

Ask the vets++

CP's team of veterinary experts tackle your feline-related questions...



Q When I was a young girl my vet told me to make sure that if any pet died in a household the other pets were allowed to see them and smell them so they would know that they were really dead and would not look for them. Please could you explain this as I think it would save a lot of pets and owners a lot of grief.

Via letter

A Animal grief isn't a well understood area. Anecdotally, it can help an animal to see and smell the pet that has died or been euthanased in some situations. This may help to prevent searching behaviours for animals that are no longer part of the household. However all animals and owners are individuals and this is not necessarily appropriate for everyone.

For those who find themselves in this situation we would advise the following. Cats can experience grief at the loss of an owner or fellow companion animal. If this is the case, it is important to understand that they may take some time and allow them to grieve in their own way. If they choose to hide or sleep in privacy, then don't be tempted to fuss them or try to bring them out from their hiding place. It's important to allow them to hide and this in itself can help to reduce any anxiety. The most important thing you can do as an owner to support a grieving cat is to maintain a regular, predictable routine; including regular times and usual levels of fuss and attention. It is very common to over-lavish attention on to a cat in difficult times as a way of trying to comfort them as we may do with other people, but unfortunately from a cat's point of view this can be confusing as the owner is acting differently, or in some cases can lead to an unhealthy overdependence on the owner.

If you feel you could do with some support during this difficult time, we would recommend getting in touch with the Pet Bereavement Support Service run by the Society for Companion Animal Studies (SCAS). Losing a pet of any kind is a painful experience and the trained volunteers run a confidential telephone (0800 096 6606) and email support line. For further information, please follow this link: www.scas.org.uk/human-animal-bond/coping-with-pet-loss

Q I would like to know the opinion of Cats Protection on the subject of yearly vaccinations for cats. My cats came to live with me some years ago and were all adult cats. Two had left home after their former owners brought a third dog into the home and my third cat was a stray who was not chipped and no-one came forward to claim. They had not previously been vaccinated and I had them injected every year since.

Have you got a question?

Send your questions to:

Ask The Vets, The Cat magazine, National Cat Centre, Chelwood Gate, Haywards Heath, RH17 7TT or email editorial@cats.org.uk

However I have been reading articles in various cat magazines and papers which seem to think that this is not necessary. They point out that most vaccinations for humans last over many years and some for a lifetime.

It does upset all three cats when I have to take them to the vets and so I was wondering if there is any real need for this or whether it is more of a cash bonus for chemical companies.

Ms Graham, London

A Cats Protection supports the judicious use of feline vaccination as the most effective way of controlling infectious disease in cats, which are sadly commonly seen in the UK, and far more commonly than serious adverse consequences associated with the use of vaccination.

Cats housed in rescue care are at especially high risk of infectious disease, because of the changing population of stressed cats in varying nutritional and physiological states with often unknown vaccination histories and which are shedding various bacteria and viruses. This makes vaccination of cats within our environment extremely important. All cats and kittens homed from Cats Protection have been vaccinated before adoption and we recommend their new owners continue to give them regular vaccinations on their vet's advice, to keep them protected through their lives.

To ensure protection, all cats should receive a primary core vaccination course of two injections three to four weeks apart, commencing from around nine weeks of age. In order to ensure a good level of continuing protection, the first booster vaccination should be given a year after the primary course. Thereafter the recommended frequency of boosters may depend on individual lifestyle and risk, and CP recommends that owners continue regular vaccinations as advised by their vet to keep them protected.

The immune system's 'memory' for infectious disease-causing micro-organisms declines over time unless those micro-organisms are encountered with some frequency. The time of decline depends on factors including:

- the individual cat
- whether the cat is being regularly naturally challenged through exposure to the micro-organism in its environment
- the specific micro-organism

There are a wealth of guidelines and vaccine manufacturer recommendations available on the frequency of vaccinations. CP recommends owners consult their vet who is best placed to guide on frequency and type of vaccination for specific cats and how often boosters should be given to maintain protection. Some infectious diseases are more of a risk

through direct contact with other infected cats and so cats with outdoor access in areas with high feline population density may be at greater risk. Cats kept indoors may appear to be more protected, but then they are not getting natural exposure to bacteria and viruses, which can act as natural booster reminders to their immune systems. If not kept up to date with vaccinations, immunity may wane and indoor cats may then be more at risk if they do become exposed.

