

Hypertension is the medical term for high blood pressure. This is an important medical condition in cats.

Why can cats get high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is commonly found as a complication of an underlying disease, although primary hypertension (high blood pressure without an underlying disease) may also be seen in cats.

What cats are at risk from high blood pressure?

Any cat older than seven years of age potentially may have high blood pressure. However, individuals with medical conditions known to cause high blood pressure are at greater risk. The most common underlying causes are chronic kidney failure, hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid gland) and sugar diabetes.

What effect can high blood pressure have on my cat?

High blood pressure particularly affects certain vulnerable organs:

- **Eyes:** Bleeding into the eyes and retinal changes can occur and this may result in damage to the cat's vision, which is often permanent.
- **Brain and nervous system:** Bleeding in this area of the body can cause neurological signs such as odd behaviour, strange gaits, seizures, dementia and coma.
- **Heart:** High blood pressure over time will make the heart work harder and as a consequence the heart will become thickened, which can lead to congestive heart failure.
- **Kidneys:** Over time, high blood pressure damages the kidneys and may increase the risk of kidney failure developing. In cats with existing renal failure, the high blood pressure is likely to make the renal failure significantly worse over time.

How would I know if my cat had high blood pressure?

As high blood pressure is often seen as an effect of other diseases, cats with high blood pressure may be showing signs attributable to their underlying problem. For example, in the case of hyperthyroid cats with high blood pressure, weight loss (in spite of a voracious appetite) and hyperactivity may be the major clinical signs. In many patients, no specific clinical signs of hypertension will be seen until the condition advances to the point where there is spontaneous bleeding into the eye or retinal detachment - these cats often present with sudden onset blindness.

Why is it important to know if my cat has high blood pressure?

Early recognition of hypertension is important in order to minimise the severe and often permanently damaging effects of persistently high blood pressure on the eyes and other organs. Some cats with high blood pressure do appear depressed, lethargic and withdrawn and many owners notice an improvement in their cat's behaviour once hypertension has been successfully managed, even if signs of damage to other organs are not present.

How would my cat's blood pressure be measured?

The equipment used is similar to that used routinely in people, with an inflatable cuff placed around one of the front legs or the tail. Measuring blood pressure only takes a few minutes, is completely pain free and is extremely well tolerated by most cats.

Which cats do we recommend blood pressure monitoring?

We recommend blood pressure measurement of any cat with an underlying condition which can cause hypertension. Older cats are more likely to develop high blood pressure and there is good rationale therefore for including blood pressure assessment in the routine clinical examination of these cats.

How would my cat be managed if high blood pressure was diagnosed?

There would be two broad aims of management: to reduce the blood pressure using anti-hypertensive drugs and to treat any underlying disease.

What is the prognosis for cats with high blood pressure?

Where there is no underlying disease that has caused the high blood pressure it is usually possible to manage the hypertension and prevent future complications, such as damage to the eyes. In cases where there is an underlying condition causing the high blood pressure, the long term outlook is very dependent on the nature and severity of the disease that has caused the hypertension. Cats with chronic renal failure that have developed hypertension have a worse prognosis than those where the cause of the high blood pressure is treatable, such as hyperthyroidism. It is important in all cases that the hypertension is monitored as accurately as possible on a regular basis in order to pre-empt any problems, such as blindness. In cats where blindness has occurred as an effect of their hypertension, control of the blood pressure can still be beneficial and affected cats may live for several years with a good quality of life.



Quick Reference Guide

Does Your Cat Have



Hypertension?

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