

THIS JUST IN

Jobs for Feral Cats

It's a win-win situation for everyone (except the rats)

Rats love cities, and fighting rat populations is difficult. Poisons can affect other animals and children. Traps also may catch innocent bystanders. Some cities are helped periodically with rat-fighting terriers, but that is sporadic. The Blue Collar Cats for 24/7 rodent control, however, is ready.

This is a program instituted by the Humane Rescue Alliance to find homes for feral cats. These are cats who have been “living wild” and surviving on their own. Once trapped and spayed or neutered, they still needed somewhere to go. Enter the Blue Collar Cat program. Think of these felines as urban barn cats.

Applicants need to provide a safe outdoor shelter, make sure there is food and water available as well as the outdoor equivalent of a litterbox. Cats need to be confined and acclimated for a few weeks to accept their new home territory. Initially the working cats may be very busy, catching mice, rats, and other rodents. With time, the rodent population usually drops and rodents learn that location X is not a great place to setup living quarters.

Cats have been successfully placed in private homes and at businesses. While most of the cats are not social, some do become like pets over time. Even well fed social cats maintain their hunting instincts however, so these cats continue to earn their paychecks. ■

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Itchy Ears: More Than Mites

Causes of constant scratching at the ears can range from mites to allergies to infections

Ear mites are usually the first thing you worry about if your cat starts scratching her ears. This is no surprise, as ear mites in cats are common, and many of us have adopted kittens with them. Plus, they do make cats’ ears itch like crazy. But, cats scratch at their ears for many reasons.

“While we certainly need to rule out ectoparasites (parasites that live on the outside of the host), such as otodectes (ear mites), notoedres (mange mites), or even demodex (another species of mange mites) on occasion, when working up pruritic (itchy) ears in a cat, there are MANY other conditions that cause itch in this location,” says Dr. Mitzi Clark, assistant clinical professor of dermatology and dermatology section chief at Cornell University’s College of Veterinary Medicine. “Cats are never boring, and their causes of itchy ears can be numerous!”

Causes of itchy ears in cats include:

- ▶ Ear mites
- ▶ Mange mites
- ▶ Allergies
- ▶ Yeast infection
- ▶ Bacterial infection
- ▶ Fungal infection
- ▶ Polyps/tumors in ear canal
- ▶ Foreign bodies in ear canal
- ▶ Infected wounds
- ▶ Immune-mediated skin disease
- ▶ Drug reactions
- ▶ Mosquito-bite hypersensitivity

If your cat has itchy ears, a veterinary exam is critical. Cats can cause significant damage to their ears while scratching, regardless of the cause.

At the Exam

Your veterinarian will start by assessing not only the ears, but the skin, paws, and oral cavity as well. Using an otoscope, your veterinarian can visually assess the entire external ear canal all the way down to the ear drum. Sometimes this is



When your cat is incessantly scratching her ears, it's time for diagnosis and treatment.

all that is needed to diagnose ear mites, as the mites can often be seen partying in there with an otoscope. If they are not visible, the dark waxy discharge that is often found with ear mite infections may provide a useful clue.

If it looks suspiciously like mites, but none are observed this way, a sample will be taken and viewed under a microscope. If they are there, they can usually be found with this closer look. There are many effective treatments for ear mites these days, including some spot-on treatments used for flea control. Be sure to have all cats and dogs on the premises

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Mitzi Clark, DVM, DACVD, is assistant clinical professor of dermatology and dermatology section chief at Cornell University’s College of Veterinary Medicine.



Veterinary Vaccine Controversies

A recent veterinary college blog for practicing veterinarians raises some valid concerns

There is no doubt that vaccines can and do save lives. The rabies vaccine is a perfect example. Rabies is a viral zoonotic disease that is routinely fatal once symptoms occur, even in people with extensive medical care. It is endemic in North America, meaning it exists throughout the continent.

Wildlife populations can spread this disease. As people move into suburbs and more wildlife habitat is destroyed, the odds of coming in close contact with animals such as bats, raccoons, foxes, and skunks that are carrying rabies increase. That means you and your pets are at a higher risk of contracting rabies and dying. By vaccinating pets against rabies, the risk to both people and pets is minimized.

