that are plugged and cannot urinate will often become suddenly and extremely ill. You may see vomiting, depression, squatting in a strange position, reluctance to move or walk, weakness or loud cries of distress. (If you notice these signs call your veterinarian immediately!) About 1-5% of cats are affected by FLUTD.

CAN FLUTD BE TREATED?

If caused by crystals or bacterial infection, yes, it can. Females are usually healthy enough to be treated at home for magnesium phosphate crystals. Males that are plugged are usually anesthetized and a catheter is passed into the bladder, dislodging the plug. The catheter is left in place for 1 - 3 days to allow the bladder and urethra to heal. Treatment is also given as needed for dehydration, infection and shock.

Both males and females will need to be treated with special diets, and sometimes urinary acidifiers and antibiotics. The prescription diets are continued for the lifetime of the cat because without long term dietary management, FLUTD usually recurs.

If calcium oxylate or other stones are present in the bladder they are usually surgically removed. Stones may also be found in the kidneys or ureters. Whether and how they are treated depends on the situation.

Management of idiopathic FLUTD, the type for which a cause has not yet been found, is more difficult and frustrating for both the pet owner and the veterinarian. Hopefully research into this disease, which seems to be very similar to a syndrome seen in people, will eventually lead to better answers for this form of the disease.

Some cats urinate outside the box because they are unhappy with something about the litter pan or the household situation. In this case, the problem is behavioral, not physical. Before reaching the conclusion that a litterbox problem is behavioral, a physical

abnormality should always be ruled out. [Click here for more information on litterbox avoidance.](#)

CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

The best way to prevent it is to feed your cat a diet formulated to help avoid FLUTD. These diets have been carefully tested to ensure that the level of magnesium is not too high and the pH of the urine stays within a range that will not encourage the build-up of crystals. The majority of commercial cat diets have 10 to 20 times the amount of magnesium needed, and many have not been tested for urinary tract health. Prescription diets for senior cats are usually formulated to help prevent calcium oxylate crystals. Ask your vet for a recommendation.

Read pet food labels carefully, and beware of pet foods labeled "low ash". "Ash" refers to all the minerals, not just magnesium. A food can indeed be "low ash" but still be too high in magnesium. Good foods available to help prevent FLUTD include Science Diet, Iams and Purina's Special Care. Once your cat has had a bout of FUS, special prescription diets are much more effective, however.

It's always wise to ask your veterinarian for advice on what diet is best for your cat. Since this problem is greatly dependant on diet, choosing a good food for your cat is an extremely important aspect of his or her health care program.

Encourage frequent urination by keeping your cat's litter pan clean. Provide plenty of fresh water. Avoid overfeeding to prevent obesity. FLUTD is more common in overweight cats.

Above all, remember that this disease in male cats is a true medical emergency. If you think your cat may be suffering from this problem call your veterinarian immediately!

CATS AND HAIRBALLS

Cats spend a significant part of their lives cleaning and grooming -- as much as 1/3 of their waking hours. While this natural instinct makes them ideal house pets, it can lead to some uncomfortable side effects.

The problem begins during the cleaning process, when cats often swallow their own hair. The cat's tongue is the culprit. It has tiny, barb-like projections on its surface which pull loose hair from the coat. Because of the inward angle of these barbs, the hair remains lodged on the tongue's surface until the cat swallows it. Since hair is largely insoluble protein, it cannot be dissolved by the cat's digestive system. As this undigested hair begins to knot in the stomach and accumulate in the gastrointestinal tract it can interfere with normal digestion and elimination.

Symptoms of "hairballs" include constipation, listlessness, dry cough, and even vomiting. It is also the most frequent cause of depression and loss of appetite in cats. The most dramatic and obvious symptom is the regurgitated hairball which is often tubular in shape. Besides being an inconvenience to clean up, it is a definite sign that your cat has a problem and needs help. Although rarely fatal, hairballs are very uncomfortable for your cat and can lead to serious complications.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Daily brushing of the cat's coat to remove loose hair is good preventative medicine. Long-haired breeds like Himalayans and Persians need special attention. During the spring when all cats shed, daily brushing is especially important. After brushing, wipe your cat down with a damp towel to remove loose hair.

