



34 Walnut Road, TQ2 6HS
01803 606059
79 Kingsway Avenue, TQ4 7AB
01803 843836
info@greenbayvets.co.uk
www.greenbayvets.co.uk

CARING FOR THE OLDER CAT

Older cats often have special care requirements. They are also very good at hiding signs of illness. The annual health check (usually done at the same time as vaccination) provides a good opportunity to discuss your pet's care. This fact sheet outlines some of the key areas we need to keep an eye on.

Common 'older cat' diseases

Common diseases of older cats include diabetes, kidney disease, and over-active thyroid gland disease (hyperthyroidism). High blood pressure is also a common problem and can cause serious problems including blindness. In many cases, the earlier the problem is discovered and the sooner treatment implemented, the better. Many cats hide signs of illness so that by the time they are showing obvious symptoms the disease is quite advanced.

Specialists now recommend that we screen cats as they get older. Screening can include the following:

- A simple urine test to detect diabetes or early kidney disease. Kits are available from us which allow you to collect a sample in the litter tray at home. This is a relatively inexpensive screen.
- Blood pressure. This is done with a vet or nurse in the clinic, usually with the owner present. The appointment can be arranged for the same day as the annual health check to avoid a repeat visit. This is also a relatively inexpensive screen.
- Blood tests to check blood cells, liver and kidney function and thyroid hormone level. This is gold standard for screening in addition to urine and blood pressure checks.

It is recommended that cats aged 7 or over are screened annually. As cats get older it may be necessary to check them in the clinic and consider screening more frequently.

To arrange screening at the same time as the annual health check please speak to a member of our team so we can allow enough time. Alternatively, you can discuss it further with the vet at the appointment.

Changes that may indicate a health problem include changes to appetite, changes to the amount of water drunk and increased tiredness/reduced ability to exercise. If you notice these, or any other symptoms of illness in your cat, an appointment with the vet is advised. The vet may suggest blood or urine tests to investigate further.

Mobility

Arthritis is very common in older cats, but can easily go unnoticed. Signs may include:

- Reduced jumping
- Difficulty with stairs
- Spending less time outdoors
- Difficulty in using litter tray or cat flap
- Less toy playing
- Difficulty grooming

If you notice any of these changes, mention them to the vet.

Weight

Older cats should be regularly weighed and have their body condition assessed. This can be done in our free nurse weight clinics. If your cat is overweight it can cause health problems such as diabetes - our nursing team will happily help come up with a plan to help with this. If your cat is losing weight a check-up with a vet is advisable and blood tests may be indicated.

Skin and coat

Older cats may struggle to groom themselves and you may need to help them. Some cats will need gradually introducing to a brush and it is best to do this from a young age with long-haired cats. If the fur is matted, an appointment should be made with a vet to check your cat. Sometimes we have to shave the matts if they cannot be groomed out comfortably. It is important to regularly check your older cat's nails, as they can get in-grown. One of our vets or nurses can clip your cats nails or show you how to do it at home.

Teeth

Dental disease is very common in older cats, but they may not show any signs despite their mouth being inflamed and painful. Our nurses can check your cat's teeth and advise about tooth brushing and other dental hygiene measures. In many cases, the vet may recommend an anaesthetic to clean the teeth and remove any diseased ones.

Dementia and loss of senses

Signs of dementia may include the following:

- disorientation/wandering away from home into unfamiliar territory,
- lack of interest in playing,
- excessive sleeping/altered cycles of sleep and wakefulness
- long periods of staring blankly into space or at walls
- indifference to food and water,
- urinating and defecating outside the litter box, and
- seemingly unprompted episodes of loud vocalizing, frequently in the middle of the night.

If you notice anything you are concerned about an appointment with a vet is recommended.

If you are interested in reading more about caring for your older cat, the International Cat Care website has a wealth of information - <http://icatcare.org/>.