Other feline vaccines prevent or minimize clinical illness from diseases that can be fatal, such as feline leukemia and distemper. Are there some risks? Yes, and studies have led to the development of core versus non-core vaccine recommendations so that your cat does not receive vaccines against diseases she is not at high risk of being exposed



Veterinarians recommend appropriate vaccines because they are effective at preventing disease and because they may be required by law.

to. Vaccine risks for the general cat population are incredibly low, as explained in a recent Germs and Worms blog by Scott Weese, DVM, of the University of Guelph (Ontario, Canada).

Vaccine hesitancy is the catch phrase used for people who are reluctant to vaccinate their pets for numerous reasons. Some are reluctant to trust science in general, while others may have concerns about vaccine risks they have read about or have had their cats experience adverse reactions to vaccinations in the past.

It is important to note that vaccine development has advanced

greatly. Vaccines use recombinant technology in many cases to reduce chances of a reaction and to minimize the chances of inducing illness after a vaccine.

The use of adjuvants, which are added to vaccines as immune-system stimulators, has been greatly reduced since concern was raised about the possibility of their contributing to adverse reactions, most notably vaccine-associated sarcomas.

A study from 2007 showed an overall vaccine reaction rate of 0.51% in cats. These reactions included things as minor as lethargy and as severe as anaphylactic shock. This study tracked cats for a month, so some long-term effects such as vaccine-associated sarcomas might not be detected. That rate is estimated at one case per 10,000 to 30,000 vaccinations according to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

Veterinarians now follow a set pattern of injection sites to track sarcomas and allow for easier treatment if they occur.

The best way to minimize vaccine risks is to carefully evaluate the need for each vaccine based upon your cat's health, lifestyle, age, and vaccine history with your veterinarian and eliminate those that are not deemed necessary due to low likelihood of exposure to the microorganism that they are designed to protect against. In some cases, local regulations may require that certain vaccines be given to your cat, but this is the exception rather than the rule. When possible, spread vaccines out rather than giving all the vaccines at one visit. If your cat has a reaction, discuss future use of vaccines and/or titers with your veterinarian.

"If we had lower vaccination rates, we'd have fewer animals with vaccine reactions (that are almost always transient), but a lot more animals with severe and potentially fatal disease (which can have permanent long-term consequences), even if the animal survives," says Dr. Weese. Lower vaccination rates would also increase human risk of zoonotic diseases such as rabies via transmission from your pets. ■

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Must I Deworm My Cat?

Yes! Monthly is easiest, but ideal timing can vary

Skippping your cat's deworming can put other pets and family members at risk.

"The ideal deworming protocol is going to vary from animal to animal," says Brian Collins, DVM, board-certified canine and feline veterinarian and section chief of the community practice service at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. "There are factors such as age, lifestyle, and geographic area that help determine what will be recommended," making monthly deworming a good idea.

Heartworm Is Everywhere

"Cats that live in heartworm endemic areas should be treated with a product that prevents the development of heartworm infections," says Dr. Collins. "Spread by mosquito bites, heartworm is most commonly found in the southeastern part of the U.S., the Mississippi River Basin, and Texas, but heartworm has been diagnosed in every state. If you live in an area where there is a concern for dogs and heartworm disease, you should also be concerned about cats."

Although cats do not seem to be as susceptible to heartworm infection as dogs, we also don't test our cats regularly, so there may be cases getting missed. And the truly scary thing is that if your cat does get heartworm, there is no cure.

Dewormers that target heartworm

are usually applied to the skin once a month. "Most of them also have coverage against roundworms and hookworms, which are common parasites of cats," says Dr. Collins.

GI Parasites

There are lots of "creepy crawlies" hoping to make a home in your cat's intestines. Common perpetrators include:

- ▶ Roundworms
- ▶ Hookworms
- ▶ Tapeworms

"Indoor-outdoor cats are especially susceptible to heartworms, roundworms, hookworms, and tapeworms," says Dr. Collins. "A monthly product that treats heartworm, roundworm, and hookworm infections will provide excellent protection. An additional product can be given for tapeworms, either monthly based on lifestyle or when the telltale tapeworm segments are noted."

