

Cats Need Veterinary Care Too!

By Heather Olson, CVT



Have we seen your cat in the last 12 months? We should have. But if you're like a good percentage of people nationwide you haven't brought your cat in. Chances are good that if you also have dogs, we HAVE seen your dogs. You may think "my cat doesn't go outside, he doesn't need anything." Or possibly "my cat is just a barn cat, I don't need to bring him in." Either way you've come to the same conclusion many others have: cats do not need veterinary care.

But they do! Even the cat that hides all the time and no one knows you have will benefit from regular veterinary visits. Cats age much faster than we do. Six months in our life is equivalent to 4 to 6 years in your cat's life! So a 1 year old cat is about 15 years old. A 6 year old cat is roughly 38 and a 16 year old cat is equivalent to a 78 year old person! That is a lot of changes in a short amount of time. Annual exams are a must!

All cats should have an examination by a veterinarian every 12 months. During the exam your cat will be examined from head to tail. Eyes, ears, teeth, gums and skin will be looked at. Heart and lungs will be listened to. The veterinarian will feel for any lumps and bumps, enlarged lymph nodes, enlarged kidneys, etc. This is an opportunity for problems to be detected early. Be sure to mention any problems your cat has been having from vomiting to appetite loss to urinating outside of the litterbox. Our goal is to keep your cat living a long, healthy and happy life.

As your cat approaches her senior years, generally around age 7, exams should be performed every 6 months. Annually lab tests such as bloodwork and urinalysis should be performed. Blood pressures and glaucoma tests should also be considered annually. We are looking at changes in the kidneys and liver as well as checking for common problems like diabetes and hyperthyroidism. All of these problems are much easier to treat if diagnosed before the cat is showing symptoms. When caught early on, the treatment is much more cost-effective for you, not to mention giving your cat a much better prognosis!

So now that you know there is more to veterinary care for your cat than vaccines, let's talk about them. First of all, every cat's individual needs are evaluated by the veterinary team. Your cat's age, health, lifestyle and previous vaccine history are all taken into consideration.

A rabies vaccine is a must for EVERY cat. Even the strictly indoor cat who never steps foot outside needs a rabies vaccine. Bats are one of the top carriers of rabies in MN and cats, being cats, are the first ones to know it's in the house most of the time. Every year in MN cats are near the top of the list for domestic animals that have become infected with rabies. Also rabies vaccination is a legal issue. If your cat bites a person, a current rabies vaccine may be the difference between life and death.

There are 2 other vaccines with which we routinely vaccinate cats. The first one is commonly called distemper vaccine. This is a combination vaccine covering four different viruses. 1. Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (Feline Herpesvirus). This causes about half of all upper respiratory infections in cats. Symptoms are sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes and fever. 2. Feline Calicivirus. This virus causes oral ulcers, limping, drooling, sneezing, fever and pneumonia. 3. Feline Panleukopenia (Feline Parvovirus or Distemper). This is a highly contagious virus. It causes high fever, vomiting and dehydration. It can destroy cells in the bone marrow, lymph tissue, intestines and brain. 4. Feline Chlamydia. This virus causes eye infections, sneezing and nasal discharge. Distemper vaccines are recommended every 1 to 3 years depending on your cat's age and risk factors.

The third vaccine we commonly give is the feline leukemia vaccine. Feline Leukemia is a very contagious and deadly disease. It is spread through saliva and other bodily fluids, such as urine and nasal secretions. Infected cats may appear healthy. Symptoms can range from none at all to such general ones as sneezing, fever and lethargy to malignant tumors to anemia to sudden death. This virus works by suppressing the immune system so the cat is less able to fight off other infections.

Outdoor cats, barn cats and cats who occasionally go outside (or sneak out) should all be vaccinated for feline leukemia. So too should the cat who doesn't go outside, but likes to sit by the screen door or on the windowsill in an area that is frequented by stray or feral cats. Feline leukemia can be spread through nasal secretions or saliva, if an outdoor cat were to hiss, sneeze or cough at your cat through the screen your cat could become infected. Cats in multi-cat households should be vaccinated even if only one of their housemates goes outside. Your cat's individual risk level will be evaluated by the veterinary team.

