



Feline Hypertension



Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is common in older cats. Studies have shown that about 60% of cats with chronic kidney failure and 25% of cats with hyperthyroidism have hypertension. Other conditions that can be associated with hypertension include: heart diseases such as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and endocrine (hormonal) disorders such as diabetes mellitus. Sometimes hypertension can be idiopathic, which means that there is no identifiable cause.

Clinical signs of hypertension in cats include:

- Depression
- Behavioral changes
- Visual abnormalities such as dilated pupils, blood within the chamber of the eye, and sudden blindness.
- Increased volumes of urine production
- Symptoms of the underlying disease indicating that it is not adequately controlled.

Diagnosis of hypertension starts with a complete medical history and physical exam. Your veterinarian will pay particular attention to any changes in the organs targeted by hypertension—the eyes, brain, heart, and kidneys. Next, your cat's arterial blood pressure will be measured. This procedure only takes a few minutes, causes no pain, and is well tolerated by most cats. A blood pressure consistently greater than 180 mmHg is

considered high in cats. Blood pressure readings between 160 and 180 mmHg are also considered too high, but your veterinarian will need to consider the effect of your cat's temperament and the stress of being in the hospital. The "white coat effect" experienced by people also occurs in cats, and an artificially high reading may be obtained if your cat is frightened or too excited.

Left untreated, the consequences of hypertension can be severe. Extreme hypertension is a medical emergency!

Cats with very high blood pressure can develop sudden blindness, damage to their kidneys, or seizures and will need to be hospitalized and treated with emergency drugs to lower the blood pressure. Blood pressure must be lowered as soon as possible to preserve remaining function in the damaged organ. Left untreated, the more likely it is that the damage may be permanent.

In chronic cases, treatment is first directed at controlling the underlying disease causing the hypertension. While these treatments may not be a cure for the underlying problem, most conditions causing hypertension can be medically managed. Your veterinarian may also prescribe a medication to help bring the blood pressure down to normal.

Regular follow-up visits with your veterinarian to monitor your senior cat's blood pressure and blood work are a must to prevent serious complications.

Ongoing veterinary care for hypertension, and the other chronic conditions that may be associated with it, along with extra love and attention from you, can brighten your cat's golden years and help your old friend live *and* love longer!