Cats can be exposed to roundworms and hookworms by eating infected wildlife or even just walking through a contaminated area and then grooming. Hookworms can also burrow directly through the skin.

Tapeworms are usually acquired by hunting and eating infected wildlife or from fleas, which transmit them in their bites. If your cat does not hunt and does not have fleas, he is less likely to need regular deworming for tapeworms.

Deworming Protects You, Too

"Regular deworming is also recommended to protect the family, as hookworms and roundworms are zoonotic parasites," says Dr. Collins. Zoonotic means that a parasite can be spread from animals to humans.

Most parasites are transmitted through feces, potentially stirred up and inhaled when you clean the litterbox or inadvertently ingest afterward, but some worms can also burrow through our skin. Deworming your cat not only protects her, but you as well.

Which Product Should I Choose?

Talk to your veterinarian about your cat's lifestyle, where you live, and other pets in the house to determine the product that is the best fit. As Dr. Collins says, something that treats heartworm, roundworm, and hookworm is a great option for most cats.

If your cat also goes outside, flea and tick treatment is likely also on your list of wants. There are products available that cover multiple bases, including to treat fleas, ticks, heartworm, roundworm, and hookworm.

Do I Have to Deworm Year-Round?

It is easy to think that cold northern winters will provide some relief from parasites. Unfortunately, cold weather is no guarantee. Parasites can continue to thrive and spread inside our homes and in the habitats of their hosts all winter long. It only takes a brief warm spell for dormant parasites to wake back up.

Because of this, deworming year-round is wise. Follow the instructions on your chosen product, and set reminders on your phone so that you don't miss administering a dose. The timing of each dose of dewormer is important because it ensures that you break the lifecycle of all the target parasites. Missing a dose even by a few days can result in some "slipping through" and continuing to parasitize your cat. ■

Indoor Cats Are Not Immune to Parasites

We recommend keeping your cats indoors for their safety from cars, predators, and infectious diseases, among other hazards, but keeping a cat indoors does not fully protect him from parasites.

"Indoor cats are also susceptible to heartworm infections when mosquitoes make their way inside. Roundworms and hookworms can be spread by insects [and rodents] when they are ingested by cats," says Dr. Collins. Other pets in the household can also bring in worms or some flea hosts themselves, exposing your cat, and you might transport some larvae on the bottom of your shoes after a walk.



chendong/istock

Brian Collins, DVM, is senior lecturer, section of community practice service, section chief, at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.



Respiratory Illness in Cats Can Be Serious

Many cats have used up one of their nine lives due to a respiratory illness

Respiratory problems in cats can range from minor annoyances to life-threatening emergencies.

Signs of respiratory illness in cats can range from an occasional snuffle or sneeze to labored breathing and heavy nasal discharge. Cats don't tend to cough as much as dogs with respiratory disease do. As with everything else, they are more subtle.

"The most common problem we see is upper respiratory infection. These cats typically have runny eyes, nose (either clear or mucoid discharge), sneezing, and are often lethargic with a waxing and waning fever. Most of these infections are viral in origin, but can develop a secondary bacterial infection," says Leni Kaplan, DVM, senior lecturer, section of community practice service, Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

"We also see asthma, also known as allergic bronchitis; and most of the time, there is a seasonal component to this condition. Every now and again we see cats with lungworm, which we treat empirically, and they usually get better, or we diagnose it via fecal sample," says Dr. Kaplan.



Important supportive care includes cleaning the cat's eyes and nose.

Clinical Signs

In mild cases, you might notice red and inflamed eyes with clear or pus-like discharge. Along with that, your cat may be quieter than normal and not have her usual appetite. Cats rely heavily on their sense of smell for eating, and not being able to smell her food well may decrease her appetite. She may have some nasal discharge. With some of the viral causes of respiratory problems, you may notice that your cat is drooling more than usual due to ulcers or inflammation in the mouth. Sneezing is more common than coughing. (Note: Hacking up a hairball can sound like a respiratory cough.)

