



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Cats hide their pain

Recently my precious eight-year-old cat Jasmine was diagnosed with Stage 4 kidney disease after having a blood test. I was totally blindsided and didn't have a clue she was critically ill.

She hid her illness tactfully, and by the time I noticed she had lost over a pound the disease had nearly destroyed her kidneys.

I missed the warning signs that something was wrong with my cat.

Jasmine had also been diagnosed with chronic colitis when she was a year old and had always been slim. (She's been on a special diet for years.) And unlike her sibling Tinkerbelle, Jasmine's personality is

more independent and shy — which made a change in her health much harder for me to detect.

Jasmine is on now on IV fluid therapy at home and I am monitoring her. Right now she is pain-free and is enjoying whatever life she has left.

Felines instinctively hide their pain as a survival strategy, and it goes back to their existence in the wild when trying to avoid attracting the attention of would-be predators. So it's important for cat pet parents to know and look for the subtle signs Kitty isn't feeling well. There are many causes of pain in cats, from injuries to arthritis to dental disease. Some causes are obvious and others are not.

Pet parents may not immediately see physical signs that something is wrong. Unfortunately, this ability to hide discomfort makes it difficult to identify when Kitty is not feeling well and when you should take her to the vet.

One of the top silent killers of cats is chronic kidney disease (CKD).

Kidney disease is truly a sneaky killer. It can be months or even years before symptoms surface and the disease is diagnosed. By then, the damage may be

severe and irreversible.

Routine blood work can detect a chronic kidney problem at an early stage. For cats 7 and older, tests for kidney function should be performed at least annually. It's a simple blood test that could save your cat's life!

Even though your cat can't talk to you she has many ways of telling you when something is wrong and she needs your help.

You just need to give her your full attention using sense and all your senses.

The most common sign of illness in some cats is hiding in a quiet, out-of-the-way place. Sick cats often lie quietly in a hunched position.

She might neglect grooming. But only you know your cat's habits, so keep an eye out for grooming changes.

She may be purring, which a cat will do when she's happy, but also when she is in pain.

A cat that doesn't feel well usually doesn't want to eat. Some illnesses can cause increased appetite, so don't ignore your suddenly ravenous kitty. Increased thirst and urination may indicate kidney disease, diabetes, or other illnesses.

Keep an eye on your cat's litter box for ANY changes in elimination.

Does your kitty have diarrhea or constipation? Diarrhea can result from nervousness, a change in diet or water, food sensitivities, intestinal parasites, infections and more. And if you notice that your cat is suddenly urinating or defecating out of the litter box, it can also be due to a variety of medical issues, such as a urinary tract infection or renal disease, diabetes, etc.

Is kitty regurgitating or vomiting? If your cat regurgitates soon after eating, she may have a problem. Vomiting food after it's been in the stomach can indicate poisoning, blockage or a host of other problems. So if your cat vomits for more than a few hours or vomits repeatedly for more than a day, she needs to see a vet. Remember: when in doubt, it is always better to call the vet instead of waiting to see what will happen.

Do you notice any change in Kitty's activity? A decrease in your cat's activity could be due to internal discomfort, illness or arthritic pain. And on the other hand, an increase in activity can be related to a metabolic change such as hyperthyroidism.

Sudden weight changes can also be cause for concern. Unexplained weight



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE
Jasmine has kidney disease.

loss can be signs of kidney disease, diabetes, and many other conditions.

Even an increase in vocalization can suggest hyperactivity, high blood pressure, pain or anxiety.

If you notice Kitty has bad breath, it could be the earliest indication of dental disease or a sign of dehydration.

Cats are generally social creatures, so a change in the level of interaction with their pet parents or other pets can also signal disease, fear, anxiety or pain.

Stressed cats many have more difficulty socializing and may hide more, and sometimes this behavior can be related to physical diseases.

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