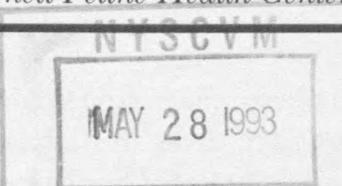
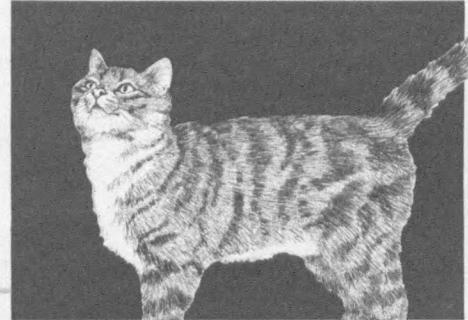


# Perspectives On Cats

Spring 1992

*A Newsletter for Cat Fanciers  
From The Cornell Feline Health Center*



## *Home Care for Healthy Feline leukemia virus-positive Cats*

With the increased testing for feline leukemia virus (FeLV) before vaccination, more healthy kittens and cats are being identified as being infected by FeLV. A cat owner can be faced with a dilemma when their healthy cat tests positive for this virus. In such cases, it is recommended to retest the cat—especially if it was an ELISA test since transiently positive results may occur occasionally. Also, a positive IFA test is less likely to revert to negative because it detects the secondary stage of viremia—when the virus has invaded the bone marrow, establishing a firm foothold within the cat. Even though most cats that are persistently ELISA-positive also become IFA-positive, approximately seven percent will remain IFA-negative. These cats have a better prognosis than cats that have positive results for both tests. The

average survival time for healthy FeLV-positive cats is about two years. If your cat retests positive for FeLV, talk with your veterinarian regarding your options based on your situation.

In a single-cat household it is much easier for the owner to care for a FeLV-positive cat. Complications arise in a multicat household since the FeLV-positive cat should be totally isolated from FeLV-negative cats. A FeLV-positive cat should be kept indoors at all times to prevent it from coming in contact with other cats.

### **Health Care**

Preventive health care is essential for a healthy FeLV-positive cat. The cat should receive vaccinations for panleukopenia, upper respiratory infections and rabies. Any behavior change, such as lethargy or inappetance, may indicate health problems. Also, the owner needs to be observant of other signs of disease including pale mucous membranes, eye problems, weight loss, vomiting, constipation, or neurologic abnormalities. The cat should be weighed regularly so that any rapid or slow weight loss can be reported to the veterinarian.

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Because the feline leukemia virus suppresses the cat's immune system, the FeLV-positive cat is more prone to secondary infections caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. Anemia often occurs in FeLV-positive cats because of the suppression of the bone marrow, thereby decreasing the formation of new red blood cells. Any illness should be treated

## A Second Chance

It takes a special person to adopt cats that are FeLV-positive. Charlotte Wright who lives in Alabama is that kind of person. She currently cares for 29 FeLV-positive cats. It began eight years ago when she adopted three abandoned kittens that she later found out had FeLV.

In an interview published in *Cats Magazine* (November 1991), she said that she likes to give a second chance to cats diagnosed with the virus when their owners might otherwise decide to euthanize them. She states that the cats can live long lives, provided they are well cared for and receive immediate veterinary care when needed.

promptly by your veterinarian. Many illnesses in a FeLV-positive cat are treatable, and do not indicate impending morbidity.

### Nutrition

Providing adequate nutrition is an important aspect of caring for FeLV-positive cats. The food should be nutritionally balanced. The label should state it's "100% complete and balanced based on feeding trials according to the protocols established by the AAFCO". Diets may need to be readjusted based on the cat's condition. For example, an anemic cat requires a boost in nutrients so that the body can replenish its supply of red blood cells. This may include feeding trace mineral supplements and B-complex vitamins. Avoid feeding semimoist cat food to anemic cats as the ingredient propylene glycol shortens the lifespan of circulating red blood cells, and thereby exacerbates the anemia.

Food palatability helps to maintain a cat's interest in eating. Canned foods are made more palatable by warming the food. This not only releases the aromas to enhance a cat's appetite, but also prevents possible digestive upsets that can be caused by feeding cold canned food.

### Drug Therapies

Because the feline leukemia virus is a retrovirus it has characteristics that make it difficult to eliminate. A variety of treatment protocols have been attempted, from antiviral drugs to boosting the cat's immune system. Vitamin C has been touted as a cure for feline leukemia. But controlled studies did not show any effectiveness from high doses of vitamin C. Unfortunately, there is no effective treatment that has been developed.

### Summary

Providing good health care for the healthy FeLV-positive cat ensures a better quality of life, and perhaps quantity of life. However, the owner must realize that the cat may develop an FeLV-related illness and become so uncomfortable that euthanasia becomes the only humane course of action.

(For further information on feline leukemia virus, request our brochure on the topic by writing to Cornell Feline Health Center, College of Veterinary Medicine, 618 VRT, Ithaca, NY, 14853-6401 and enclose a self-addressed stamped-envelope. Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery.) ■

## Lyme Disease in Cats

Lyme disease is continuing to spread according to reports from the Center for Disease Control. This is a concern to cat owners since little is known about Lyme disease in cats.

