



For the last two months we have addressed the fact that cats are missing out on regular trips to the veterinarian's office. Just to remind you, a recent report stated that cats are only taken to the veterinarian's office an average of 0.7 visits per year. That means a lot of our feline friends are missing on getting their *at least* yearly exams. This month we will talk about just a few of the many things can be caught during this yearly wellness exam.

It is kind of a no-brainer that you take your cat to the veterinarian when she isn't feeling well, right? What about when she seems totally normal? Why bother? Our yearly physical exams can sometimes reveal a lot more issues than you may think! A visit to the vet should include a weight of your cat, a thorough physical exam from nose to tail (and everything in between), possibly some needed vaccines and most important a good question and answer session with your friendly veterinary staff. While I can't possibly mention all the problems that a yearly physical exam may reveal – there are books written on that subject and this is just a small article – we will mention just a few of the most common issues.

Weight – So, has kitty gained a little weight since their last visit? If so, your vet should let you know why proper weight is important and how you can help your kitty shed those unwanted pounds. On the other hand, maybe your feline friend has actually lost weight and you and the doctor have decided that some blood work and maybe some other tests might be in order. Regardless of which way it went, this is probably the biggest area that an owner doesn't notice - weight changes. The reason this is so hard to notice is that you see your cat all year long and even significant changes in weight are gradual and are not so easily noticed. Your veterinarian has a record of what your cat weighed in the past and uses this information to determine what kind of trend may be occurring. After all, your vet may only see your cat once or twice a year, so that extra two pounds of fat is really quite noticeable.

Physical - When a doing a physical exam, a well experienced veterinarian can use much more than a history and numbers on a chart to give your cat a thorough checkup. An overall look over your cat's physical appearance can reveal changes in the general body type of your cat and the vet will notice possible aging or disease changes when they look into the eyes, ears and mouth. They should notice if your cat's coat feels funny, or if there is a new lump felt somewhere on the body. Maybe the vet will feel a thickening in the walls of the intestine. They might just notice a bad smell to kitty's breath or other parts. What sounds did your vet hear when they put on their stethoscope and listened to your pet's heart and lungs? In addition to all of the diagnostics done by machines and tests in a clinic, your vet is utilizing multiple senses at once to really get a feel about how your cat is doing. OK, maybe there is one sense that your vet won't use during a physical exam...Taste. Taste may not be so helpful in the whole scheme of things. But if it would help, we'd certainly give it a whirl!

Mouth - Another area that we notice a lot of changes from year to year is in the mouth. Most owners are not checking their cat's teeth on a regular basis, let alone brushing them (which is an excellent thing to do!). During many wellness exams that I have performed I have found moderate to severe dental disease that owners had no idea about. Sometimes there is weight loss directly associated with the dental problems and sometime not. A lot of those cats even show signs of pain when the mouth is examined by "chattering" or just avoiding the oral exam. While brushing your cat's teeth is a great preventative measure that you can take to help in your cat's overall health, realistically it just doesn't happen that often. This is another reason why yearly exams by your vet, including an oral exam are a must for all cats.

As I stated earlier, another important part of the yearly exam will be the chance to talk to your veterinary clinic's staff about any of those questions that have been nagging you over the past year. I love it when owners are involved in the well being of their cats and we get a chance to discuss all the questions that come up. Be it dental care, behavior, flea and heartworm control, diet or just whatever you want to discuss, I feel my job is complete when they are involved and asking what is the best for their cat. Be sure to make your vet's day by planning and keeping a yearly wellness exam for your cat.