Besides brushing the coat, there are several medications which are available to eliminate hairballs and help prevent their reoccurrence. A dietary fiber supplement, when added to the cat's food, can aid in the elimination of accumulated hair and other materials without discomfort. New diets specially formulated to help prevent hairballs are also available, and contain the extra fiber that helps move hair through the cat's intestinal tract.

Laxatives have been recommended by veterinarians for decades. There are many different brands of laxative remedies available and it should be easy to find one that appeals to your cat's taste.

Remember, your cat relies on you for help in relieving this problem. A program of frequent brushing, regular use of a hairball remedy and following the advice of your veterinarian is all it takes.

The Top Three Fatal Feline Diseases

For years now, we've had safe and effective vaccines for distemper, rabies and the respiratory diseases that used to kill millions of cats every year. Because most people are vaccinating their pets for them, these once very common infections are under control. (They are still common in outdoor and unvaccinated cats.) The diseases that are now killing millions of cats are ones that many owners are not familiar with. These diseases are known by a confusing set of initials - FeLV, FIV and FIP.

About 10% of cats in this country are infected with one or more of these viruses. Once your cat becomes ill with any of these diseases he or she will die. There are no effective treatments or cures. What will save cats' lives is preventing the spread of these infections through blood testing, keeping cats indoors and, when warranted, vaccination.

All three of these infections can be carried and spread for long periods of time by cats who are harboring the viruses with no obvious symptoms of disease. Cats who appear perfectly healthy can be infected yet not come down with an illness for months or years. During these months or years, however, they are contagious to other cats.

1) The number one infectious disease killer of cats in the United States today is Feline Leukemia Virus, or FeLV. FeLV destroys the cat's immune system so that he falls prey to anemia, cancer or infectious diseases that a healthy cat would not get. A simple blood test is 99% accurate in diagnosing the disease. The test is less accurate in kittens or in cats who have only recently been exposed to the disease. Many veterinarians routinely test all new cats and kittens entering a household. Vaccination may also be advised. Effective vaccines have been available for more than ten years and are often included in the same vaccine with distemper and the respiratory disease viruses.

Unfortunately, the vaccination for FeLV can be associated with a particular type of cancer called fibrosarcoma. Although the risk for cancer is low, and the potential for death from Feline Leukemia may be much greater, this is something you will need to discuss with your veterinarian.

2) The second leading disease killer of cats is Feline Infectious Peritonitis, or FIP. FIP is a hardier virus than FeLV. It can survive in damp areas, such as the dirt in your garden or sandbox, for several months. You can track it into your house on your shoes, hands or clothes, so your cat may not be safe even if it stays indoors. A vaccine for FIP became available just a few years ago. It requires two initial doses about a month apart and then annual boosters after that. As with all vaccines, the cost is quite reasonable. This vaccine can save your cat's life.

The symptoms of FIP vary, but include fluid accumulation in the chest or abdomen, fever, vomiting or diarrhea, liver inflammation, weight loss and debilitation. Once signs appear the disease progresses inevitably to death over several days, weeks or months.

Blood testing for FIP is not very accurate. FIP is caused by a particular strain of virus. The blood test will detect antibodies against many viruses in the coronavirus family to which FIP belongs, so it is not specific for FIP. The disease also seems to be dependant in part on a cat's individual immune system. Cats may fight infection off, become persistent carriers of the virus without symptoms, or actually come down with the disease. Once symptoms appear, death is unavoidable. A firm diagnosis of the disease can only be made from tissue samples obtained via surgery or after death.

3) The last virus on our list is the Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, FIV, a relative of the HIV virus that causes AIDS in people. This virus is present in up to 10% of the cat population in some areas and seems to be becoming more prevalent with time. We have no vaccine yet for this disease. However, there is a good blood test that will tell you whether your cat has it or is a carrier for this disease. If you have not had your cat tested for FIV, you might want to ask your veterinarian about it, since these test results will influence all your health care decisions for the rest of your cat's life.

