

Does Your Cat Seem to Be Losing Her Mind?

Cognitive dysfunction syndrome is a common phenomenon among elderly felines.

Your 17-year-old cat, once a fastidious creature, has been ignoring her litter box for the past several months, defecating and sometimes urinating wherever she pleases throughout the house. She spends most of the day either fast asleep or, if awake, staring blankly at a wall. And at night she wanders about the house in the dark, wailing pathetically. Considering that she seems to be in good physical health, you're apt to wonder whether the cat, at the age of 17 (the equivalent of 85 years or so in a human) might be losing her mind.

You could be right. Various studies have shown that as many as 80 percent of cats over the age of 16 show signs of age-related dementia, often referred to as senility or — as animal behaviorist Katherine Houpt, VMD, PhD, prefers to call it — cognitive dysfunction. "Senility is a rather disparaging term, and dementia implies a kind of aggressive behavior that you might see in extremely unstable humans but never in cats," says Dr. Houpt, the James Law Professor of Animal Behavior and director of the animal behavior clinic at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Looking for Clues

The physical changes in the makeup of a cat's brain that result in mental impairment and bizarre behavioral patterns are not well understood, but progress is being made. In one study of cats over the age of 16, post-mortem examination revealed the same type of tangled fibers (beta amyloid plaques) that are seen in the brains of humans with Alzheimer's disease. Another post-mortem study revealed that the brains of cognitively impaired cats contain a certain protein that is also present in the brain cells of humans with Alzheimer's.

All feline breeds are susceptible to age-related cognitive dysfunction syndrome, Dr. Houpt says, although the condition is more frequently observed in domestic shorthaired cats than in pedigreed cats for the simple reason that shorthaired cats tend to live longer.

Telling Signs

The salient indications that a cat is experiencing this condition include spatial disorientation; wandering in unfamiliar territory; diminished playfulness; excessive sleeping; shifting cycles of sleep and wakefulness; long periods of staring into space or at walls; indifference to food and water; sudden, prolonged and seemingly unprompted vocalization; and elimination outside the litter box.

According to Dr. Houpt, the most dramatic and most frequently reported behavioral indication of feline mental decline is an elderly cat's persistent vocalization during the night. "They howl constantly between midnight and dawn," she says. "That's the behavior that owners complain most about and the one that most frequently leads to a cat's being euthanized. People wouldn't mind if the animal was just active during the night. Cats are light on their feet, and you can't hear them pacing. But the constant yowling keeps owners awake."

Another behavioral indication that may signal age-related mental decline is a change in an animal's socializing patterns. "They tend to withdraw from other cats," says Dr. Houpt. "On the other hand, an old cat will usually become more affectionate, more willing to lie purring in its owner's lap for extended periods."

Despite the prevalence of cognitive dysfunction in the older cat population, owners of an elderly cat that begins to behave oddly should not assume that it is becoming mentally impaired. For example, Dr. Houpt points out: "An undiagnosed cancer that the cat has harbored for a long time may make a cat defecate in the house or become less active. And hyperthyroidism, which can be very easily treated, can make a cat hypervocalize, or meow a lot."

Other age-related conditions whose signs may resemble those of mental deterioration include arthritis, which can cause a cat to slow down noticeably as it ages; advanced kidney and urinary tract disease, which may severely alter an animal's litter box behavior; and progressive hearing problems, which may make a cat decreasingly responsive to its environment.

Easing the Situation

Certain measures might help prevent or delay the onset of cognitive dysfunction, says Dr. Houpt, while others will ease the discomfort of an already affected cat. For example, she suggests that cats 15 years of age and older be fed a diet rich in vitamin E and antioxidants, substances that are known to retard the effects of aging.

Dr. Houpt also advises owners to try to reduce the stress in an aging cat's daily life. "Don't bring another cat or a dog into the household," she says. "This can be very stressful during the later period of an animal's life."

If the aging cat has trouble going up stairs or jumping onto a bed, she suggests helping the animal by providing a ramp. Make sure that its litter box is readily accessible and that the animal can get in and out of it easily.

And take the cat to its veterinarian for routine checkups. If its unusual behavior is due to an underlying illness, the veterinarian can recommend treatment. If cognitive dysfunction is diagnosed, the veterinarian can prescribe medications that may ease the condition.

By Tom Ewing, October 2007 www.catwatchnewsletter.com



Toxic Mold May Pose Health Threat To Pets

The deaths of two cats from what is believed to be the first documented case of toxic black mold poisoning in pets point to a new health concern for pet owners, according to a veterinarian who co-authors a report in the Sept. 1, 2007, issue of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.