Q I took on a cat that had previously been owned but abandoned when his owner had to go into a home. He had lived under a hedge for nearly two years, being fed by neighbours.

He has the run of the house and garden now but he 'yowls' at various times of the day and night. I think he's talking to my other cat but there is no way of knowing. He went back to the vets recently and is borderline having thyroid problems and gingivitis. The vet also told me that he doesn't wash his coat. He licks his paw and washes his face but keeps his paw flat, whereas other cats bend their paw to be more flexible. Why does he yowl and how do I get him to wash himself?

Ms Smith, Northampton

A Several conditions can cause vocalisation. As your cat has been diagnosed as having thyroid problems it is possible that he may be showing one of the signs of hyperthyroidism. Other signs to look out for include increased appetite, increased thirst, weight loss, behavioural changes such as hyperactivity, restlessness and being more vocal, vomiting, diarrhoea and a poor coat. If treatment becomes necessary, you may find that the vocalisation reduces.

However, vocalisation also occurs in older cats who may be experiencing confusion or senile changes and can quite often be shown during unsociable hours of the night. Another cause of vocalisation is due to a change in visual acuity (the eye's ability to resolve fine details) which can lead to unusual vocalisation. Quite often there is no obvious sign that the cat's eyesight has changed until a change in the environment is made, for example, the furniture being moved. Cats are so dependent on their sense of smell that this will often mask any visual problems they have. Your vet will be able to give an ophthalmic examination to detect any changes to vision.

A reluctance to groom may be linked to your vet's diagnosis of gingivitis. Gingivitis is a painful condition caused by inflammation of the gums, making it uncomfortable for cats to groom. Other reasons cats may not groom include other dental disorders, being overweight, or having arthritis that makes it more difficult to twist and turn. We would suggest you discuss this with your vet, as there may be further treatment that may help. However, it is important you help him manage his coat by gentle regular grooming to prevent his skin becoming sore.

THE EXPERTS



Maggie Roberts BVM&S MRCVS

After qualifying at Edinburgh University in 1986, Maggie went on to work primarily in private practice. Maggie first worked for CP as Veterinary Officer from 1997-99; her interest in feline medicine brought her back to the charity as Director of Veterinary Services in 2006. She has two cats, Frankie and Ronnie.



Beth Skillings BVSc MRCVS

Beth qualified at the University of Liverpool in 1998 and went on to work in general veterinary practice until 2005 when she joined CP as Head of Veterinary Services. Beth moved into a new role as Clinical Veterinary Officer in November 2006. Beth has a CP cat, Humphrey.



Lisa Morrow BMLSc DVM MSc (Vet Epi) MRCVS

Lisa graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, Canada in 2000. Lisa first worked with CP as an Adoption Centre Vet at Derby Adoption Centre and was CP Head of Veterinary Services from 2003-2005. Lisa rejoined CP in 2009 as Field Veterinary Officer in the northern region of the UK. She has a black cat, Kiwi.



Sarah Elliot BVetMed MRCVS

Sarah graduated from the Royal Veterinary College London in 2007. After an initial two years in small animal practice in Nottingham, Sarah headed to New Zealand to continue veterinary practice abroad. Upon her return home Sarah took up a position as a PDSA vet in North London. Sarah was very happy to combine a love of cats and charity work as a Cats Protection Field Veterinary Officer.



Emily Billings BVSc MSc MRCVS

Emily graduated from the University of Liverpool in 2007 and went on to work in a private veterinary practice until joining CP as the National Cat Centre Veterinary Officer. She has one CP cat called Wolfy.

Our veterinary surgeons have provided the advice on these pages, but for specific cases and health concerns it is important that you consult your own vet who will be able to look at your cat's history and do a clinical examination.