As with the AIDS virus in people, FIV can be carried by a cat for years before symptoms develop. Anemia, low white blood cell counts and susceptibility to infectious disease and cancer eventually develop. Although treatment may slow the course of the disease, it will eventually be fatal.

Rules to remember to help prevent the spread of these fatal diseases:

1) Keep your cat indoors. The more time he or she spends outside, the more exposure there is to infectious disease.

2) NEVER bring a new cat or kitten into the household and let it interact with other cats and kittens until you have it, and the resident cat, tested and vaccinated. Keep any new arrivals in a separate room with separate food and water bowls, and litter box, until your veterinarian tells you it's safe. Many of the cases of FeLV and FIP we see occur in an indoor cat in a household that recently adopted a new cat or kitten. Keeping new arrivals separated also cuts down the spread of parasites and respiratory infections.

WASH YOUR HANDS AFTER HANDLING EITHER PET IF THEY ARE NOT TESTED AND VACCINATED. Also wash your hands after petting any unfamiliar cats outside your home.

3) Remember, 1 cat in 10 is carrying one of these viruses, healthy looking or not. That 1 cat in 10 may be a cat in your house right now.

4) If your pet becomes ill with any of these three diseases it will die. We may be able to extend the cat's life but we cannot save it. For a long, healthy life, be sure your companions are protected!

How To Choose Toys And Treats For Your Cat Or Kitten

Most people who have pets enjoy playing with them and giving them toys. Unfortunately, unlike with children's toys, there are no regulations to ensure that toys made for dogs and cats are safe. Many that are available in pet stores and supermarkets are unsafe. Many of the treats on the market are also unhealthy.

Check any toy you purchase for parts or pieces that could come off and be inhaled or swallowed. Googly eyes, little bells, small pieces of glued on felt, feathers and strings are some things to watch out for. Never purchase any toy that looks like it could come apart.

Whatever toys you choose, it's a good idea to rotate them. Putting a toy away and getting out a different one every few days can help avoid having the cat or kitten get bored with the same old thing. Keeping a cat occupied with a different toy each week may also prevent him from finding excitement knocking over waste baskets or scratching the furniture.

Popular toys include little plastic balls with bells inside, the balls that can be batted around inside a large, donut-shaped plastic tube, the long piece of fabric on a stick, and assorted cat nip filled animals. Be sure to throw away any toy that is getting frayed or broken, before threads or pieces are swallowed by the cat.

A very popular toy in recent years is the glitter ball, a soft ball with gold or silver "hair". The 2 inch larger size is pretty safe, but the 1 inch diameter glitter balls are small enough to be swallowed, requiring emergency surgery to remove them from cats' stomachs. They are also small enough to be choked on.

Be extra careful if you have a dog as well as a cat. Toys large enough that a cat can't choke on it or swallow it may be unsafe for a dog that gets ahold of it instead.

Cats have small barbs on their tongues. The barbs point backwards. The function of these, aside from making the cat's tongue feel like sandpaper when he licks you, is to make grooming more effective. These little barbs also make it very difficult for a cat to remove string or fabric from its mouth. If a cat is playing with, or chewing on, one of these materials, and it gets too far back in the mouth, it will catch on these little barbs. The cat is not able to pull it back out again, and will reflexively start to swallow the string. Little by little he will be forced to swallow the whole thing.

The cat may choke on the string, or it may lodge in the intestinal tract and need to be surgically removed. In the worst cases, the string or thread becomes caught in the mouth, either by wrapping around the base of the tongue or a tooth, or because there is a needle on the end of the thread that punctures the mouth or throat and lodges there. With one end of the string caught, when the intestines try to move the string along, it actually saws through the intestine. This causes multiple holes which will need to be sutured, and leads to massive infection in the abdominal cavity (peritonitis). Without emergency surgery, the cat will soon die.

Dragging or waving around a string is a favorite way to amuse a cat. There is no reason to stop this game forever. You do need to use caution, though. Don't let your cat play with these items unsupervised, and put them away when you are done. Don't leave sewing, fishing or wrapping supplies out where cats can get into them. Be cautious of lace, rubber bands, yarn, shoelaces, dental floss, fishing line, ponytail scrunchies, ribbons, etc. Even though the kitten and the ball of yarn is a favorite image, yarn and cats are not a good combination!