Douglas Mader, a veterinary specialist in Marathon, Fla., was performing routine dental procedures on two cats when he noticed frothy blood within endotracheal tubes used to supply anesthesia to the animals. The veterinarian immediately stopped the procedures, but both animals died - one the following day, the other about two weeks later.

"The circumstances of these cases are just not heard of," Mader said. "Anesthesia doesn't cause pulmonary hemorrhage [bleeding from the lungs.]" These were healthy, indoor cats. Examinations conducted prior to the dental cleanings showed no indications of illness. Blood collected prior to the cats' death was tested and demonstrated the presence of the toxin produced by *Stachybotrys chartarum*, also known as "toxic black mold." Exposure to the mold can cause respiratory-related health problems, pulmonary hemorrhage and death in people.

It had not previously been associated with disease in pets, Mader said. The toxin from the black mold causes a weakening of the capillaries in the lungs. When the capillaries are stressed, they burst and bleed. The cats died from complications arising from the pulmonary hemorrhage.

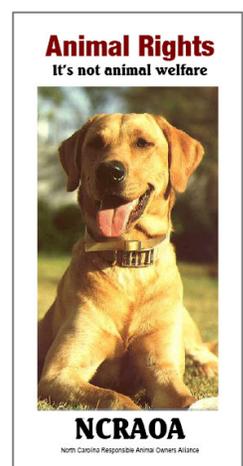
The cats lived in a home that sustained water damage during a hurricane in October 2005, seven months prior to the development of pulmonary hemorrhage. After Mader discovered the presence of the toxins, he urged the cats' owners to check their home for mold. "Sure enough, they had very severe mold contamination in their walls," Mader said. Mader hopes the report will raise awareness that illnesses associated with mold can also affect pets, particularly those living in flood-prone areas. He also suggests pet owners share more information with their veterinarian.

"I think the most important thing is for clients to be aware of things in their environment that could potentially impact the health of animals," Mader said. "They need to let their veterinarian know."
<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/81655.php>

New on the NCRAOA Website

New trifold, "Animal Rights .. It's not animal welfare"

An overview of the difference between animal rights and animal welfare, and basic description of the movement philosophy is available to download from our website.



The Reasons Behind the Puddles on Your Floor

What do you do when Fido starts peeing on your brand new carpet or having accidents in the night while she sleeps? Inappropriate urination problems are not uncommon in dogs and owners should be aware that finding unexpected puddles on the floor may warrant a trip to the veterinarian.

The first step in your dog's diagnosis will be to decide whether Fido's inappropriate urination is caused by a behavioral or medical problem. Your veterinarian will want to know how long your dog has been urinating in the house, how often it occurs, and the situations surrounding the accident.

If your dog or puppy is still being housebroken it is likely that further training and not medical attention will be the solution to the problem. Puppies are unable to hold their urine as long as their adult counterparts so frequent walks at consistent times throughout the day can help with the housebreaking process. However, it is still important to keep an eye on your puppy's bathroom habits and seek advice from your veterinarian if you're concerned.

Once behavioral problems have been ruled out, your veterinarian can then move on to narrowing down the long list of medical problems that can cause your dog's inappropriate urination. According to Dr. Julie Byron, a veterinary specialist at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine in Urbana, it is important to know whether the animal is actively, or consciously, urinating. This information can help distinguish between urinary incontinence and other medical problems like bladder infections or stones.

Incontinence problems in dogs can be caused by a variety of problems. Dr. Byron says that it is important for owners to recognize that with incontinence the animal has no control over its inappropriate urination and usually does not even know that it is occurring. Incontinence is usually characterized by accidents that happen while the animal is resting or asleep, the owner may simply notice that the dog's bed is damp in the morning and that the dog never moved.

There are several factors that can predispose your dog to incontinence issues such as age, breed, and sex. Incontinence is more common in middle-aged and senior animals, but can occur at any point in the animal's life. Also, female dogs and large breed dogs over 45 pounds--like Dobermans, Old English Sheepdogs, and Weimaraners--tend to be more prone to urinary incontinence.

"I also make a point of asking owners if they have noticed their pet drinking more water than usual," says Dr. Byron. "If this is the case the animal may have an endocrine problem that is causing their increased thirst and subsequent increased need to urinate. Blood work would be needed in order to diagnose such a problem."

Once incontinence and endocrine problems have been removed from the list of likely causes the next question your veterinarian may ask you is whether the inappropriate urination is characterized by an increase in frequency or urgency, straining when urinating, or any other signs of discomfort while urinating.

