



FDA VETERINARIAN

PET OWNERSHIP - A MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP



National Pet Week MAY 2 - 8, 1999 "Taking Care of Each Other"

National Pet Week will be celebrated May 2 - 8, 1999, and provides a time to reflect on the positive impact that pets have on our society. "Taking Care of Each Other" is the theme for this year's campaign as we pay tribute to the joy and love pets bring to our lives.

Numerous studies now document the health benefits of the human-animal bond. In addition to the traditional role of animals as helpers and guardians of disabled individuals, pets have helped millions of people

who suffer from a variety of afflictions, from high blood pressure to AIDS. Senior citizens receive enormous comfort from the companionship of pets, and the health benefits are becoming more evident. Pet therapy is now utilized increasingly as physicians are recognizing the positive effects in treating human patients with the therapeutic use of animals. A study of heart attack victims demonstrated that patients with pets in the family have a significantly greater chance of surviving. Another

study showed that people's blood pressure is lower when they are talking to pets than to other people.

Reasons for a pet's positive impact on human health include: social support, reduction of stress, anxiety and anger, and the provision of something to nurture. Animals are also becoming an integral part of rehabilitation for children undergoing psychiatric treatment, or experiencing learning difficulties. Pets can teach children responsibility, and social interaction at a young age.

It is now widely recognized that pet ownership can have a very positive effect on the quality of human life. By the same token, pet owners must ensure the quality of their pet's lives by providing proper health care for their beloved friends. Due to the high social value on animals,
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FELINE ELIMINATION BEHAVIOR

by Ann Stohlman, V.M.D.

The following article provides information on feline elimination behavior and provides suggestions dealing with this problem. Veterinarians may wish to duplicate this article and provide copies to their interested clients. As always, material which appears in the FDA Veterinarian is free of copyright and may be reproduced without permission.

Inappropriate elimination behavior is the most common behavioral problem for which cat owners seek advice from a veterinarian. Several million pets are euthanized each year in animal shelters across the country for behavioral problems. A 1996 study determined the most common behavior-related cause for surrendering a cat to a shelter was inappropriate elimination.

Cat elimination problems can be difficult to diagnose and treat, so a

good relationship with your veterinarian and a lot of patience throughout the investigative process is essential. Elimination problems can involve either inappropriate urination, defecation, or both. Urinary problems are often more difficult to detect initially because urine can be difficult to see or smell when it is absorbed into or dries onto a surface. Once you are aware of your cat's urinating or defecating outside of the litter box, the real investigation can begin.

If your household includes several cats, you and your veterinarian must first determine which cat is eliminating outside the litter box. In some
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veterinary care is gaining recognition in our society. Many pet owners think of medical care for their pets in much the same way they would for any other family member.

Many high-tech advances in veterinary medicine can extend the life

of pets. Radiation therapy, bone replacements, allergy testing, dental work, and behavior modifications are now available options used regularly to ensure pets' comfort. Adjunct veterinary facilities, such as animal blood banks, are emerging, as well.

Together pet owners and their veterinarians can have a positive influence on their pet's health and happiness for many years to come. The rewards of pet ownership will be mutually beneficial and will last a lifetime. □

FELINE ELIMINATION BEHAVIOR (Continued)



Photo by Wendy Schuller

cases, more than one cat may be eliminating outside the box. Occasionally, a few simple questions and some detective work can find the culprit. If the identity is still uncertain, your veterinarian can give each cat a product that will stain its urine marks with a color that can be detected by an ultraviolet light.

Your veterinarian must then determine if the inappropriate elimination is due to a medical or behavioral problem. The veterinarian will ask many questions about your cat's background, medical history, normal activities and habits, and any unusual activities and habits that may have developed. You will also be asked details about your home environment, the outside environment, other pets, family members, and any recent changes in your household or in the cat's life. Many details about

the litter box location and the type of litter will be gathered. This thorough history is time-consuming, but is critical in making a correct diagnosis. It may take a one to two-hour appointment to get all the necessary information. Some veterinarians have prepared questionnaires for their clients to complete before the visit.

After the history is taken, a thorough physical examination is performed to rule out any medical condition your cat may have. For example, older cats that develop constipation may experience pain while defecating, associate this pain with the litter box, and stop using the box. In order to further determine if the problem is due to a medical condition, some laboratory tests should be run. A urinalysis is routinely performed to look for evidence of urinary tract infection or cystitis. Your veterinarian may recommend additional tests such as a urine culture to look for bacteria in the urine, and radiographs to look for bladder stones or changes in the bones associated with arthritis. Depending on the findings, your veterinarian may also recommend specialized radiographs, or even an ultrasound examination of the abdomen. If a medical problem is detected, you and your veterinarian can initiate appropriate treatment for the specific problem.

After medical causes for the inappropriate elimination have been ruled out, your veterinarian will use the history obtained to make a list of potential diagnoses for the problem. Once the specific cause is determined, a therapy best suited to the problem can be planned and started.