There have been no reports of a major problem with cat nip, but no controlled studies have ever been done on its safety. Some cats get too wound up or aggressive after playing with cat nip, and it should not be given to those cats. It's probably best to give cat nip as an occasional treat and not on a daily basis, in case it can cause problems with frequent or long term use.

Cats are seldom as interested in treats as dogs are, but some cats do enjoy a snack here and there. Unfortunately, most cat treats are not very healthy. They tend to be loaded with salt, artificial flavors and artificial colors. They are also a long way from being complete and balanced nutrition.

Because cats are so small, usually around ten pounds in weight, it doesn't take very many of these snacks to overdo it. The rule of thumb is not to give a cat more than 2 of these sorts of treats per day, and we would rather young kittens don't get any at all. Like potato chips or ice cream in people, a small amount once in a while is fine, but if those food items are a major portion of your diet, you probably aren't getting very good nutrition. Most cats only need 1/4 to 1/3 of a cup of food twice daily. It doesn't take many treats before they are getting too much junk food.

Children love to give treats to their pets and are often the guilty parties when pets get too many of them. Encourage your kids to play with their pets instead. It's much healthier to get more exercise and less snacks!

There are small chewies for cats that help prevent dental tarter. Some cats don't like them, but for those that do they are a great way to help clean the teeth without adding many calories. Ask your veterinarian if he carries any of these. CET is a common brand.

Check treat labels in the stores carefully, and try to avoid the ones with the most salt, fat and artificial ingredients. (The same is true for any dry cat food - if the nuggets come in different colors it's because they've been sprayed with food coloring. Avoid these foods. Your cat doesn't need food coloring - cats are color blind!)

Choose toys and treats for your pets carefully, and hopefully you will have many years of playtime together!

INTESTINAL PARASITES

95% of kittens are born with intestinal worms! These parasites can cause vomiting, diarrhea, weight loss, stunted growth and even death. Some kinds, especially roundworms, are also trans-missible to humans. There are 10,000 cases of animal parasites causing disease in children every year in the United States.

Internal parasites are diagnosed by having a fresh stool sample examined under a microscope by someone at the veterinary hospital. This should be done as part of a health exam when you obtain a new kitten or cat, and on a yearly basis as part of your cat's annual health exam and vaccinations.

Try to collect the freshest sample you can and keep it refrigerated until you can bring it in to the veterinary hospital. Stool samples will keep up to 24 hours if kept cool (NOT FROZEN). The sample of your pet's feces will be mixed with a salt solution and the parasite eggs allowed to float to the top. After the eggs rise to the top a cover slip is used to transfer the eggs to a microscope slide so they can be seen. Cat litter sinks during this process so it doesn't hurt the sample you bring in if there is litter in it.

So that you may better understand the problems internal parasites can cause and what signs to look for, here is a short description of the five most common types of internal parasites

ROUNDWORMS . . .

are the most common type of worm. They are 2-3 inches long and resemble strands of spaghetti. They live in the small intestine, and may cause vomiting, diarrhea and weight loss. This parasite is most commonly transmitted via the stools of other cats or dogs, or from eating mice or other rodents which may harbor infective larvae of the worm. Mother cats can also pass these worms to their unborn kittens.

Roundworm eggs are sticky and have a tough outer shell. They cling to objects or vegetation or linger in the soil where they have landed, and can remain infective for years. These are the most common intestinal parasites to be picked up by people, especially toddlers. 10,000 people, mostly children, contract roundworms every year in the U.S. They do not grow to adult worms in people but can migrate to various organs and cause blindness, brain damage and other signs.

Roundworms are easy to treat and prevent with regular stool sample testing and deworming as needed. To help prevent problems, clean litter boxes at least once a day. Dispose of fecal material properly – never put it in your compost pile or garden. Wash your hands after cleaning the litter box. Be sure your family is protected as well as your pet!