The respiratory rate may be increased. Normal respiratory rate in cats is 15 to 30 breaths per minute, and anything over 35 breaths per minute (while at rest or sleeping) should prompt immediate veterinary consultation. If your cat has a fever (normal temperature for a cat is 100.5°F to 102.5°F), she will usually be lethargic.

With more severe respiratory illness, your cat's respiratory rate will usually rise above normal, and her activity level will drop dramatically. She may hide, and you may notice purulent discharge (greenish to yellowish, pus-like) from her nose. She may have a fever, may sneeze and/or cough and may not want to eat at all. In severe respiratory distress, your cat may open-mouth breathe. This is a serious clinical sign that warrants immediate veterinary consultation.

Diagnosing Respiratory Illness

For mild cases, and with a limited number of cats involved, supportive care is often sufficient, and determining the cause may not be that important. Many feline upper respiratory infections tend to be self-limiting, particularly if a cat is appropriately vaccinated. Most affected cats will recover with simple supportive care in five to 10 days. For a cattery or shelter situation, more diagnostics may be merited, especially if some cats become very ill.

Scrapings of the conjunctiva of the

Causes of Respiratory Disease

The most common pathogens are respiratory viruses such as feline calicivirus and feline rhinotracheitis virus. These often occur together, especially in high-density cat populations such as catteries, humane societies, and rescues.

Chlamydia and mycoplasma may also be involved. Secondary bacterial infections may occur due to the damaged tissues and overwhelmed immune system. This is especially true for kittens, senior cats, and cats in stressful situations. Any cat with a chronic health condition is also at risk.

As is typical of respiratory infections in all species, the most common means of spread is via respiratory droplets from sneezing or coughing while in close contact, but many of these viruses can live for short periods of time on things like bedding, food and water bowls, litterboxes, and toys.

eyes can identify some pathogens. Cells collected from the nose or mouth may be helpful, too. In these cases, your veterinarian will examine stained cells to look for organisms, and samples can be sent for viral culture and PCR-based (DNA) testing if necessary. If the upper respiratory illness progresses to pneumonia, radiographs may be taken and a transtracheal wash done to try to identify the causative agent(s). Often, a diagnosis is based on the clinical signs, and empirical treatment may be instituted without a specific diagnosis.

Treatment

Not surprisingly, treatment depends on the cause of the illness. Antibiotics are important if bacterial infections, including pneumonia, develop, and secondary bacterial infections are common with viral respiratory diseases of cats. Your veterinarian may go with the empirical antibiotic choice based on experience or do a culture and sensitivity, although this is more commonly done if your cat does not respond to the first choice. Consider adding a probiotic to your cat's food if she is taking an antibiotic.

Some new antivirals (both systemic and ocular) can be used in cats to help

fight viral infections. These can be expensive but may hasten recovery, especially in cats at greatest risk.

For cats diagnosed with feline asthma, a common feline problem, inhalers that deliver corticosteroids and/or bronchodilators to the lungs are now available. Your cat may need some convincing to become comfortable with an inhaler, but it can be an ideal way to deliver medications directly to where they are needed, and most cats can be acclimated to accepting this valuable way of delivering respiratory therapy.

Some cats may need nutritional support if they aren't eating to avoid the

development of hepatic lipidosis. This may be as simple as an appetite stimulant such as mirtazapine, which can be used transdermally or orally, or as complicated as placement of a feeding tube. Either way, it is important to get nutrients into your sick cat promptly if she is not eating.

Hydration is especially important for cats with respiratory problems. Along with normal hydration requirements, fluids help to keep respiratory secretions liquid, so they are easier to cough or sneeze out. Your veterinarian or a veterinary technician can show you how to give subcutaneous fluids at home for a hydration boost.

If you volunteer at a shelter or humane society, change and wash clothes as soon as you get home, and wipe shoes with a disinfectant or keep a pair set aside just for those activities.

Cats who are in severe respiratory distress require hospitalization. At the hospital, they can be placed in an oxygen-enriched environment and can be given medications and fluids intravenously, avoiding the stress of giving pills and injections.

What You Can Do

Supportive care is crucial for cats with respiratory diseases.

