

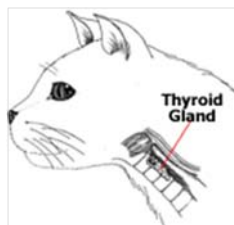


SENIOR CAT DISEASE

Older cats are susceptible to numerous ailments, but a triad of diseases frequently occur more often than others. This information sheet will explain the symptoms, diagnostics, treatments, and prognosis for senior cat disease.

Hyperthyroidism

This condition is caused by a benign tumor of the thyroid gland. While not cancerous, the tumor is hormonally active, causing accelerated metabolism. This results in numerous clinical changes, including increased appetite, weight loss, increased thirst, and (occasionally) vomiting or diarrhea. More importantly, the increased metabolism can cause dangerous changes in heart physiology that can lead to clots or heart failure.



Diagnosis is through a blood test. If the cat is confirmed to have a high thyroid level, this disease can be managed through daily medication or cured through radiation therapy and the cat can live a very normal life. Without treatment, however, the progression to vascular disease leaves a poor prognosis.

Diabetes Mellitus

Most owners are fairly familiar with, or have at least heard of, diabetes. This disease is caused by destruction of islet cells in the pancreas for unknown causes, resulting in loss of insulin production and subsequent high blood sugar.

Initial clinical signs will be excessive drinking and urination. If left uncontrolled, weight loss will result, and eventually the high blood sugar will progress to an acidosis that will cause life-threatening

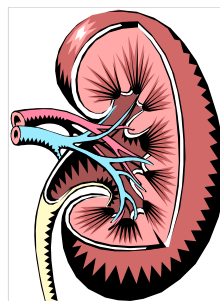
symptoms including dehydration, vomiting, anorexia, and secondary infections.

Diagnosis of diabetes is done through blood and urine testing. If confirmed, all cats are initially started on twice daily insulin injections. Control of some cats can be frustrating and require frequent monitoring, but almost all cats can be controlled and live otherwise normal lives. A minority of cats can be managed through diet exclusively and may no longer need insulin injections, but the injections must be used initially to control the condition.



Chronic Renal Failure

For a myriad of reasons (some understood and others not so much), older cats' kidneys may stop working. This is typically a gradual process; the cat may show mild signs initially, but once the kidneys "cross over" to a state where their output is poor, the cat may become sick very quickly.



Clinical signs of kidney disease include excessive water intake and urination initially. A subtle weight loss may occur as well. As the disease progresses, the cat will begin to vomit regularly and exhibit poor appetite, both of which accelerate the progression.

Diagnosed again by blood and urine tests, kidney disease carries a poor prognosis. If diagnosed early, dietary changes and some medications can slow progression. Very ill animals can be rehydrated with IV fluids to reduce renal toxins in the blood, but this is not as effective as the dialysis used in human medicine. Due to

expense, dialysis is not available in animals, and transplantation is very expensive and limited to two referral centers, in Michigan and California.

Catching Disease Early

As you probably have noticed, all three of these diseases share similar clinical signs. If noted, the cat should have a full workup performed, doing blood and urine tests that will be able to screen for all three diseases, plus other less common ones. Cost of this lab workup is usually about \$160 and takes a day or two to get results.

The advantages of early diagnosis are quite significant, as treating a cat with early disease and minimal clinical signs is far less expensive and ensures better quality of life. Advanced disease always carries a more guarded prognosis. So as your cat gets older, consider regular screening for these common illnesses!