**Caring for your Elderly Cat**

We understand how difficult it can be to watch your beloved pet growing old, and sadly as they do age certain changes in their health are inevitable. However, not all are uncontrollable and with early diagnosis and correct management our aim is to extend the healthy years of your cats life and make them as enjoyable as possible for you both.

As you can see, several of the conditions outlined below have very similar signs and so it is paramount that you bring them to see us as soon as you suspect something is wrong.

**Renal Disease**

Kidney disease is extremely common in older cats. When the kidneys start to deteriorate they can no longer perform their proper function in the body which is to filter waste products from the blood. These toxins then start to build up in your cat’s system leading to illness.

**Clinical Signs**

Drinking more and urinating more, Dehydration

Weight loss with or without reduced appetite

Lethargy/Weakness

Nausea, Vomiting and Diarrhoea

Bad breath

Poor coat condition

High blood pressure

**Treatment**

Sadly this disease is incurable but with correct and timely intervention we can try to slow down the progression of the disease.

The most important thing to do if your cat is showing any of the above clinical signs is to bring them into us at the surgery. Usually our first port of call after performing a full clinical exam is to take some blood to check kidney function. This is a relatively quick test that we can run in house. After we discover the extent of damage to the kidneys we can devise a treatment plan for your cat.

This could include: - Admitting to the hospital here to place on a drip. We usually do this to correct dehydration brought about by vomiting or diarrhoea and to flush excess toxins from the body.

- Change of diet. Once we know the kidneys are no longer functioning well it is very important that we switch your cat onto a specialised diet. There are several companies that make these but the most important thing is that it is low in phosphorous. We can advise you on the correct diet on your cat and also on dietary supplements that will further reduce these substances.

- Medication to lower blood pressure. This is a very important stage as higher blood pressure leads to increased demand on the kidneys and can hasten the deterioration.

**Hyperthyroidism**

This is a very common condition of middle aged to elderly cats, caused by an enlargement of the thyroid gland in the neck. The thyroids secrete a hormone which works in the body to promote healthy growth and renewal of tissues and also acts in many bodily functions.

**Clinical Signs**

Weight loss with a ravenous appetite

Drinking more and urinating more

Hyperactivity/restlessness

Poor hair coat

Easily Stressed

Occasionally vomiting and diarrhoea

Can develop a heart condition secondary to this

**Diagnosis and Treatment**

If your cat is showing any of the above signs the first step is to bring them into us at the surgery. If after carrying out a full clinical exam we are suspicious of hyperthyroidism we will take some blood to send off to an external lab who will measure the amount of thyroid hormone and report back to us.

Once we have these results we can devise a treatment plan which usually involves medical management as the first line of defence. These tablets work to break down the excess thyroid hormone and will be lifelong treatment which many cats do very well on.

Other options, which we are unable to offer at the practice, could be considered if referral is an option include surgery to remove the enlarged thyroid gland or radioactive iodine treatment which kills off the fast growing cells in the thyroid gland.

**Osteoarthritis**

This is a condition that is often more associated with elderly dogs, but we are certain almost as many of our older cats suffer from it too and it can be very debilitating for them.

Signs include: Not wanting to jump up onto chairs/surfaces

Not being able to groom properly, especially around rear end

Howling/excessive vocalisation

Off food

**Treatment**

Depending on the severity of signs we may start treatment with a course of anti-inflammatory drugs (eg Metacam) to reduce pain and harmful reactions in the joint. We will then try to taper this dose down to the lowest dose possible to manage the signs and add in supplements to help with joint healing and function etc, for example ‘Yumove’.

**Diabetes**

Diabetes in cats is often seen in combination with obesity and so weight management becomes very important in controlling the condition. The majority of cats get insulin dependant diabetes (much like type 1 diabetes in humans) which means their pancreas is no longer able to secrete insulin. Some cats however do get an insulin resistance (similar to type 2 diabetes) which means their cells cannot respond properly to the insulin the pancreas is producing. Diabetes is reported as being most common in middle-aged to older male cats but can been seen in all ages and sexes.

**Clinical Signs**

Increased drinking and urination

Increased appetite, often with weight loss

Sudden blindness (due to cataracts forming)

Hind limb weakness

**Diagnosis and Treatment**

As with Kidney disease and hyperthyroidism our first post of call if we suspect diabetes is to run a blood test to check glucose levels. We will do this in house first to give us a rough idea, however in cat glucose is related to stress levels and often just the act of examining a cat in our consult room is enough to dramatically raise the glucose level. Because of this we will often send off a sample to an external lab where they can test for a different form of sugar which is much more stable. We will also often run an in house urine test to check to see whether glucose is being excreted though the kidneys, something that only happens at very high levels.

Once we have diagnosed your cat as being diabetic we will start them on insulin treatment to control the glucose levels. There is no hard and fast rule for how much each cat will need but our vets will monitor you cat closely with you over the first weeks and months to find the correct dose.

As mentioned before weight management plays a very important role in controlling the condition and again there is no set rule for this, but we would highly recommend signing up for a weight clinic with one of our nurses to help you with this.