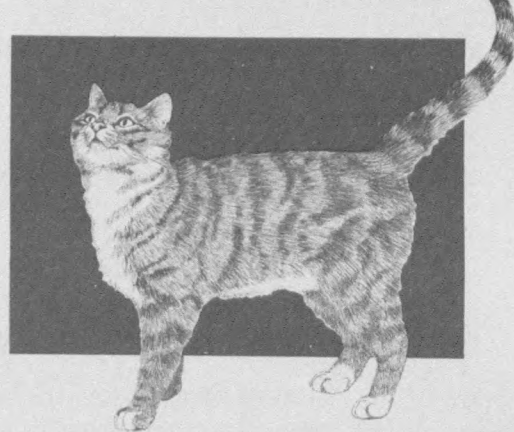

Perspectives On Cats

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

Winter 1988



Winterizing Your Cat's Lifestyle

John E. Saidla, D.V.M.

The average cat is very adaptive to its surroundings no matter what the outdoor temperature or length of the day. However, you can increase both the level of safety and pleasure that your cat has during the coldest part of the year by providing cold-weather protection.

There are many variables to consider when preparing your cat and its surroundings for winter. The following questions will help you think about the factors involved.

- *Have you moved into a new residence or are you bringing in a new cat?*
- *What are the different ages of cats in the household?*
- *Has the cat undergone a recent weight loss?*
- *How drastic are the fluctuations in temperature?*
- *What are the various stresses in the cat's life?*
- *What are the potential environmental hazards?*

Cats needing more help the first winter include the newly purchased kitten or adult cat, or cats that are moved to a new home or outdoor environment. You may need to show them where to find the security and warmth they will need. Keeping your cat in a place that is warm, dry, no drafts, and pleasant will help to make them more comfortable.

Basic Care for Young and Old Cats

The different ages and stages in your cat's life will certainly dictate the level of care and other considerations involved when providing for their winter-time care. The young kitten's needs are different than the adult cat, but are similar to the old, senile cat in declining health and mental status. They both need more warmth, more frequent feedings, more frequent litter pan changes and more human concern and care. Young kittens will need protecting from the roaming neighborhood dominant tomcat until they are at least old enough to defend themselves. Young intact female cats need protecting from the same tomcats for reproductive reasons. Male cats that are allowed outdoors should be neutered to protect them from the aggressive bully tomcats.

Inside this issue. . .

Winterizing Your Cat's Lifestyle	Page 1
Vaccine Protects Against Chlamydiosis	Page 3
Helping Your Cat Survive the Holidays	Page 4
A Christmas Story	Page 7
Honor Roll	Page 8

Food for Warmth

Cats need a certain amount of body fat to help provide for warmth in the winter time. If your cat is older and has lost some weight since last spring and possibly does not see or hear as well, then it is advisable to take it to the veterinarian for a physical examination. Weight loss is actually a loss of body fat; however, in the later stages of the condition, muscle wasting takes place. Weight loss may indicate a metabolic disease such as hyperthyroidism or diabetes, or just the

decline of advancing years. In either case you need to know the cause and treat accordingly.

If no medical reason for the weight loss can be found, then your veterinarian may recommend increasing the fat content of foods fed to help replace the body weight and provide more calories to expend for heat energy. If you observe your cat shivering, you should provide additional warmth and food. Supplementary heat can be achieved by providing a heated sleeping place -- a heating pad on a low setting or by increasing the thermostat setting in the house both during the day and night.

Temperature Changes

The fluctuation of temperature between outdoors and indoors, the natural fluctuation between early morning and the midafternoon high for the day, and the temperature differences in a room (eg. the difference between the floor level and five feet high in the room) are factors that increase the chances your cat may develop a cold, or runny nose and eyes. This element of stress may cause tonsillitis,

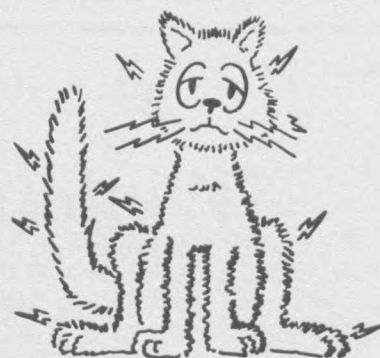
pharyngitis, laryngitis, and rhinitis. Bacteria or mild virus infections cause many of these mild upper respiratory infections. Sneezing, coughing, watery eyes, runny nose and voice changes are typical signs of these infections. These signs are reason enough for a visit to your veterinarian for treatment.

