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Capitol Illini Newsletter



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Food allergies: more common than you may think.

It's winter, everything is frozen and your pet is still itchy. This is a problem commonly encountered this time of year. Year round non-seasonal itching in pets is often a sign of food allergies. Food allergies are possibly the most itchy skin conditions in pets. Accurate diagnosis and treatment can greatly improve symptoms and quality of life for your pet.

Common symptoms of food allergies include: year round non-seasonal itchy skin, chronic reoccurring ear infections, hair loss and redness around the eyes, mouth, flanks and paws, chronic anal gland issues and occasionally vomiting or diarrhea. The itching can be mild to very intense. Your pet may also develop secondary bacterial or fungal/yeast skin infections and hot spots.

Many people believe that your pet must encounter a new food or treat to start having food allergy problems; however, this is not the case. Food allergies take time to develop and many animals develop allergies to items that they have been ingesting for years with no previous issues. Food allergies are abnormal reactions to food triggered by the pet's immune system. This response then triggers the characteristic symptoms seen in pets with food allergies. Often the onset of food allergies is before the age of one year or after the age of seven.

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Stress and your cat: A silent player in feline disease.

Cats are unique creatures. Due to their behavioral evolution they can become easily stressed if placed in situations that are against their normal. It can be helpful for cats owners to have a basic knowledge of natural cat behavior in many situations. Often stress can cause unnecessary conflict between pet and owner in the form of unaccepted behaviors and can also cause or make several common medical conditions worse. By understanding just a little more about your cats natural instincts and behavioral evolution you can enrich your pet's life and decrease the effects of some of the common feline diseases.

Stressors are events in a cat's life that affect its well-being. Some cats can be unusually sensitive to their surroundings and experience more stress and some cats seem to be able to adapt well to any situation; every cat is different. Cats that were poorly socialized as kittens or have had some traumatic change in their life seem to be especially affected by stress. These cats are the ones that are most prone to behavioral problems and medical conditions associated with stress. They may respond to stress by showing signs of being fearful or nervous, being aggressive, house soiling and/or developing health problems. Some cats can become stressed by small changes in their territory, visitors in the house, changes in the owners habits or schedule, addition of another animal to the house, and even things that seem very small or are even un-noticed by the owner can cause enough stress for a cat to experience adverse effects. By understanding a little more about normal cat behavior it is possible to make the life of these cats and all cats more enriched.

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Stress and your cat: a silent player in feline disease



Cats are not pack animals and are solitary beings. They mark to communicate by scent with other cats in their territory. They use scratching and rubbing on objects to leave pheromones (natural chemical scents produced by glands in their cheeks, paws, forehead and tail base) and they also will urine mark. They also use vocal communication in cat to cat encounters. They would generally hunt multiple small animals through the day keeping them fairly active and gives adequate mental stimulation. Cats also require specific things for the area that they eliminate. Litter boxes that are clean and on the periphery of their territory in a quiet and private place can make a huge difference in a cat's elimination behavior. Understanding these things can help you understand your cat's behavior on a daily basis.

Many medical conditions in your cat can be either caused or made worse by stress. Stress or perceived stressors change your cat's physiological status and causes a chain of reactions that weaken your cat's immune system. Feline immunodeficiency virus, Feline leukemia virus, and feline herpes are all viruses that can be made worse by stress. Feline asthma and dermatological conditions can be made worse, and over grooming (barbering of fur) inappropriate elimination, and feline lower urinary tract disease can all be caused by stress. Feline lower urinary tract disease is the most common problem that cats get as a result of being stressed, symptoms include blood in the urine, small frequent urinations, pain and crying upon urination, urinating outside of the litter box, and even urinary blockage.

