

# The dilemma in treating cats

By Frank De Feis, DVM  
For The Education Center

In veterinary medicine today, despite all our advances in technology, nutrition, and diagnostic capabilities, we rarely see cat owners bringing felines in for wellness exams. According to a recent study by Bayer, over half the cats in the U.S. do not receive veterinary care. Add to that the AVMA's 2012 research statistics on pet ownership, showing feline-favoring households have 2.1 cats. This "half" represents 37 million potential patients now not receiving our care for wellness.

Why is this? Often, it's the sheer trauma for both cats and their caregivers. Just finding and catching their cats is one of the hardest tasks faced by our clients. Every week, they call and cancel appointments just because they can't find, much less catch, their elusive feline friend. You've managed to get a cat in the carrier? We've all heard it—the crying, moaning, sometimes terrifying sounds emanating from carriers throughout the drive to the clinic. When patients arrive at the hospital, stress levels can escalate quickly not just due to confinement, but the unfamiliar surroundings, noises, and dogs often in very close proximity, causing cats to shrink into a corner of their carrier. Friendly dogs—and even the aloof ones—will come up to the carrier to sniff around and investigate their small feline friends, further aggravating cats' stress levels. All this can reach the boiling over point when we finally get the pet into the exam room—techs often are prepared with shoulder-length gloves, trying to gently extract patients and begin the examination and treatment process. Rare is the cat that's completely calm and compliant with our exams—it can take hours before they've calmed down after reaching home. Unfortunately, the memory sticks, making any "next times" equally or more difficult. Due to all the contributing factors listed above, we are seeing actual decreases in the number of feline visits we have every year.

## Why the difficulty?

Once felines are spayed and neutered, and all their vaccines administered, owners often just stop bringing them in. A primary justification? The majority of cats are indoor-dwellers only. They are neither walked nor professionally groomed, and very rarely taken on trips. All this contributes to making cats very independent and antisocial creatures. Owners, not able to read their minds, see their cats semi-regularly and just assume they're fine. Yet, this is often not the case.

As veterinarians, we are failing in care provision for our feline friends. This is partly due to the cat's independence, but also to the fact cats are so good at masking signs of illness or even injuries until it's too



Eliminating hazardous heat was a game-changer.

**“Cats generally LOVE these laser treatments.”**

late. They will tell us when they need to eat and they'll come to us when they want attention, but the rest of the time, these independent-minded felines do what they please. We find them sleeping under beds, perched on windowsills, or behind the couch. I know in my house when it comes to my cats, I sometimes don't see them for many hours. As cat owners, we get used to that, assuming everything is copacetic, but maybe it's not.

The statistics are revealingly stark. When we don't notice our pet's early signs of illness or discomfort, conditions can worsen, can complicate, and even become too late to resolve. Owners may only start to notice behavioral changes (e.g. missing meals or the litter box that's staying empty) two or three days after they've started. Sometimes, it's weeks before something registers as a problem. Other times, we may notice the cat is having trouble or is unable to make jumps that are normally easy. These can be powerful indicators a

cat is in a tremendous amount of pain, but pet owners simply didn't know.

We have been dealing with these types of pathologies for decades because we are not picking up on the clinical symptoms. Along with lack of regular wellness exams, there are a few good treatment options for cats. For more than 10 years, I've been trying to come up with different remedies for treating felines. I became a certified acupuncturist, which enhanced my ability to treat pets with fewer side effect-producing drugs. Another modality I've adopted is treating with Class IV lasers, now Class I Super Pulsed Lasers, which have worked well, but again require the owners to bring their pets to me. There's a general lack of long-term pain medications for felines, which again, stunts our ability to treat elderly cats. Avoidance of exacerbating trauma continues to greatly affect compliance, all to the cat's detriment. So, what can we do as veterinary practitioners about this problem?

## Creating client compliance

My solution for long-term, less stress, and more convenience to clients with great compliance for my canine and feline patients is MyPetLaser. This multi-wavelength, over-the-counter, and safe laser goes home with owners. They will gladly follow my prescription and use it once or twice daily in the stress-free comfort of home! The feedback from my clients is the process is easy, stress-free, and actually works for so many conditions. My clients express how happy they are we have a treatment option many veterinarians do not offer. They love they are able to physically help their cat live longer and thrive without pain. They express how satisfied they are with the outcome of the treatments. But what do they love most? They can be part of the team, utilizing an effective treatment option that does not require putting their cat through tortuous twice-weekly trauma for laser treatments.