Indoor Stress

The various stresses in a cat's life are numerous and include being cold, lonely, kept in dark or semidark environment, overcrowding, moving to a new home, confinement, over breeding, diseases, noise or smoke pollution, and the addition of a new kitten or cat.

Indoor cats should live in open spaces rather than confinement in a small bathroom or darkened apartment hall. They need light, bright colored spaces that have perches, toys, scratching

posts, litter pans of different shapes, and enough room especially for multiple cats. Cats, even though small themselves, need their own spaces just like their human friends. Providing windows to look out, covered and protected tanks of fish, and even



protected bird cages provide excellent diversions for the house-bound cat. Leaving on a radio or television, especially to a soothing music station, will help relieve monotony of being alone all day. Consider having a friend check on the cat at midday. While you are home, talk to your cat and include it in family activities. Increasing the amount of play time with your cat will make a difference in its adjustment and contentment during the winter months.

Changing the litter pan more frequently for indoor cats will help reduce odors. Also, it will encourage cats to use the litter more frequently, thus decreasing the possibility of house soiling.

Heating the home with woodburning stoves and other forms of dry heat can cause dry cracking skin, foot pads and noses. Occasionally the hair coat will appear dry and dull. Often cats exhibit an increase in itching and scratching during the winter months due to living in a dry environment. A good preventive measure is to maintain a humidity level of 30 to 50 percent in the house.

Environmental Hazards

Potential environmental hazards include poisonings, being hit by cars and exposure to extremely cold weather.

Poisonings can occur during any season. Ethylene glycol poisoning occurrences increase especially during the late fall when automobile antifreeze is being changed. The sweet taste of the ethylene glycol (antifreeze) causes potentially fatal kidney problems. The fatal dose is only 1.5 milliliters per kilogram in the cat. In the kidney,

oxalate crystals are formed causing the urine production to cease, resulting in an acute depression and death within 12 to 36 hours after ingestion. Some of these animals can be successfully treated after ingesting a lesser amount if they receive prompt intensive treatment by a veterinarian.

It is thought that cats climb into car motors to hide, find warmth, and to lick antifreeze that has been spilled around the radiator cap. This also creates the additional hazard of them being in the motor area when someone starts the engine. Many cats try to get out in a hurry and are injured by the radiator fan blades. Locating outdoor cats prior to starting the engine is very helpful in preventing these dangerous situations.

Indoor poisonings of all types can happen from plant leaf ingestion to insecticide intoxication. A watchful eye for all of these possibilities will help prevent them from happening. Kittens

are susceptible to electrical shock from chewing on electrical cords. This is not much of a problem in adult cats.

Frostbite, or freezing of tissue, is rare in animals that are healthy and well-nourished. However in cold regions, cats are susceptible to frostbite of the tips of ears and tails when exposed to the extreme cold.

Cats that have access to the outdoors are also at risk of being cat-napped by someone looking for a healthy cat. Also a roaming cat may select a new family with which to live.

In Summary

Making sure that your cat is healthy, having it examined by a veterinarian and updating its vaccinations, and making a conscientious effort to provide for its safety and comfort will provide years of companionship. ■

John E. Saidla, DVM, is assistant director of the Cornell Feline Health Center and feline extension veterinarian at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell.

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: Fredric W. Scott, D.V.M., Ph.D.

Editor: June E. Tuttle

Secretaries: Sheryl A. Thomas, Gwen Frost,
Karen Havekost

Special Consultant: Leo A. Wuori, D.V.M.

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Vaccine Protects Against Chlamydiosis

Chlamydiosis (feline pneumonitis) is the third most common respiratory disease in cats. Estimates indicate that up to 20 percent of cats with respiratory disease may also be infected by chlamydia. The disease is spread among cats by direct contact with eye or nasal secretions from infected cats.