HOOKWORMS . . .

are small, fine worms which attach to the walls of the small intestine and live by sucking blood from the cat. They cause severe diarrhea, which may be bloody, and anemia, especially in kittens and young cats. Hookworms are usually transmitted by infested stools of other cats or dogs, or via the uterus or mother's milk.

Hookworm eggs hatch out within a few days of being shed in the stool. The larvae crawl around until they encounter a new host and then burrow into the body through the skin. Hookworms can cause a skin disease in people called cutaneous larval migrans. This is another problem prevented by good parasite control in pets.

TAPEWORMS . . .

also live in the small intestine, where the head attaches to the intestinal wall and produces a chain of segments. Mature segments containing eggs are passed with the stool, or may be seen around the rectum. They resemble small grains of rice. They may be acquired through the ingestion of rodents or birds or, more commonly, through the ingestion of fleas. Flea control is essential to control tapeworm infestation.

COCCIDIA . . .

are one celled protozoal parasites, more like bacteria rather than "worms." Kittens can pick these up from their mother and they can also be acquired by eating rabbit or other wildlife droppings. They are treated with antibiotics.

GIARDIA . . .

are also protozoans. They are very difficult to pick up on a regular stool check. Antibiotics or special wormers kill them but they are difficult to eradicate completely and often flare up with stress or other intestinal problems. They are contagious to humans and cause vomiting and diarrhea in both people and pets. A vaccine for *Giardia* recently became available for dogs and is in development for cats. This will be particularly useful for cats that have had the disease or in breeding facilities.

If a stool sample is positive for parasites, the veterinarian will prescribe an effective dewormer. You will need you to weigh your animal before picking up any dewormer, to ensure that the proper dose is given. A stool sample should be checked again after treatment, to ensure that your pet is not being reinfested by his or her environment and that the dewormer was effective. The time for this recheck will depend on the species of parasite. Clean the litter box daily until treatment is complete.

HEARTWORM DISEASE IN CATS

Heartworm disease is caused by a large (8-12 inches long!) worm that is carried by mosquitoes, who inject the larval stage of the parasite into the cat or dog. The larvae migrate through the body and eventually live in the heart, where they can cause extensive damage or death. Heartworms are less common in cats than in dogs, but the incidence seems to be increasing. Because there was no specific test for this disease until recently, and even now blood testing is not very accurate in cats, it is thought that heartworm disease is much more prevalent in the cat population than was previously believed.

Affected cats usually have only a few of these worms in their heart, but because the cat's heart is very small and the worms are quite large, even 1 or 2 worms can be fatal. Signs of heartworm disease in cats include chronic coughing, wheezing or vomiting, and sudden collapse or death. The disease has usually been diagnosed after death with a necropsy (animal autopsy) because there was no blood test for heartworm disease in cats. There is still no effective treatment for cats that have heartworm disease but there is now a blood test to detect these parasites in cats, and a new once a month preventative medication.

Outdoor cats are most at risk, but interestingly enough a new study of feline heartworm disease in Texas and South Carolina showed that 36% of infected cats were kept totally indoors. Since it takes so few of the heartworm parasites to cause disease in cats, even the occasional mosquito finding its way into the home can carry more than enough heartworm larvae to be fatal.

Luckily, cats can now be put on the once a month preventative medication during the mosquito season, just like dogs have been taking for years. Though effective preventative medications have been available for dogs for many years, nationwide more than 1/3 of dogs are not being protected. Many of them are harboring the heartworm parasite. Mosquitoes then carry the disease from infected dogs to other pets, and occasionally to people as well. Wildlife, especially coyotes, wolves and foxes, can also spread this disease.

Heartgard® for cats is a chewable, good tasting tablet your cat should like. The price is quite reasonable, and the medication also helps prevent roundworms and hookworms - common intestinal parasites - as well. There is also a new preventative on the market called Revolution. This is an ointment you apply to the skin on the back of your kitten's neck (where he can't lick it off). Revolution prevents not only heartworm disease but also fleas, ear mites and several other parasites.

Weight Control And Exercise for Cats

Over half the cats veterinarians see every year are overweight, many extremely so. Being overweight has some serious consequences for cats, just as it does for people. In fact, the average lifespan of an obese pet is years shorter than that of pets who stay slim and trim. Weight related diseases include arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, liver disease, bladder problems and many types of cancer.