Forming the diagnosis doesn't change. We need to see our patients to evaluate, test, and determine what's most appropriate for treatment. As part of this workup, we've developed a comprehensive laser home rental treatment plan. This creates huge advantages for the veterinarian, the patient, and the owner. I find the majority of owners follow this laser home rental plan because they see immediate pain relief and increased mobility. They love seeing their pet more comfortable. I find we are actually increasing the number of visits from clients—they're staying in better communication and observation with their pets. And, most importantly, the cats generally LOVE the laser treatments. Unlike Class IV, MyPetLasers will not overheat tissues and will not make even sensitive and finicky cats uncomfortable. Therefore, patients are less stressed and more compliant for visits, leading to the owner feeling comfortable bringing their pet in more frequently. The takeaway goal for this article? We want to increase awareness of how important it is for patients to regularly frequent our vet practices. It helps build trust and understanding between the clinic and the client.

## Reducing inflammation and more

You're asking what conditions are most amenable for MyPetLasers? A few: UTI, arthritis, stomatitis, soft tissue injuries, skin conditions, anxiety, muscle strains, sprains, and ear infections. I'm seeing very positive results in all these cases. When a cat comes in for a case of FUS and is catheterized for two to three days, there are urethral spasms upon the removal of the catheter. To more quickly resolve those, we are lasering the cat's bladder and dorsal back. This helps quickly reduce inflammation in the bladder. And by also lasering the lumbar sacral area, you're stimulating the nerves for the bladder, as well as the hind legs. The cats seem more comfortable, and recover better and faster when we provide this modality.

Another reason for the success we are experiencing? It's enhancing the human-animal bond. Most cats love being close to us. Client and cat share this experience of being together at home. Applying MyPetLaser slowly along their spinal nerve roots triggers a systemic release of endorphins, causing deep relaxation. This also enhances trust between cat and owner. Another benefit is the cat becomes more accustomed to being handled by their humans. I frequently hear about owners enjoying the fact they get to treat the pet at home, as it's extremely convenient. Our issues of compliance? Next to none. My long-term goal is to have them able and comfortable to visit us at the clinic more often. We want to keep up very high standards of care, and by seeing them more often, we can accomplish this.

There are three very simple settings or modes with MyPetLasers.

- 1) **Inflammation**— stimulates improvement of blood flow by photodissociating nitric oxide
- 2) **Tissue repair**—stimulates ATP production in the mitochondria
- 3) **Unwind (Inhibitory) for pain relief**— apply along nerve roots of spine for systemic release of endorphins



#### **Compliance issues disappeared with home rentals.**

The first mode, Unwind, is applied from the temporal bone along the spine over to the pelvis and then back along the spine up to the temporal bone. Using this setting, most cats treated are relaxed within 30 seconds. Through the Unwind function, we're stimulating the nerves coming out of the spinal cord.

The second setting is for inflammation. We use this in the areas that are inflamed, possibly infected. These treatment areas include the gingiva, ears, bladder, knees, back, hips, and wounds. I find applying circular movements slowly in and around the areas affected works best. We also have used it for photohemotherapy, applying it

to a proximal artery, so the blood flowing through the body gets treated.

The third and final setting is for pain management. I use this mostly after surgery, on sprains, strains, and arthritis. This setting delivers a higher frequency intensity with the Super Pulsed Laser and LED light. The great advantage versus other lasers is the absence of heat, the hazardous aspect of Class IV's.

In summary, I recommend MyPetLasers as rentals for every older cat that has difficulty getting around. I feel and see it improves their quality of life and owners seem uniformly pleased with this new modality. The fact they can take it home for a week to treat their pets makes it a valuable tool in my veterinary hospitals. As a bonus, I'm seeing higher visitation rates from these clients, as well as experiencing newfound trust from both owners and pets. ●

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*This Education Center article was underwritten by Multi Radiance Medical of Solon, Ohio.*