Cats should be screened for feline leukemia, feline immunodeficiency virus and heartworm disease. The frequency of testing depends upon your cat's risk factors. Some cats should be tested annually, others maybe only once or twice in their lives. During your cat's appointment the need and frequency of testing will be addressed and recommendations made based on your cat's lifestyle.

All cats should have a fecal sample checked for intestinal parasites, such as roundworms, hookworms and coccidia; among others. Fecals should be tested at least once a year. Intestinal parasites can cause blood loss and anemia, allergic reactions, nutrient loss and damage to internal organs. Some can even be transmitted to people. Even indoor cats can become infected with intestinal parasites. If kitty has even a brief jaunt outside, he could become infected with an intestinal parasite. If your cat eats a flea or mouse that wanders into your home she could pick up a parasite. Also any four-legged visitors to your home have the potential to spread intestinal parasites in the right circumstances.

We can help protect your cat from roundworms and hookworms with a product called Revolution®. This product goes on your cat's skin between the shoulder blades and in addition to killing roundworms and hookworms will kill fleas, ear mites and heartworms.

Give us a call and set up an appointment to bring in your feline friends. We look forward to seeing them!



How Do I Read A Pet Food Label?

By Sue Bollman, CVT

HOW DO I READ THE INGREDIENT LIST?

Like packaged food for people, pet food must list ingredients by weight, starting with the heaviest. But if the first ingredient is a type of meat, keep in mind that meat is about 75% water, according to the FDA. Without that water weight, the meat would probably fall lower on the ingredient list.

Meat meals, such as chicken meal or meat and bone meal are different; most of the water and fat have been removed, which concentrates the animal protein.

WHAT ARE BYPRODUCTS, AND SHOULD I AVOID DOG FOODS THAT CONTAIN THEM?

Veterinarians say that is a matter of choice. Any pet food labeled as complete and balanced should meet your dog's nutritional needs. Liver, which is a byproduct, is rich in nutrients such as vitamin A. Meat byproducts also can contain blood, bones, brain, stomachs, udders and cleaned intestines according to the Association of American Feed Control Officials. Byproducts don't include hair, horns, teeth and hooves although an exception is allowed for the amounts that occur unavoidably during processing.

Meat meal also may contain animal parts that many people consider to be byproducts. An ingredient listed as "chicken" or "beef" may include the heart, esophagus, tongue and diaphragm. Although all of these ingredients may sound unpalatable to you, your dog would probably disagree. So don't necessarily balk if you see byproducts in the ingredients list.

WHAT ARE ALL THOSE CHEMICAL SOUNDING NAMES LOWER ON THE INGREDIENT LIST?

Preservatives, artificial colors, and stabilizers in pet food must be either approved by the FDA or be generally recognized as safe, a category that includes everything from high fructose corn syrup to benzoyl peroxide, used to bleach flours and cheese. Manufacturers must list the preservatives they add, but they do not always list the preservatives in ingredients such as fish meal or chicken that are processed elsewhere. Certain preservatives stop fats from turning rancid and can keep dry pet foods fresh for about a year. Be sure to check a food's "best by" date on the label before buying or feeding it to your pet.

HOW CAN I MAKE SURE THE FOOD MEETS MY DOG'S NEEDS?

Look for a statement of nutritional adequacy on the label. Many pet food makers follow model regulations set by the Association of American Feed Control Officials that establish the minimum amount of nutrients needed to provide a complete and balanced meal. The statement may say the food is formulated to meet AAFCO standards or that it has been tested in feeding trials and found to provide complete nutrition. The AAFCO statement should also say what life stage the food is appropriate for. For puppies, look for a food suitable for growth. For adult dogs, look for adult maintenance. Nutritional needs for senior dogs can vary, depending on health conditions, and there is no AAFCO standard for senior food.