There are two reasons why a cat eliminates. Cats urinate or defecate

to rid the body of waste products. Cats will also urinate as a means of communication, called "marking". It is uncertain if domestic cats mark with feces. The cat will take on a different posture for each of these types of elimination. A cat that is urinating to eliminate waste will squat with its tail held parallel to the ground. A cat that is urinating to mark will hold its tail straight up, back towards an object to be marked, and quiver the tail while spraying urine on the object.

Doors or entranceways frequented by you or other cats may be marked. Placing urine on stoves or vertical surfaces is usually a type of marking behavior. Often, objects that smell like you such as bedding or laundry may be marked. Marking behavior can be triggered by stress or anxiety. One example of this is the cat that picks up cues that the owner is preparing for a trip and urinates in the suitcase. Another example is the cat that marks a piece of furniture

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FDA Veterinarian

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after a new cat is introduced into the household.

Treatment for this type of behavior needs to be individualized to the cat and its particular circumstances. Usually, the treatment revolves around modifying the stresses in the environment or trying to modify the cat's response to them. In some cases, anxiolytic drugs may be prescribed to help the process. As with all therapies for behavior problems, the treatment plan may evolve as the therapy progresses.

Problems relating to elimination of urine and feces as waste products are very common. Cats eliminate outside the litter box because there is something about the box they don't like or they just prefer another place. There are many types of litter available ranging from clay to recycled newspaper. Some have fragrances added to help control the natural odor of the urine or feces. Litter boxes come in several styles. Some have domed lids to keep the odor confined to the box area. Most litters and boxes are designed to be convenient to the owner. Cats have individual preferences and some may not like the texture of a particular litter, or the smell of a fragrance added to the litter. Many cats don't like the domed lids because they make the box too cramped and may cause the box to have an unpleasant smell.

Location of the box is important. Many cats don't like to eat near the litter box. An owner may hide a litter box behind the noisy washer or dryer in the laundry room, which may frighten the cat. If a cat spends most of its time upstairs with you, it may find a box in the basement inconvenient. There should be a litter box for each cat in the household. The box should be kept free of solid waste and cleaned every few days to once a week, depending on the litter type and amount of use.

The solution to these problems may be as simple as cleaning the box more often, removing the lid, providing more litter boxes or testing new locations. Sometimes the veterinarian will recommend a "litter box smorgasbord." Many boxes are provided with a different litter type in each. The cat can then choose its preferred litter and the others can be discarded.

Not all elimination behavior problems can be predicted or prevented. However, you can take certain steps to avoid some of these problems. Cats should be spayed or neutered, preferably between 4 and 8 months old, before they reach sexual maturity. When teaching a new kitten to use the litter box, look at its location from the kitten's perspective. When the urge to eliminate hits in

the kitchen after a meal, a tiny kitten may not be able to climb two flights of stairs to get to the box. Likewise, a geriatric cat may not be able to easily negotiate stairs or a litter box with tall sides. Any new cat should be placed in a large room with a litter pan for a few days so he can get used to the new box in a new environment before exploring the rest of the home. If possible, you should find out what kind of litter the cat used previously and use the same kind in your home.

Inappropriate elimination can be a very frustrating problem to diagnose and treat. At the first sign of a problem, you should notify your veterinarian about your concerns. These problems are usually easier to treat early before they have become habits. There are veterinarians who have received formal, specialized training in diagnosis and management of behavior problems in pets. The veterinarian who is a general practitioner can refer cases to these specialists or consult with them over the phone regarding difficult cases. Your veterinarian is your best resource for information on these behavior problems. With patience and your veterinarian's help, many elimination problems can be resolved to ensure a long and happy relationship between you and your cat. □

VEGETARIAN DIETS FOR PETS?

by David A. Dzanic, D.V.M., Ph.D., DACVN

Many Americans enjoy the vegetarian lifestyle today, either for health or ethical reasons. Some people choose to extend this dietary philosophy to their pets as well, which has prompted the marketing of commercial vegetarian dog and cat foods. There is a spectrum of foods and ingredients that may be included or excluded from a "vegetarian" diet, depending on one's definition. At minimum, it usually means that most meat sources are excluded from the diet (such as beef, pork, lamb, poultry, and sometimes fish). More restricted diets exclude

other foods of animal origin, such as egg and dairy products. Perhaps the most extreme example would be a "vegan" diet, where all foods and ingredients of foods, including vitamin and mineral sources, are excluded if they are derived from animals. Provided foods are carefully combined in appropriate proportions, vegetarian or vegan diets for people can be very nutritious and tasty. However, is the same true for dogs and cats?

To help answer that question, one must consider the normal anatomy and physiology of the dog and cat.

Both species are in the scientific order Carnivora ("meat-eaters"), although today the domestic dog is considered more as an "omnivore" (animals that eat both animals and plants). Still, just by comparing the dentition of dogs and cats with that of humans and herbivores (plant-eaters, such as cattle and horses), it is readily apparent that their teeth are designed by nature for eating a diet largely comprised of animal tissue. Their short intestinal tracts compared to humans and especially to animals like sheep or horses also indicate that

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