The causative agent of Lyme disease is *Borrelia burgdorferi*, a spiral form of bacteria. The deer tick is the primary carrier for *B. burgdorferi*, transmitting the bacteria when it sucks the blood of the host animal. Diagnosis is based on clinical signs (i.e. fever, lameness, loss of appetite) coupled with high titers in serotests for *B. burgdorferi*. There have been no published reports of the organism being isolated from cats, so it has been impossible to confirm Lyme disease as a clinical entity in cats. Antibiotics are used for treating Lyme disease.

Because outdoor cats frequent the same habitat as dogs, one might expect that the risk of Lyme disease would be similar to that of dogs. However, in veterinary practices that have seen hundreds of cases of Lyme disease in dogs, less than 20 cats were thought to have the disease. A possible explanation for the reduced occurrence of Lyme disease in cats compared with dogs may be grooming habits. *B. burgdorferi* is not transmitted to the host until at least 10 to 24 hours after attachment of the tick. Cats may conceivably remove most ticks by grooming shortly after the ticks have attached, decreasing the possibility of the bacteria entering the cat's bloodstream. Another possible explanation is that cats may be physiologically more efficient at clearing the bacteria from their bodies.

Outdoor cats are at a higher risk; and they also may increase the risk of Lyme disease for their

owners. Proper usage of pesticides in the environment and on the cat are important methods of preventing Lyme disease. Chlorpyrifos is the preferred environmental pesticide. When using any pesticide carefully read and follow the directions on the label.

(Adapted from an article written by Drs. Jacobson and Saidla in "Feline Health Topics"—Vol. 5 No. 4, 1990.) ■

## Perspectives On Cats

*A Newsletter for Cat Fanciers*  
From The Cornell Feline Health Center

The ultimate purpose of the Cornell Feline Health Center is to improve the health of cats everywhere, by developing methods to prevent or cure feline diseases, and by providing continuing education to veterinarians and cat owners. All contributions are tax-deductible.

*Director:* Fred W. Scott, D.V.M., Ph.D.

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*Q.I am writing because of a peculiar and distressing week-long episode that recently occurred in my two-cat household. After five years of harmony, one of my cats became hostile and aggressive toward his brother. The problem gradually diminished. Can you think of any possible reasons for such an abrupt and total change of behavior?—W.M., New Hampshire*

A. Aggression occurring between cats, *intercat aggression*, is the most common type of feline aggression and can be triggered by any number of situations. According to Dr. Katherine Houpt, an animal behaviorist at Cornell University, common causes include the introduction of a new cat into the household, or a familiar cat returning from the hospital with a new smell or uncoordinated gait from tranquilization. If a cat has experienced something unpleasant but takes it out on an innocent bystander, it is called *displacement aggression*. Common inciters of this kind of behavior include seeing strange cats outside, hearing a cat fight outside, or smelling the urine-marking of a cat outside. In most cases, the old friends will eventually work out their differences, but if they are actually hurting each other or if their disagreement is lasting a long time, they may need help to settle their dispute.

Treatment involves separating the cats and gradually reintroducing them. One method involves using barriers between the cats. Begin first with a solid barrier, then gradually downgrade the barrier to a screen, and then finally a baby gate. It may be helpful to rub the cats with the same towel so that their odors are interchanged. Another method requires separating the cats by putting them in individual

cages when feeding them. Slowly move the cages closer together; cats are rewarded with feeding in one another's company. Eventually let the victim out of the cage, but keep the attacker in until the victim no longer hisses and there is no sign of aggression by the attacker. In severe cases, it may take 6 weeks or longer for the aggression to disappear.

#### Correction—

From my response to the question regarding bathing of cats in the previous issue of *Perspectives on Cats*, it was possible to conclude that a professional groomer is able to dispense tranquilizing medication. The statement was not meant to imply that. Only a veterinarian is permitted to dispense tranquilizers for cats. I apologize for the potential confusion.—Dr. James R. Richards

*Have a question about cat care?*

*Send your question to the address below and have a published answer in the next issue of Perspectives on Cats.*

Cornell Feline Health Center  
POC/Mail Bag  
College of Veterinary Medicine  
Ithaca, NY 14853-6401

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We extend a special "thank you" to the following people, organizations and cat clubs who contributed \$100 or more to support the programs of the Center during the last three months. We also wish to thank those who are not listed, but made a contribution during this time.

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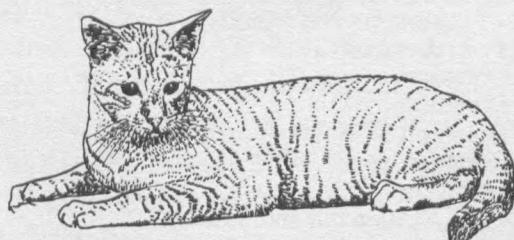
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***Thanks to You, Wishes Come True***

We are grateful and happy to report that fellow cat lovers responded generously to our "Christmas Wish List" in the last issue. We were able to purchase the Multi-Bloks Heater and First Temp thermometer for the Small Animal Clinic. We received other gifts earmarked for particular items or "where needed most." We wish to thank the following people who responded to our wish list items—

Deborah Burlingham, Ohio  
Frances Frey, Florida  
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### A Comprehensive Seminar for Cat Breeders

Saturday and Sunday, August 15-16, 1992  
at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

This comprehensive short course is designed for cat breeders and others who work with or share a serious interest in cats. It will be taught by faculty members of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine and other distinguished feline specialists. The course is being cosponsored by the Cornell Feline Health Center, Veterinary Continuing Education Department, and Cornell University Programs in Professional Education.

For more information write to Programs in Professional Education, Cornell University, Box 201, B12 Ives Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-3901 or call (607) 255-7259.



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