

**VET SERVICES**  
HAWKE'S BAY



**SENIOR CAT CARE**

## SENIOR CAT CARE

Now that your cat is a senior, we need to have a good discussion regarding support for our aging cats.



### FEEDING

You should now change to a senior diet. In general, cats eight years and older start taking life a bit easier and, as a result, their nutritional needs begin to change once more. Senior cats are less active and have a slower metabolism, so they can be even more prone to gaining weight. Equally, as they reach their geriatric years, illness and blunting of the senses of taste and smell mean it can be hard to maintain a good body condition.

In their senior year's cats need a high quality, palatable diet which is easy to digest with lower energy levels and a careful balance of other essential nutrients. Key minerals support ageing joints and along with good quality protein, help support the aging immune system.

Depending on veterinary advice and underlying medical conditions it is advised to move older cats onto a specially formulated senior cat food in preference to a normal 'adult' cat food. Manufactured complete and balanced senior cat foods are carefully formulated to reflect these changes in nutritional requirements and feeding habits. Your senior cat can continue to enjoy mealtimes without compromising on the essentials.

### WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

It is very important as our cat's age that the weight they are carrying is not putting extra strain on their joints.

Ask one of our nurses today for a free weight check. We have fantastic food products available now that help to reduce weight in our cats. Having your cat in his or her ideal weight range will help continue a happy and healthy life as they age. Arthritis is very common from around 6 years on and carrying too much weight at any stage through their life will speed up the arthritis process.

## **COMMON DISEASES AND SYMPTOMS TO WATCH OUT FOR**

### **ARTHRITIS**

Our cats slow down as they age, but there are many great products we can use to help keep them comfortable for as long as we can. Things to look out for if you suspect arthritis:

- 1) Struggling to jump onto the bed or couch.
- 2) Taking longer to get up from lying down.
- 3) Taking time going up or down stairs.
- 4) Swollen joints, lameness.
- 5) Bunny hopping with their back legs.

### **EARLY RENAL DISEASE**

This is also a very common disease we see in older cats as they age. Renal disease is when your cat's kidneys are not working as well as they used to.

Symptoms to look out for are:

1. Excessive drinking/urination
2. Reduced appetite
3. Dehydration, sunken eyes, dry gums
4. Vomiting and or diarrhea
5. Weight loss

A simple blood and urine test will determine how well your cat's kidneys are working and treatment consists of medication and a special diet. Once kidney disease is present it usually can't be fixed, but we can help slow the progression of the disease.

### **HYPERTHYROIDISM**

Hyperthyroidism is an over- production of thyroid hormone. When an animal is hyperthyroid, there is too much thyroxine in the body and the rate of how cells burn energy and turnover is greatly accelerated.

Clinical signs of the disease are:

- 1) Weight loss
- 2) Increased thirst and urination
- 3) Increased appetite
- 4) Poor coat.
- 5) Hyperactivity
- 6) Aggression
- 7) Diarrhoea
- 8) Vomiting

This disease is diagnosed by a blood test and is treated with medication or food. This disease is for life so it needs to be managed on a regular basis

## LUMPS & BUMPS

We start to notice lumps and bumps as our cats age. Some may not be of concern, but other lumps can be nasty and can spread quickly. If you notice any lumps, be sure to have your vet take a look at them. They can put a needle into the lump to collect cells and look under the microscope. This will diagnose what type of lump we are dealing with and the action that needs to be taken. Please remember that the larger the lump gets the more risks there are involved in removing it. So catching and removing (if needed) these lumps as early as possible gives your cat the best chance for a healthy, happy life.

## DENTAL DISEASE

Dental disease occurs as our cats age due to the buildup of dental plaque on the teeth. This process produces inflammation of the gums (gingivitis) that causes the gums to recede exposing the tooth root. With an exposed tooth root, bacteria can travel up the sides of it and result in a tooth root abscess. Chronically infected teeth can cause severe pain, changes in the eating habits, bad breath, loss of teeth, loss of body condition, and the bacteria within the plaque can serve as a source of chronic infectious material that can affect other organs of the body such as the heart, liver and kidneys. At each health check your cat has, the vet will be looking at his or her teeth. Some cats need teeth cleaning on a more regular basis than others.

We have fantastic foods available that help prevent tartar build up, but please note these won't help if your cat already has tartar build up. We recommend once the teeth are clean to then change to a specific diet, as this will prolong the onset once again.



## BLOOD & URINE TESTING

As our cats age it is also a good idea to take urine and blood samples for testing, even if we think they are happy and healthy. These results give us valuable information on ongoing things which we can't necessarily see.

We recommend from 8 years of age testing blood and urine samples annually. If everything comes back normal, this gives us a starting base line, that we can then monitor as your cat ages, and pick up on slight changes very early on.

We still recommend seeing the vet on a yearly basis and we also recommend seeing the nurse for a 6-month senior checkup between vet visits. This checkup is a great opportunity for you to discuss any questions or concerns you may have as well as a general once over. We want to pick up on changes and we can help prolong the onset of disease.



**Please don't hesitate to phone one of our vets if you have any concerns about your cat between visits to our clinic.**