Eyes: Start by checking your cat's eyes. If she has a discharge, flush and clean her eyes three to four times a day. If a conjunctival scrape indicates a viral pathogen, your veterinarian also may prescribe an antiviral medication to be applied after cleaning. Warm compresses can help to loosen up dried-on crusts.

Nose: A warm compress can loosen up crusts and debris from nasal discharges. As with the eyes, you may need to clean her nose multiple times a day. It is important that your cat eat, and if her nose is congested/caked with discharge, she can't smell very well. Without a sense of smell, many cats lose most, if not all, of their appetite.

You can loosen up respiratory secretions inside her nose and sinuses by using a nebulizer or vaporizer. Keeping your cat in the bathroom while you shower will help to humidify her respiratory passages. Consider purchasing a humidifier if the air in your house tends to be dry.

Diet Adjustments: As part of your plan to keep your feline friend eating, consider adding some smelly things to her usual diet. Juice from a can of tuna, a mashed sardine (packed in water) or warm, plain, low-sodium chicken broth or bouillon may entice an ill cat. Add liquid and mash the food if she has oral ulcers that are painful.

Dr. Kaplan says that if your cat is not eating well due to a congested nose, offer her canned food that is lightly heated so the aroma is stronger and stimulates her appetite. You can also add tuna juice or broth to her drinking water to encourage good hydration. Always keep a plain bowl of fresh water available too in case she prefers that.

Air Quality: "Avoid using scented candles, incense, carpet cleaners with strong odors, and heavy perfume, as these may irritate airways that are already inflamed and sensitive," says Dr. Kaplan. "Purchase an air purifier for at least one room of the home, and if the cat is battling an upper respiratory infection or having a flare of allergic bronchitis, she can be confined to this room until she is better. Make sure to wash bedding and vacuum as often as possible to cut down on dust, dander, and other allergens that may irritate airways."

Isolate the Cat: Set the sick cat up in an isolation ward to quarantine her. Be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling her. Have one set of shoes just for that room and wear a smock or apron that stays in that room. All bedding and toys from the isolation area should be washed frequently. Food and water bowls should be cleaned daily, and the litterbox emptied and scrubbed often. Wiping down walls and mopping the floor are also important. Your veterinarian can guide you about which cleaning solutions are best to use for your situation.

Prevention

Vaccinations are key in the prevention of respiratory illnesses in cats. While they may not totally prevent illness, vaccinated cats tend to have milder symptoms and faster recovery times from common viral respiratory infections. Indoor-only cats are less exposed to respiratory pathogens (i.e., viruses and parasites) and harmful environmental influences, such as the wildfire smoke that has plagued much of North America recently.

If you foster cats, set up a quarantine room for them to prevent them from potentially passing respiratory and other infectious diseases to any other cats that you may have in your home. Consult with your veterinarian about how best to manage such quarantines.

If you volunteer at a shelter or humane society, change and wash clothes as soon as you get home, and wipe shoes with a disinfectant or keep a pair set aside just for those activities. Practice good hygiene by washing your hands before interacting with any cats in your home after being at the shelter. ■



Leni Kaplan, DVM, senior lecturer, section of community practice service, Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Behavior Detective Work

Learn how to determine if your cat is stressed, anxious, or in pain and what to do about it

Cats love to keep us guessing, and they often keep to themselves when they aren't feeling well, which just makes things more difficult for us and them. Pain, stress, and anxiety are all things that we do not want our cats to endure, so we need to pay close attention to identify problems.

"It can be difficult to distinguish between the three states," says Pamela J. Perry, DVM, PhD, behavior resident, Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. "Pain can be due to injury or illness and result in stress or anxiety, and stress can be due to feeling fearful or anxious, or of being in pain."



Valery Kudymov / iStock

The anxiety this cat is feeling is palpable. His eyes tell the whole story.

Signs of Stress in Cats

"Cats show that they are stressed in various ways," says Dr. Perry. Stress can be brought on by direct conflicts (such as not getting along with another pet in the house), injury or illness, or by lifestyle changes such as moving or frequent company. Some cats may only show their stress in one way, while others may show multiple behavioral changes.

