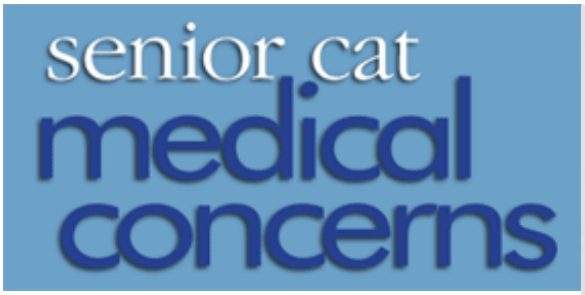
Older Cats Medical Concerns

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



As cats move into the senior phase of their lives, they may be less apt to jump up to an elevated perch, are fussier at mealtime, and are less interested at playtime. Cats move into this phase between 8 and 12 years of age, and though it pains us to see our beloved family member change, there are several important things we can do for him to make the transition easier and keep him in optimal health.

By making good nutritional choices, using appropriate medications and supplements, and incorporating exercise into your cat's daily routine, you can make his senior years more joyful and comfortable.

Nutritional Changes

Some studies suggest senior cats do not digest properly, and thus may not absorb fat, vitamins, minerals, and electrolytes as well as younger cats. This means that they may not be getting the calories or the nutrition they need for optimal energy and function.

Rule out medical problems with your veterinarian, but if your senior cat is shedding pounds due to poor digestion, make sure you're feeding him a quality diet with highly digestible proteins and fats. In addition, supplement with a digestive aid to help him get the most nutritional benefit from his food. Since your cat's senses diminish as he ages, try lightly warming his food before feeding to bring out its flavor and aroma. Make sure he's getting plenty of fresh water, too.

Arthritis Can Rob Mobility

Geriatric cats with arthritis are no longer the agile little tigers you once had zipping around your home. They may have trouble getting into and out of the litter box, which may make them inclined to eliminate elsewhere. They may also begin to avoid jumping over obstacles or jumping up to favorite perching sites, which decreases activity level - and enjoyment of their surroundings. If your cat is disgnosed with arthritis, work with your veterinarian to develop an arthritis management plan.

Stair steps or ramps provide access to favorite perching spots without the pain of climbing. A low-sided litter box is easier on joints, too, and may prevent litter-box avoidance "accidents" around the house.

Medicating With Ease

Your aging cat may be less cooperative at taking medications. Ask our pharmacist to compound his medications, changing the form of a medication to make administration to your pet easier, combining multiple medications into one so you only have to administer once, or flavoring your pet's medication to make it more palatable.

You can also try one of the special treats on the market made especially for hiding a pill or medication inside. Your cat thinks he's getting a treat, and you don't have to fight him to take his medication.

Veterinary Care: Essential in Senior Years

Regular visits to your veterinarian are essential in your cat's senior years, not only to

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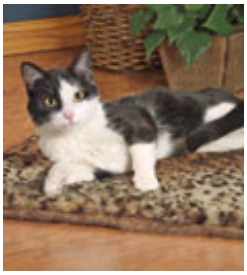
Help Keep Him Active

Activity (physical and mental) is crucial for senior cats. It increases blood flow, which stimulates and oxygenates tissues to help remove toxins from the body more easily. Exercise also helps maintain proper bowel function, especially in constipation-prone senior cats, and can even help cats maintain emotional health. If your cat is still active, take him outside on a harness and leash for exercise and mental stimulation. If arthritic, take him outside in a pet stroller in mild weather. Brush him often to stimulate circulation, especially if he's stopped grooming himself. Keep cat grass handy for him to smell, chew, and paw at for added stimulation.

Whenever you are not certain about any of your aging cat's changes, consult your veterinarian. Timely action will help preserve the quality of life your senior cat deserves.

Products for your senior cat...

Prozyme



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Cat Dental Kit

Greenies® Feline Pill Pockets

years, not only to diagnose and treat ailments, but also to prevent a series of related problems that can occur if one ailment goes untreated.

Make sure your veterinary visits include dental exams and regular cleanings. Dental disease is one of the most common problems in senior cats. Regular at-home care is an important bridge between veterinary visits.

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