Most of our house pets are not very active. Not only are many of them overweight but they also don't get enough exercise. This is bad for their health and contributes to behavior problems - a cat that is bored and inactive is more likely to be destructive or aggressive.

So what should you do to prevent these problems?

Some cats are better at burning calories than others but for most cats the recommended feeding amounts on cat food bags are way too generous. If you are feeding a good quality food your cat can eat much less than the label says and still get all the nutrients necessary for good health. Feed only what your pet needs to maintain a healthy weight.

You should be able to easily feel your cat's ribs and backbone under his skin. If there is lots of padding over the ribs your cat is probably overweight. You should be able to see his waist - his body should curve up behind his ribs if you are looking at him from the side. Looking down from above you should also see a pronounced narrowing of the body behind the ribs. Also look for bulges over the hips or a pot belly, common places for excess pounds to show up. (Many cats have a pouch of fat and skin between the back legs, even if they are not overweight. This is not the same as an enlarged "pot belly".)

On the other hand, if your pet's ribs or backbone are visible, or very pronounced when you run your hand across them, your pet may be too thin.

Choose a good quality pet food which fits your pet's lifestyle. If your pet is a couch potato, he needs a low calorie food. Limit treats, snacks and table food. It doesn't take many extras to tip the scales. Avoid processed treats that are loaded with fat and salt. If you must feed treats, give bits of the pet's regular food. Canned food is OK in small amounts, but the more moist food you feed, the faster plaque and tartar will build up on the teeth.

Make sure your cat gets the exercise he needs. If he tends to be lazy, get him up and moving with a game of chase the string or roll the wad of paper. How often does your cat really cut loose and RUN? Probably not often enough.

If your cat is already overweight he'll need an playtime exercise program and/or a restricted calorie diet. Most "lite" foods available in supermarkets are only about 10-15% less in calories than regular food. If you feed one of these, and give the same amount of food as you fed of the regular non-diet food, your pet may stop gaining weight, but he probably won't lose any. To achieve a reasonable amount of weight loss in a reasonable amount of time you need to cut back by 25-30%. The easiest way to achieve this is to feed a prescription weight loss diet. These foods are low in fat and calories, so you can feed an amount large enough to keep your pet feeling full, while still achieving weight loss. Ask your vet.

The first step in any weight loss program is to measure how much you are feeding per day. Most cat owners simply fill the bowl. Given unlimited access to food, it's no wonder pets get too fat! Start by measuring how many cups of food you put in the bowl over the course of a week. Then divide by seven to get the amount fed per day (usually 1/2 to one cup). Now you need to feed a smaller amount of food.

If your cat is eating a cup of food per day, you might want to only give him 3/4 of a cup. If she's eating 1/2 cup, decrease to 3/8. Whatever your starting point is, you'll need to decrease by 1/4 to 1/3. Divide this amount into two or three daily feedings. Cats are natural nibblers and will do better on several small meals a day rather than one large one.

If you switch to a store brand reducing diet you won't need to cut back as much on the amount you feed as if you stay with a regular maintenance food. If you feed a prescription reducing diet you may not need to cut back at all in amount, as some of these foods are high in bulk and fiber. Either way it's very important to measure the amount you feed! That lets you and your veterinarian to adjust the amount fed as the cat loses weight.

It is important to remember that cats will suffer liver damage, or even liver failure, if they are put on too strict a diet too quickly or if they don't like their new food and stop eating. Work with your veterinary clinic to be sure you aren't harming your pet's health with an overly restrictive diet program.

Most pets become less active with age, so their calorie needs often go down as they get older. Decrease their food accordingly. Most geriatric pets benefit from a food made for older pets which is lower in fat and salt. On the other hand, some elderly cats become too thin. Low fat senior diets are not necessarily a good choice for thin pets.