Signs of stress in cats include:

- ▶ Escaping
- ▶ Hiding under the bed or elsewhere in the house
- ▶ Urinating or defecating outside the litterbox
- ▶ Aggressive toward the owners or other cats or pets in the home
- ▶ Grooming less
- ▶ Spending less time playing and more time resting
- ▶ Fewer interactions with others
- ▶ Becoming "needier"
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Change in appetite (usually decreased)
- ▶ More vigilant and startling easily

"Less frequently, cats may begin to show repetitive behaviors, such as overgrooming, when they are chronically stressed," says Dr. Perry. Any change in your cat's normal behavior could be an indication of stress.

Signs of Pain in Cats

Younger cats are more likely to have

acute pain from an injury, while older cats can have chronic pain related to osteoarthritis or other health conditions.

Common signs of pain include:

- ▶ Vocalizing
- ▶ Flicking the tail
- ▶ Pacing and restlessness
- ▶ Limping
- ▶ Refusing to eat
- ▶ Hiding
- ▶ Unkempt appearance
- ▶ Avoiding being handled

You may also notice some more dramatic expressions and postures if your cat is in pain. "He also may show changes in his facial expression, or "grimace," squint his eyes, lie "hunched up" with his legs tucked underneath him, or show aggression when approached or touched," says Dr. Perry.

The exact signs of pain that your cat exhibits will vary depending on where he hurts and how much. Cats with an acute injury may be more likely to cry out, while cats with chronic pain may be more likely to hide and have a poor appetite.

Signs of Anxiety in Cats

"Anxiety is a generalized feeling of apprehension in anticipation of something that predicts a potentially negative outcome," says Dr. Perry. "For example, a cat may become anxious in the car because she has learned that

car rides lead to trips to the veterinary clinic." Yes, an anxious cat is stressed, but the anxiety causes her to become stressed before the actual event has taken place.

"Anxious cats show various body postures, facial expressions, and behaviors," says Dr. Perry. These include:

- ▶ Dilated pupils
- ▶ Ears lowered and turned back
- ▶ Crouching
- ▶ Spending more time hiding
- ▶ Acting vigilant
- ▶ Walking with a low posture
- ▶ Flicking the tail
- ▶ Suddenly grooming excessively

Your cat may also show more general behavioral changes due to anxiety. "Anxiety also can be manifested as urine marking, eliminating outside the litter box, or other behavioral changes, such as aggression," says Dr. Perry.

When to Seek Help

Occasional stress, anxiety, and pain are all normal parts of life, but we don't want our cats to experience these negative states for prolonged periods of time.

If your cat seems painful, make an appointment with your veterinarian. Call a veterinary behaviorist if your cat's anxiety or stress is a chronic issue or if it is interfering with your cat's ability to lead a normal life and enjoy the things she used to enjoy.

Treating Pain

You will need your veterinarian's help to identify the source of your cat's pain and treat it. There are relatively few analgesic (pain-relieving) medications that are safe for cats, so never give an over-the-counter pain medication unless you are specifically directed to do so by your veterinarian.

Your veterinarian will prescribe appropriate medications and give you other strategies to help keep your cat comfortable and encourage healing of any injuries.



Pamela J. Perry, DVM, PhD, is a behavior resident at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Treating Stress

Try to determine what is causing your cat stress and remove that trigger if possible. For example, if your cat shows stress behaviors when a neighbor's cat comes to the glass door, block the door so your cat can't see the rival.

Your veterinarian can also prescribe medications to help.

Treating Anxiety

Just as with stress, the first step is to identify the cause, such as your cat becomes anxious when you turn your

stove on because once you burned something and set off the smoke alarm—your cat is worried that the stove will cause that beeping to happen again. Your veterinarian will help you devise a plan to resolve that trigger for your cat and may prescribe medications to help keep her calm. ■

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Why Is My Cat Howling?

Nothing has changed in her routine

Q My healthy adult indoor-only cat has started howling seemingly all day and all night. I haven't changed anything in her routine. I don't understand why this suddenly started?

A Thank you for getting in touch with us, and I understand that this must be a concern for you and your family. Cats can be very vocal, and they are good at getting their owners' attention, often at inconvenient times of the day or night.