WHAT IS THE GUARANTEED ANALYSIS?

All dog food labels must list the minimum amount of protein and fat in the food and the maximum percentage of fiber and moisture. Some dog food labels also list the percentage of other ingredients such as calcium and phosphorus. Low fat dog foods often contain less fat and more fiber, to fill up a dog without adding calories. At least 10% of the daily diet, by weight, should be protein, and 5.5% should be fat, according to the National Research Council, a scientific research unit of the nonprofit National Academies. Dog foods typically contain higher amounts than those, because dogs may not be able to digest all of the nutrients in a food.

WHAT DO "NATURAL AND HOLISTIC" LABELS MEAN?

Legally, not much. Food labeled natural should contain few, if any, synthetic ingredients. Holistic, along with premium and super-premium, are marketing terms and there is no rule that controls how they're used. Watch out for marketing terms like "human grade ingredients" or "made in a USDA-inspected facility," too. "It's difficult to confirm those claims are truly accurate," says Theresa Crenshaw, interim chair of AAFCO's pet food committee. Although food can be made in a USDA-inspected plant, it may not happen when there is an inspector present, Crenshaw says. Meat once considered safe for humans may have spoiled and been diverted to pet food, she says. Neither claim means the food is safe for humans to eat.

WHAT IS ORGANIC PET FOOD?

There is no official definition for it yet. But the U. S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program, which sets rules for using an "organic" label, is reviewing the issue.

Pet of the Month



By Janet Cafferty

Panzer

"Laughing, I took a crouching position, then, slowly crept to the box where Panzer peered through an opening. As I lifted my head, Panzer would lower his. As I lowered my head, Panzer raised his. The tension mounted, and then he suddenly sprung like a rocket from the box, taking another swipe at me!" says Leighton, Panzer's owner.

Playing interactive games with his owner is commonplace for this friendly male Domestic Shorthair cat named Panzer, weighing in at twenty pounds and measuring at nearly two feet from head to tail. Playing "sly cat in the box" games are only some of the favorites for Panzer, along with chasing after hockey pucks and coins across the floor.

Panzer was an ordinary, free, country kitten when he came into Leighton's life nearly 7 years ago. Even as a growing kitten, Panzer was so fast, tough, absolutely

fearless and loyal. He has gone nose to nose with big gentle dogs such as a Labrador Retriever and even a Rottweiler. At those times Panzer's hair would go up and he doesn't move a muscle. His whole character, physical attributes and overall personality seems to befit the German word synonymous with an armored vehicle, Panzer. Yet Panzer is friendly to those who pass by when he "takes Leighton" for his signature walk in the Watertown neighborhood.

Whenever Leighton prepares to leave for work, Panzer will pick up and carry his look-alike toy cat, and vocalize his thoughts to Leighton. Could it be that he is communicating to Leighton that he will miss his best friend during his absence? Whatever the case may be, Panzer will wait for Leighton's return and pop up into the window to peer out when Leighton drives up.

It has been a heartwarming experience for Leighton to have Panzer as part of his life. "Panzer keeps me grounded and thankful for the littlest gifts in life, and I guess that should be no surprise because he is my pride and joy."

We at the Watertown Veterinary Clinic have also enjoyed our association with Panzer, and thank Leighton for his friendship with our clinic.



DID YOU KNOW...

- 🦷 Puppies have 28 temporary teeth that erupt at about three to four weeks of age. They have 42 permanent teeth that begin to emerge at about four months.
- 🦷 Kittens have 26 temporary teeth that begin to erupt at about two to three weeks of age. They have 30 permanent teeth that erupt at about three to four months.
- 🦷 The first toothbrush with bristles was manufactured in China in 1498. Bristles from hogs, horses and badgers were used. The first commercial toothbrush was made in 1938.
- 🦷 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of dental disease by age 3.
- 🦷 Common indications of dental disease include bad breath, a change in eating or chewing habits, pawing at the face or mouth and depression.
- 🦷 February is National Dental Health month for both people and pets.



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