Most veterinarians will welcome you anytime to put your pet on our scale or ask their opinion on his current weight or weight loss goals.

limit snacks exercise measure food appropriate diet

CERVICAL LINE LESIONS IN CATS

Cervical line lesions are erosions of the enamel from the surface of the tooth, at or below the gum line. They are a recent phenomenon in cats. The cause is, at this point, unknown. We do know that 25 years ago cats did not get these lesions, but no one knows what has changed to cause them to occur so frequently today. It may be a result of environmental changes or a nutritional deficiency that we are unaware of. Unfortunately, they are currently being seen in as many as 60% of domestic cats.

Cervical line lesions begin as a small erosion in the enamel. The overlying gums may become swollen and inflamed. One or more teeth may be affected at a time causing much discomfort to the cat. The lesions progress, growing larger and deeper, eroding more and more of the tooth. Once the enamel is eroded enough to expose the dentin layer underneath, they become extremely painful. The affected tooth may fracture, or the gums may grow up onto the side of the tooth, and eventually the tooth will be lost.

Extraction of the affected tooth is the best course of treatment that we have today. Attempts to repair these lesions with a filling rarely slows the destruction of the tooth. The lesion grows in size, the filling falls out, and the cat is in pain once again. Today's state of the art pain medications along with a course of antibiotics help cats recover quickly from extractions, so they can return to pain-free living.

We may not be able to cure cervical line lesions as of yet, but you may be able to slow their progress by applying a fluoride gel to the surface of the remaining teeth two to four times a month. Your veterinarian may apply a fluoride foam at the time of the extraction or with every dental cleaning, but this will soon wear off. If fluoride is applied by the owner at home, this will strengthen these teeth and possibly prevent the development of further lesions.

Please call your veterinarian if you have any questions regarding this treatment in your cat.



This teeth pictured above show cervical line lesions. On the left hand picture, the lesion appears as a pink, triangular shaped area where the enamel is eaten away and the gum is growing down over the cavity. The picture on the right shows two premolar teeth similarly affected. These cavities always develop at the base of the teeth a little above or below the gumline. X-rays may be needed to diagnose and treat them.

ELECTIVE SURGERIES

DECLAWING

Many people who keep their cats indoors prefer to have their front paws declawed. This surgery is done under anesthesia and requires up to 3 days of hospitalization. The surgery is actually the amputation of the last digit of the toe. The toenail grows out from the base of this bone. There are many ways to do the surgery. The newest technique involves a laser, which decreases bleeding, swelling and pain after surgery. Most methods involve bandaging the feet afterwards. Pain medication is usually given post-operatively (ask your veterinarian.) Recovery is fastest in younger kittens but declawing is also frequently done at 6 months of age, in conjunction with spaying or neutering.

The older the cat, the more painful declawing is, so please decide early if you want your cat declawed. If you start trimming your kitten's nails every 4-6 weeks and train it to use a scratching post, you may not need to declaw at all.

Usually only the front paws are declawed. Declawing all four feet is hard on the cat and is seldom necessary.

NEUTERING

The average lifespan of a neutered pet is 40% longer than that of an unneutered one. Unspayed females will usually develop breast cancer or severe uterine infections by the time they are 8-10 years of age. Unspayed females also are in heat frequently, during which time they are noisy and troublesome to live with. Worst of all, millions of unwanted kittens are put to death in this country every year because there aren't enough homes for them all.

Unneutered male cats have very strong smelling urine, which they like to spray in the house to mark their territory. They are also prone to wander in search of female cats and are also very territorial. These traits lead to high rates of death from being run over by cars, fight wounds and contagious illnesses. Male cats are also, of course, equally responsible for pet overpopulation.

We recommend spaying (surgical removal of the ovaries and uterus) of female cats, and castration (surgical removal of the testicles) of males, for all pets that will not be used for purebred breeding. This should be done by the time your animal reaches 6 months of age. Your animal will be a healthier, happier pet, and you will have done your part to reduce the pet overpopulation problem.

While your pet is anesthetized is also a good time to remove any retained baby teeth, fluoride the new adult teeth or implant a microchip ID.

75% of unsprayed females will develop breast cancer and 75% will develop a serious uterine infection called pyometra. Many will develop both problems. If you want your pet to live a long time, have him or her altered! [Click here for more information on pyometra.](#)