Are you Taking Proper Care of Your Cat?

People often admire cats for their independent nature, but that same self-sufficient attitude may also be responsible for a lack of veterinary care. Cat owners often think that their kitties are perfectly capable of taking care of themselves and don't need any medical attention. More than 50% of all cats are never brought to the vet for a wellness exam in their lifetime while silent but easily preventable conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, hypothyroidism and dental disease, are quickly rising among our cats.

There are many reasons to get your apparently healthy cat to the veterinarian. Reason #1 is that it is a law in Massachusetts that every cat be vaccinated against Rabies. That is how we prevent humans from contracting Rabies— by protecting our hunter cats from getting it. All indoor cats are at risk of contracting Rabies from a bat and then transmitting the killer disease to their human housemates.

Another reason to get your cat to the vet once or twice a year is parasite prevention. A stool sample should be examined every year on your cat to protect you and your cat from parasites. Cats may contract roundworm and hookworm. Even an indoor cat can contract eggs from potting soil, which can carry eggs or form eggs being tracked in on shoes. The eggs, if ingested or touched by a human, can infect the human; migrate throughout the body and cause blindness.

Your cat can contract heartworm from one mosquito bite. Symptoms are either nothing, vomiting or sudden death. Heartworm in cats is an easily preventable disease.

Fleas are what transmitted the bubonic plague. They also transmit bartonella, which is cat scratch fever. You do not want fleas in your house. For a good summary of how parasites are contagious to people and some really gross pictures of what a migrating animal parasite can do in your body go to capcvet.org.

Cat owners should remember that our little feline friends are VERY good at hiding their illnesses. Without regular veterinary visits, a disease or

condition could go unnoticed for months or years, until severe symptoms finally force a visit to the pet's doctor.

Monitor your cat's social behavior. An independent cat that suddenly becomes clingy may be feeling unwell. Likewise, a normally social cat that becomes withdrawn may also be exhibiting early signs of illness. If your active cat is starting to slow down or doesn't seem to have the same energy level, arthritis could be the culprit along with several other conditions.

Changes in water intake or eating habits are also often early signs of illness. It's a good idea to know how much your cat eats and drinks each day and to also monitor their eating. Sometimes early dental problems can be seen as odd. Similarly, if your cat has bad breath, metabolic diseases or even serious dental disease could be the problem.

Changes in weight can occur without any significant change in food intake. Unexplained weight loss or weight gain should be investigated. A cat that doesn't want to groom is definitely not feeling well. This could be due to arthritis, obesity or even dental problems.

Changes in sleeping habits or even vocalization habits are also good signs that your cat may be experiencing some unseen problems. Cats often sleep about 75% of the day, so a sudden decrease in the time spent sleeping is very concerning.

Finally, like many people, cats prefer a stable routine and a calm environment. Situations that can cause stress for our cats include new people in the home, changes in routine or even an unforeseen move.

If you notice any changes in your cat's behavior or signs similar to the ones listed above, it's a good idea to see your veterinarian as soon as possible. Our cats can't talk to us and let us know what's going on, but his or her doctor can help get to the bottom of their distress.

Ideally, a veterinarian should see both dogs and cats every 6 months. This will help find and identify problems before they turn into big expensive issues.

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