Clinical signs include ocular and nasal discharge, sneezing, conjunctivitis and pneumonia. Associated complications include dehydration and anorexia which develop when the cat loses its sense of smell due to blocked nasal passages.

Vaccines have been developed to protect cats against chlamydiosis. Kittens should be vaccinated at 8 to 10 weeks, followed by a second dosage at 12 to 14 weeks. An annual booster is recommended to maintain protection. Vaccination of cats can be important to human health as well since there are documented cases of human conjunctivitis caused by feline chlamydia. ■

Helping Your Cat

June E. Tu

The holidays are a festive, but hectic, time of the year. Kitchens are filled with the aroma of baked goods; gifts begin to pile up as shopping hastens at a frantic pace; and parties fill the weekends. Before you become too caught up in the hustle and bustle of the season, take a moment and consider the affect the holidays have on your cat's health and well-being.

Stress

We know how stressed we are by the holiday season, but how do cats react to this surge of household activity? Cats rely on routine schedules. Any disruption in their daily routine causes stress. Physiological reactions to stress include increased heart rate and changes in the motility of the gastrointestinal tract (i.e. diarrhea, constipation). Behavioral responses to stress can vary from withdrawn behavior to aggression to house soiling. We consider these responses to be misbehavior, when in reality they are natural behavioral responses by a cat when it is stressed. Consider the following scenarios.

The Party:

The doorbell rings and the first guests arrive for the holiday party. The sight of a cat asleep on the fireplace hearth catches the attention of the seven-year-old girl. Without hesitating, she runs and grabs the cat, and begins to stroke its fur. By now the cat's ears are flattened back, the eyes are dilated, and before you can intercede, the cat strikes out with claws unsheathed at the little girl. You apologize to your friends saying, "I don't know why Hector scratched Denise. Normally, he loves to be petted."

(Yes, Hector would, under normal circumstances, purr contentedly when petted. However, in this case his environment was invaded by a stranger.

The confusion of being awakened suddenly and held by a stranger triggered an aggressive response.)

The New Kitty:

Joey has been begging his parents for a kitty of his own. His parents decide that Christmas would be the ideal time to give Joey a kitten. On Christmas day Joey is elated with his "gift". However, lurking in the corner is the 12-year-old cat that has resided in the house without any other animals to invade its territory. As the kitten frolics by the old cat, the old cat hisses a warning, then suddenly attacks the kitten. Over the next few days the attacks become more frequent, and the old cat begins to urinate and defecate every place but in the litter box. In the meantime the kitten appears withdrawn and is found hiding in secluded places in the house.

(The introduction of a new pet can be one of the most stressful situations for both the new pet and existing household pets. In this particular case, all three forms of behavior occurred -- aggression, house soiling, and withdrawal. Because the holidays are such a busy time, there is not enough time available for one to properly socialize and acclimate the new pet to its new environment. Also, the holidays interrupt the normal daily routine.

The best alternative is to wait until after the holidays to introduce a new pet to the household when daily routines are reestablished. However, a second alternative is to initially keep the cats physically separated for a few days, then slowly allow them to interact during a quiet time. Throughout the adjustment time you should provide additional attention to the older cat.)

Survive the Holidays

A.A.S., B.S.

Holiday Treats

There is always a temptation to share holiday goodies with pets, and probably a greater temptation to feed table scraps to pets. However, a cat's digestive system is finely tuned to a carnivorous diet. Feeding high-caloric, low-protein, high-fat holiday foods to a cat can cause vomiting and diarrhea. A healthier alternative to rich holiday foods from the table are cat treats that can be purchased from a pet or grocery store. These should be rationed since they do not provide a 100% nutritionally balanced diet.

Holiday Plants

Poinsettias, amaryllis, mistletoe, holly, and Jerusalem cherry are plants that adorn our homes during the holiday season. Unfortunately, all these plants are potentially dangerous to cats. The following table provides information on the poison potential of those plants.

If there is any sign that the cat has eaten any of the listed plants, the cat should be taken to a veterinarian so that preventive measures can begin early.