According to Dr. Byron the next step is diagnostic testing, which usually includes a urinalysis and urine culture to detect signs of infection. Depending on those results further diagnostics such as an ultrasound, radiographs, blood work, or cystoscopy may be needed, and can diagnose anything from bladder stones to tumors in the bladder or urinary tract.

If infection is the cause of your dog's problem, your veterinarian will use the results of your dog's urine culture and sensitivity to prescribe an antibiotic to clear up the offending infection. The results of this test are important since it enables your veterinarian to prescribe the right antibiotic to target your dog's specific infection.

Unfortunately, not every medical condition is so easy to fix and some dogs will hit the unlucky lottery with a diagnosis of bladder stones. Bladder stones can form when the pH of your dogs urine is either too basic or acidic, causing the minerals that are naturally present in the urine to form a hard stone. Breeds that are predisposed to bladder stones of various compositions include the Dalmatian, English Bulldog, Schnauzer, West Highland Terrier, and Bichon Frise.

Dr. Byron explains that your veterinarian will use x-ray and ultrasound images to determine how many stones are present and how large the stones are. If the stones are small enough they can be flushed out of the bladder in a non-surgical procedure known as urinary hydropulsion; however, the more common method of removing bladder stones is a surgical method called a cystotomy. After the bladder stones are removed your veterinarian will work with you to create a plan to help prevent further stones from forming.

Dr. Byron recommends performing x-ray studies every other month after the initial operation to reduce the need for future surgery, since it is possible for bladder stones to reoccur despite preventative measures.

For more information on causes of inappropriate urination or on any of the medical conditions that may cause inappropriate urination, contact your local veterinarian.

[University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine](#)

Becoming the Change Conference

Tom Regan's Culture and Animals Foundation holds its annual animal rights conference in Durham this week. Among the conference sponsors are the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the Animal Protection Institute (API), American Anti-Vivisection Society, VegNews Magazine, and Lantern Books.

Michael Greger M.D. and Bernard Unti Ph.D. from HSUS are featured speakers, along with Tammy Grimes of Dogs Deserve Better (DDB).

The conference brochure's description of Culture and Animals Foundation, "CAF fosters the growth of intellectual and artistic endeavors united by their positive concern for animals" would appear to be too low-key for keynote speaker Paul Watson (Sea Shepherd Conservation Society). Watson is best known for his direct action tactics, including ramming fishing and whaling vessels.

"There are 30-million plus species on this planet. They're all earthlings. They're all equal. Some are more "equal" than others, I admit: earthworms are *far* more valuable than people."

— *Paul Watson, at the Animal Rights 2002 convention*

"We should never feel like we're going too far in breaking the law, because whatever laws you break to liberate animals or to protect the environment are very insignificant."

— *Paul Watson, at the Animal Rights 2002 convention*

Meet Buddy, the “Un-Sheltie”

The first time Buddy came through animal control he had been picked up as a stray and was labeled a “Collie-mix”. Buddy was adopted by a family with young children. However, just as puppies and young dogs are prone to do, Buddy in his youthful exuberance jumped on the children, chased them when they ran, and sometimes knocked them down. For this “crime” he was returned to animal control where he was then labeled as a Sheltie and listed on Pet Finder.

Sheltie? No way you say.



When a dog enters animal control, it must be labeled. What is the most frequently asked question when the public walks down the aisles of the kennel: “What kind of dog is this?” Hence the dog is labeled as the closest looking identifiable breed.

Labeling as Generic Basic Dog (Brown Dog, Black Dog, Blue Dog) is in all probability not as attention getting as being named a Lab, Poodle, or “Sheltie”. Does this add to the oft-quoted percentage of purebreds sitting in shelters? Granted there

are shelter personnel that do not have a background in purebred dogs, but even for those who do there is sometimes no choice. The 'pet' placement groups do not provide a 'generic mixed breed' category. You can't do a search for a mutt on Pet finder--you have to have a breed. Animal control has no alternative but to put square pegs into round holes and select a breed name in order to do a listing.

Activists set great importance on the percentage of purebreds in shelters in order to back their demands for breeding restrictions. Correct or not, maybe it was that purebred label that helped the dog be noticed.

Protecting your right to responsibly own and breed animals.

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For more information on animal health, training, reports on pet issues, animal sheltering, or to learn the difference between animal welfare and animal rights – visit our website at www.ncraoa.com

North Carolina Responsible Animal Owners Alliance, Inc. (NCRAOA) is a statewide organization of animal owners and professionals dedicated to animal welfare, responsible animal ownership, and maintaining the rights of responsible citizens to breed and own animals. NCRAOA, a 501(c)3 organization, provides education and information to the public and supports reasonable and humane animal welfare laws.

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