There are a number of reasons that a cat may vocalize in this manner, ranging from normal to indicating disease. The first thing to rule out is a disease.

Urinary tract infections and/or stone formation in the urinary tract can be associated with pain and discomfort, and may cause cats to vocalize.

In many of these cases, they may show other signs of illness in the urinary tract, such as frequent urination, vocalizing upon urination, blood in the urine or avoidance of the litterbox. They may associate the act of urinating with pain, and therefore stay away from the place they normally urinate.

Certain diseases of the central nervous system, such as tumors or infections of the brain, can cause cats to behave abnormally. In many of these cases, cats will show some other signs of central nervous system problems, such as seizures, problems with balance, abnormal eye movements and/or lethargy/depression.

Another typical cause of excessive vocalization is hyperthyroidism, the most common endocrine (hormonal) problem in cats in which the thyroid produces excessive thyroid hormone (thyroxine), a hormone that is important in a variety of organs in the body. High thyroxine levels can cause a cat to become hyperactive, have a ravenous appetite, lose weight despite eating more than usual, drink



A cat who starts howling may be trying to get your attention.

and urinating excessively, and to have an unkempt appearance. Owners of hyperthyroid cats often report that the cats vocalize excessively at odd times.

Age-associated deterioration of vision and/or hearing, leading to disorientation and confusion can be a cause, as can dementia, which many veterinary behaviorists feel cats suffer from in a manner that is similar to that seen in humans with age-associated dementia.

My best advice is to visit your cat's veterinarian for a check-up. He or she can help rule out medical causes of excessive vocalization, treat them if diagnosed, and/or make recommendations about how to address those causes not directly associated with a disease.

Most cats can be managed well with treatment of underlying diseases, behavioral modification and/or anti-anxiety medications, if needed.

I understand that your kitty may be driving you bonkers right now, but please hang in there and seek veterinary assistance. I am sure that, with time, you will find a solution so that both you and your kitty can get some sleep! ■

(scratching, continued from page 1)

evaluated and treated, as ear mites are very contagious. Ignoring this important step could result in mite infestations going back and forth between your pets.

Once ear mites, foreign bodies, polyps, and tumors in the external ear canal have been ruled out by otoscopic examination, samples are taken from the ear canal for cytology. Cytology identifies inflammation, yeast, and /or bacterial infection. These conditions are typically treated topically. A follow up exam at the end of treatment is recommended to ensure full resolution of the problem.

Your veterinarian may also take samples from the skin and coat to rule out the other mites and fungal skin infections like ringworm, as these can cause itchy skin in cats.

"I can't emphasize enough the importance of ear cytology, in addition to the mite preparations, skin scrapings, and fungal cultures performed," says Dr. Clark.

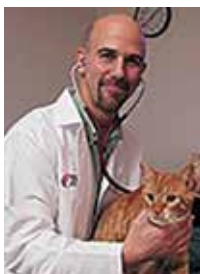
Allergies

The biggest thing causing itchy ears in cats, once ectoparasites and infections have been ruled out or treated, is allergies. Allergies in cats cause normal healthy-looking skin, including that in the ears, to itch.

"I see cats with allergic otitis as the only sign of their food or environmental allergy," says Dr. Clark. Cats with allergic otitis often develop secondary bacterial or yeast infections, so underlying allergies should always be considered for cats with recurring ear infections.

Bottom Line

To assure proper treatment, you need to get a proper diagnosis, which means involving your veterinarian. Just remember that itchy ears are not always due to ear mites, so don't run to the pet store for "ear mite treatment." See your veterinarian for a proper diagnosis and the best targeted treatment, so your itchy kitty can get relief as soon as possible. ■



Do You Have a Health Concern?

Send your health questions to Bruce Kornreich, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, Director of the Cornell Feline Health Center and Editor-in-Chief of CatWatch. Email to catwatcheditor@cornell.edu or send by regular mail to CatWatch, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713.



Scan this code for more information on the Cornell Feline Health Center.

Coming Up ...

- ▶ Strangers in the House
- ▶ How to Help a Feral Cat
- ▶ Dental Care for Cats
- ▶ Handling Hairballs
- ▶ Multi-pet Households