POISONOUS HOLIDAY PLANTS

PLANT	POISON	TOXIC REACTION
Amaryllis	The bulb contains an alkaloid substance that is a gastric irritant.	Nausea and vomiting
Christmas Mistletoe	Sympathetic amines that stimulate smooth muscle contractions.	Nausea and vomiting; also can increase blood pressure, pulse and respiration rates.
English Holly	Compounds that irritate the digestive tract.	Nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea immediately occur after eating the plant.
Jerusalem Cherry	Solanine glycosides	Vomiting, abdominal pain, bloody diarrhea and a dry mouth are noticeable 18 to 24 hours after the plant is eaten. May also cause cardiac arrest.
Poinsettia	The milky substance in the stems and leaves irritates the digestive tract.	Inflammation of the mouth, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea immediately occur after eating the plant.



Hot pepper sauce applied to leaves and stems will deter most cats from nibbling on leaves. Another alternative to prevent plant poisoning is to locate plants out of the cat's reach or territory.

Decorations

Glistening tinsel, bright ribbons and bows, twinkling lights, and shiny glass ornaments easily attract a cat's attention.

Although ribbons and tinsel seem relatively harmless, they can cause intestinal (bowel) obstruction when ingested. Trying to remove the string by pulling on it can create enough tension to cut or saw through the bowel. Safe removal of string or ribbon can be accomplished by your veterinarian who may use surgery or endoscopy.

Glass ornaments can easily shatter into thousands of sharp-edged pieces when knocked off the tree. These pieces can easily penetrate a cat's paw, eye, or accidentally become lodged in the tongue, esophagus, or digestive tract during the cat's grooming ritual. Ingested glass shards are potentially dangerous and require a veterinarian's attention.

Hanging breakable ornaments on higher branches and nonbreakable ornaments on lower branches may help preserve the ornaments and your cat's health, unless the cat climbs into the tree. Providing a safe distraction, such as a catnip toy, may furnish enough stimulus to divert the cat's attention from the holiday decorations. However, some cats are so mischievous that they require constant supervision when holiday decorations are on display.

Artificial snow has become a popular addition to many holiday decorations. The chemicals used to make artificial snow are toxic and may cause gastric upsets if ingested by a cat.

Wires for tree lights are just one more enticement to the curious cat. Pulling or gnawing on the wires is a common holiday hazard for a cat. Potentially, the cat could receive an electric shock which could be fatal. A solution of hot pepper sauce rubbed on the wires will deter most cats from playing with electric wires.

Tinsel can be replaced by strings of cranberries, wooden beads or paper cutouts. These items are less attractive to the curious cat and are less likely to be ingested.

Tree Hazards

The Christmas season traditionally features decorated pine trees. Trees inside the house are particularly attractive to the inquisitive cat and may become the cat's new climbing post. A tree can easily topple over when it becomes unbalanced from the weight and movement of a climbing cat. The simplest remedy is to locate the tree near an area where it can be easily stabilized by attaching guy lines to it. The use of flexible wire or heavy fishing line can be used to attach the tree to curtain rods or ceiling hooks.

Cats may find that the tree stand provides a new source of water. In most instances the water is not harmful, provided a chemical solution is not added to prolong the freshness of the tree. If you do use chemicals, you must prevent your cats from drinking the water. Cut a plastic milk bottle in half and cut a hole in the center for the tree trunk to fit through. Making a slit from edge of bottle to the center hole will make it easier to slide the bottle over the tree stand to prevent your cat from drinking the treated water.