Environmental enrichment can be very beneficial to all cats and especially those affected by stress. Enriching your cat's environment can be more simple than you think. Try to remove anything that the cat feel is threatening and avoid punishment. Cats respond poorly to most punishment, and other methods should be taken to provide rules for your cat without direct punishment. If another pet in the household causes your cat stress, try to give your cat its own space by using a baby gate. Increase the availability of fresh water and change to a canned diet; many cats will be too afraid to go across the house to drink if a stressor is present and will simply just drink less. Change cat litter to clumping, unscented variety, and keep it cleaned frequently. Provide climbing structures, resting perches, scratching posts, visual and audio stimulation if possible. Increase the interaction and playtime you have with your cat and try to identify and resolve problems between cats in multiple cat households. Feline pheromones (Feliway™) can also be used to help create positive smell sensations for your cat. Adopting a few of these enrichment ideas can make a difference in your cat's quality of life. For more ideas on making your cat's life less stressful feel free to contact us at Capitol Illini Vet services.

(source: Clinician's Brief magazine, February 2010)

February is pet dental health month!

A few things your should know about your pet's dental health...

- *** Bad breath may be the first sign of dental disease in your pet.
- *** Harmful bacteria enter your pet's bloodstream from the gums and can cause problems to your pet's vital organs.
- *** Dental disease can start as early as 1 year of age and some pets are pre-disposed to developing dental disease.
- *** Taking care of your pet's teeth can be easier than you think: routine professional cleanings, flavored toothpastes, dental treats and other products are available to help keep your pet's teeth healthy.
- *** Contact us at Capitol Illini to learn more about your pet's dental health.



"My goal in life is to be as good of a person as my dog already thinks I am."
-Anonymous



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Food allergies: more common than you may think**



Our pets are fed a variety of things in their diets today that may cause a food allergy. Generally the allergy is caused by a main protein or carbohydrate source in the food, but sometimes the fillers, coloring, dyes, and by-products can also be the problem. In order to determine what your pet is allergic to, a limited ingredient diet trial must be done. Depending on what your pet is currently eating, medical history, and physical exam findings, your veterinarian can decide what diet is best to try. After strict feeding of nothing other than the new diet for 12 weeks it can be determined if improvement was noted. Depending on what happens during this 12 week feeding trial your veterinarian will decide if your pet should continue on this diet or if it is necessary to try another food. Some pets are easier than others to find an appropriate diet for. Blood testing for food allergies is also available and may be considered depending on your pet's specific medical condition.

Once your pet is on the appropriate diet clinical signs should begin to resolve. After this it is important to observe strict guidelines as to what your pet eats to prevent the itching from returning. The diet must be fed exclusively and measures must be taken to ensure that no one, such as children or visitors, feed your pet inappropriate items (table food, treats, other pet's foods). EVEN ONE BITE of an inappropriate item can cause your pet to start itching again. Caution must be also be used when using flavored products such as medications, toothpaste, and even some plastic toys.

Food allergies can be difficult to diagnose, but once maintained properly, your pet's quality of life will improve. Other health problems often coincide with food allergies so careful management by your veterinarian is necessary. Close follow up and progress reports are imperative for a successful outcome. Feel free to contact us here at Capitol Illini if you suspect your pet may be suffering from symptoms of a food allergy.

(sources: www.veterinarypartner.com and Emily Rothstein, DVM: Small animal client handouts)

*"Thousands of years ago, Cats were worshiped as gods.
Cats have never forgotten this."*



Staff corner: Welcome Michayla Street, CVT



Michayla, born and raised in Scott County, IL.. always knew she wanted a career helping animals. After high school she went to Champaign and worked for a veterinary hospital while attending Parkland College. She graduated from the Veterinary Technology program at Parkland in May, 2010, then joining Capitol Illini in August 2010. Michayla loves spending her free time with her animals. She has a lion-faced rabbit named Cookie, a maltese-dachshund mix named Moxy, a maltese named Meiko and another maltese named Kiara. Other things she enjoys in her free time are running, spending time with friends and family, dog/house sitting and basic agility training with Meiko and Kiara.