

Senior Cat Care



Cats are a common addition to many families, with a quarter of households in the UK opening up their homes to these fluffy felines.

The four conditions we will talk about today are common findings in elderly cats and are often identified by the vet at routine booster and health checks. However, there are also several things you can watch for at home. This early identification of problems will help keep our cats happy, healthy and content well into their golden years.

You may notice when reading through that there are similarities and overlaps in the symptoms for each of these conditions. To reach a diagnosis, the vet will need to take a thorough history, perform a clinical examination and may recommend a blood or urine test.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is a condition that affects the cartilage and bone in the joints, which can lead to stiffness and pain. Cats are brave animals and will often hide signs of discomfort. You may start to notice that they have slowed down, they sleep more often than they used to, or, that their favourite sleeping spot has moved; for example, they now prefer the sofa, or the floor in front of the fire, rather than the top of the wardrobe.

They may start hesitating before jumping up onto your lap or the counters and not want to stretch into the graceful cleaning positions that they once used to, so their coat can appear matted and dull.

As osteoarthritis worsens, these signs become more obvious. They might limp, or not want to climb in and out of their litter tray. Although osteoarthritis cannot be cured, it can be managed with medications to provide pain relief and keep them comfortable and happy. Our vets and nurses can also advise you about changes that can be made in the house to make life easier for your cat.

Dental Disease

Over time, bacteria and plaque builds up in the mouth, causing damage to the teeth and gums leading to pain, infection and difficulty eating. When your cat comes in for their annual health check, the vet will check their teeth, however, dental disease isn't always obvious on examination alone. Keeping a close eye on your pet for tell tale signs can alert us to discomfort before the problem becomes severe.

A cat with dental disease may choose to eat wet food rather than the biscuits that they used to like, and you may see them dropping food as they eat. They will often produce more saliva in response to sore teeth and gums so they could start to dribble or get skin sores on their chin and neck where the saliva irritates. They could rub or paw at their mouth if they have a painful tooth.

If an infection develops, you might notice a particularly foul smell (worse than normal cat breath) or swelling on their face. Often, the only symptom that you can see is that they lose weight. If you are worried, then please bring them in for a check and the vet can advise if dental disease is evident and advise the treatment options to manage it.

Hyperthyroidism

The thyroid is a gland in the neck, which secretes hormones that control many functions in the body, such as the way the body uses energy, consumes oxygen and produces heat.

An overactive thyroid can cause your cat to be unusually hungry, but, in spite of their increased food consumption, they actually lose weight. Some owners report that their cat has a changed voice or is more vocal. Hyperthyroidism can also cause a poor coat, and suppress immunity, which can make it easier for your cat to pick up other infections.

Hyperthyroidism is diagnosed with a blood sample and there are several ways to treat or manage it. The vet will discuss the various options with you and advise which would be the best treatment for your cat.

Chronic Kidney disease

Chronic kidney disease occurs when the kidneys become damaged over a period of time, and can no longer function effectively. The main role of the kidneys is to filter and purify the blood to keep important nutrients in the body and to get rid of waste products. The kidneys also play an important role in keeping your cat well hydrated by keeping (or getting rid of) extra fluid when needed. When they become damaged they lose the ability to do these vital tasks efficiently.

The signs of kidney disease include reduced appetite, weight loss and increased thirst and urination. Your cat could become more sleepy and lethargic and not groom themselves as they used to. If toxins build up in the blood stream, it can cause nausea and they may vomit.

Kidney disease is something that can be managed rather than cured. There are several different ways to manage kidney disease and this is often decided after results of blood samples, urine samples, and blood pressure measurements along with a discussion with you. The treatment plan could include a combination of nursing care, special diets, supplements and medications that can slow down the damage to the kidneys and to treat the symptoms.

If your cat is showing any of the symptoms above, or if you have any concerns, please book in for a clinical examination with one of our small animal vets so that we can help keep your cats healthy and comfortable into their senior years.