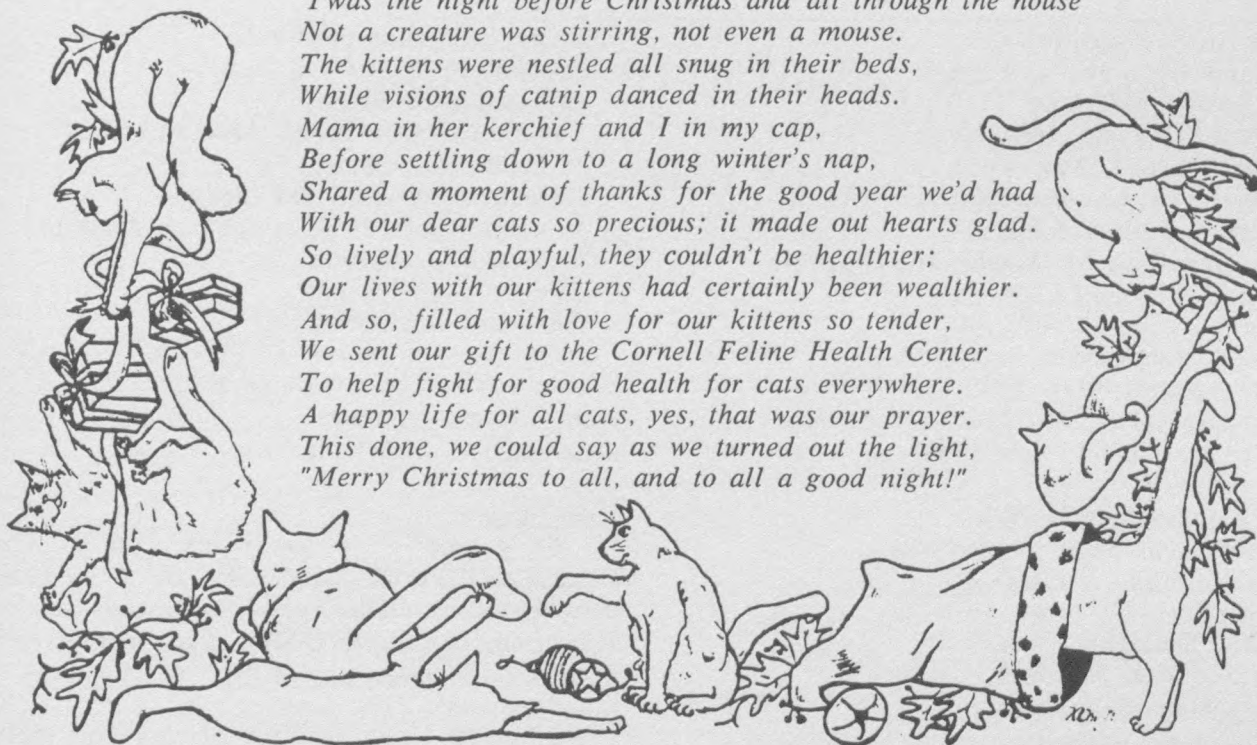
Summary

Helping your cat survive the holidays requires additional care and precaution. However, it is worth the extra effort to ensure your cat's health and well-being. ■



A Christmas Story

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house
 Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
 The kittens were nestled all snug in their beds,
 While visions of catnip danced in their heads.
 Mama in her kerchief and I in my cap,
 Before settling down to a long winter's nap,
 Shared a moment of thanks for the good year we'd had
 With our dear cats so precious; it made our hearts glad.
 So lively and playful, they couldn't be healthier;
 Our lives with our kittens had certainly been wealthier.
 And so, filled with love for our kittens so tender,
 We sent our gift to the Cornell Feline Health Center
 To help fight for good health for cats everywhere.
 A happy life for all cats, yes, that was our prayer.
 This done, we could say as we turned out the light,
 "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"



Help create a healthier future for cats everywhere. Use this coupon below to send your gift to the Cornell Feline Health Center.

Enclosed is my Christmas gift to help the Cornell Feline Health Center develop new treatments and vaccines to fight feline diseases.

☐ \$25 ☐ \$10 ☐ \$ _____ ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100

Name _____

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Make checks or money orders payable to Cornell Feline Health Center and send to:

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Honor Roll

During the past few months the Center has received many contributions from individuals and cat clubs interested in the future health of cats. The people listed have contributed at least \$100 to support the Cornell Feline Health Center's work on feline diseases. We are most grateful for their generous support. We also wish to extend our thanks for the support of many others who are not listed on the honor roll.

Name

Dona Adler, California
Lyn and Jim Enright, Virginia
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Club Support:

We extend a special thank you to **Garden State Cat Club of New Jersey** for their generous contribution to help fund our studies on Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP). The monies will be used for studying the effect of antiviral compounds against FIP.

Other cat clubs showing their support include:

Genesee Cat Fanciers Club, Inc., New York
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