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FELINE FOCUS

This month Cedar Way Veterinary Clinic is focusing on our feline friends and the most common issues that owners have been asking us.

Some pet owners may not realize that cats, just like our canine companions, have their own health care needs and issues. Overall, dogs may be at higher risk because they go outdoors more often and are exposed to many different environments but cats are also at risk for certain factors too.

The most common concerns we encounter are:

****Why does my cat need vaccines? He/she stays indoors (or mostly indoors).***

****What issues can my cat possibly encounter?***

****Why should I have my cat's teeth cleaned?***

Let's explain how vaccines work and what they work against. Vaccines help prepare your cat's immune system to fend off invasion by a particular disease causing organism. The organism can be bacterial or viral. When a vaccine is administered, the immune system mounts a protective response. Then, if your cat is

exposed to a disease causing organism, its immune system is prepared to prevent infection or reduce the severity of the disease.

Are vaccines necessary?

Through numerous studies, yes they are. They are the only thing available in fighting feline infectious disease. The vaccines that are needed are dependent upon each individual cat's needs and environment. Indoor kitties need to be vaccinated against rhinotracheitis/calici/panleukopenia (a combination vaccine) and rabies. Outdoor kitties should be vaccinated for the same diseases as indoor kitties along with a feline leukemia vaccine.

What ARE these diseases?

+Panleukopenia (also called distemper): a highly contagious & deadly viral disease. Signs include listlessness, loss of appetite, fever, vomiting, and diarrhea. The virus is shed in the feces of an infected cat and can be active for months to years.

+Herpes virus (cause of rhinotracheitis) & calici virus: are responsible for 80-90% of infectious upper respiratory disease. Signs are sneezing, runny eyes, runny nose, and fever. Both viruses are shed in the secretions from the eyes, nose, and mouth of an infected cat. Cats that are infected can never completely rid

themselves of the viruses & can shed the virus for long periods of time, infecting other cats.

+Rabies: is a routinely fatal disease & public health concern.

Vaccine is required by law.

+FELV (feline leukemia virus): is the leading viral killer of cats. The virus is spread in the saliva and nasal secretions of infected cats. Infection is transmitted through prolonged contact with infected cats, bite wounds, mating, and from mom to babies. Anemia (blood disorder), cancer, and secondary infections resulting from immune deficiency are the most common consequences of infection. Outdoor and indoor/outdoor cats are at the greatest risk.

+FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus): primary mode of transmission is spread through bite wounds. Cats that go outdoors are at risk. The infection leads to a state of immune deficiency that hinders the cat's ability to protect itself against other infections.

The next most common disease cats get but is preventable is: dental disease. Very often we hear the question 'why does my cat need his/her teeth cleaned?' Simply, dental disease and the ramifications of very often go overlooked.

Layers of plaque accumulate & harden on the tooth surface (just like it does with people). Bacterial poisons and plaque enzymes eventually evoke an inflammatory response in the gums. If that is left untreated it will lead to severe gum inflammation (gingivitis). In cats, advanced periodontal disease can lead to secondary infection, tooth fracture, tooth extraction, bone loss, jaw fracture. The bacteria from the plaque on the teeth are swallowed when cats eat & drink so it may also affect the heart, kidneys, and blood stream.

To help prevent the above signs/symptoms, there are a couple options available. The first is a proactive effort for the owner—brush your cat's teeth at home 2-5 times per week. The toothpaste should be made for pets and not people (they can't tolerate human toothpaste). For some, that may be a simple task and for others, it may be one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish.

If brushing teeth is not an option for you or kitty, the next best step in preventing dental disease is to have the veterinarian perform a dental cleaning. It is the same kind of cleaning that people receive from their dentist but our patients do receive anesthesia—they do NOT open up and say AHH.

The next question we commonly hear is ‘Is anesthesia safe?’

In general, the answer is yes as long as safety precautions are taken. An exam is done by the veterinarian prior to the procedure to check for heart &/or lung for irregularities (affects the respiratory system), a simple pre-surgical blood panel is also done prior to the procedure (checks for internal organ abnormalities that can complicate the body’s way of metabolizing anesthesia), the safest anesthesia is used (some are also used in human medicine), and last but not least, monitoring during the procedure by a veterinary technician as well as mechanical equipment. We hope this article was informative so you have a better understanding of your feline friend’s basic health care needs.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please check out our website or call the clinic.

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