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Stress triggers for cats

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Cats and heartworm disease

5 mouser myths debunked

4 tips for bringing your cat to the veterinarian

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10 client handouts that keep cats healthy



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Stress triggers for cats

Are you contributing to your cat's anxiety and behavior issues? It's possible if you do any of the following:

1. You punish your cat. Swatting and hitting your cat only teaches it to fear your approach. Telling your cat "no" only interrupts the behavior. Instead, show your cat what you want it to do, and reward it for appropriate behaviors. Cats are very curious and agile—so give yours places to go and things to do, and keep potentially dangerous items picked up and put away.

2. You assume your cat "knows" English. Animals communicate using body language and are very good at figuring us out. Most people don't bother teaching their cats to sit, much less any other cue—but it's surprisingly easy to train them to do behaviors on cue. Just don't assume your cat understands what you're saying without teaching it what you want it to do first.

3. You grab your cat's head to tousle its hair. Nobody likes to have their head grabbed and rubbed—cats are no different! Most cats prefer a few long strokes from head to tail; others prefer a small amount of gentle scratching around the chin or ears. Many cats get irritated by an extended period of repetitive stroking.

4. You hug or kiss your cat. Cats like to be able to move and escape situations. When we hold them tightly, they may become stressed, anticipating that something bad is going to happen.

5. You don't clean your cat's litter box. Nobody likes to use a dirty toilet—including your cat. Imagine not flushing your own toilet for three or four days! Ideally, the litter box should be scooped every time you notice waste. Otherwise, they should be scooped at least once daily. Most need

to be completely empty and cleaned every one to two weeks.

Regular scooping also allows you to identify early signs of illness such as diarrhea, constipation, or excessive or lack of urination.

6. Your cat's litter box is in an inconvenient location. The spot you've chosen for the litter box might work best for you, but a cat that has to negotiate humans of all ages, other pets, stairs, or loud appliances might feel like the journey is a suicide mission every time it needs to eliminate.

7. You tempt your cat to play by wiggling your fingers or toes, then get angry when it bites or scratches you. Cats naturally grab "prey" using their teeth and claws. Offer your cat the appropriate chew toys so it knows that hands are for loving—not biting!

8. You leave your cat home alone with a jumbo-sized portion of food and one litter box while you go on vacation for a long weekend. Especially for cats that eat quickly, this can be stressful because they'll have no food left by the end of the weekend. Cats can become sick if they don't eat every day. Timed feeders can be helpful in this situation. A self-cleaning litter box may also be a reasonable option, but don't rely on it—it's important that you pay attention to the frequency and quality of your pet's eliminations so you can identify any changes that could indicate stress-induced health problems such as cystitis, constipation, and diarrhea.

9. You use strong-smelling cleansers, deodorizers, and products containing alcohol. Cats' noses are sensitive, and these scents can be offensive to them. Be careful about the use of these products in your home or on your person. Some cats may even find the smell of hair spray, perfume, or cologne unpleasant.

10. You add new cats to your home without an introduction period. When an unrelated cat appears and tries to join a related group, it's in the cats' nature to attack and force the outsider to leave. Without a proper period of controlled, gradual introduction, the chance of aggression between cats and stress increases.

Information provided by Valarie V. Tynes, DVM, DACVB, Premier Veterinary Behavior Consulting, Sweetwater, Texas, and Colleen Koch, DVM, Lincoln Land Animal Clinic, Jacksonville, Ill.



How to habituate your cat to A CARRIER



Use this step-by-step guide to help your cat adjust to a cat carrier for her trip to the doctor.

Step 1: Cat, meet carrier

Place the carrier in a cat-friendly area and leave it open so your curious kitty can check it out when she's ready.

Step 2: Draw kitty close with food

Start by placing the food bowl near the carrier. If she's too shy to snack close to the carrier, move it as far away as necessary to get her to eat.

Quick tip: Add a special, tasty treat, such as a bite of canned tuna or chicken, to lure your kitty close.

Once your cat regularly eats from the bowl, begin moving the bowl closer and closer each day until she will chow down happily next to the carrier.

Step 3: Create a dining car

When your cat comfortably dines next to the carrier regularly, she's ready to dine in—inside the carrier, that is. Place the food bowl directly inside the carrier entrance so she can pop her head inside for a quick snack.

Quick tip: Never close the door on your cat. If you need to, you can prop it open and wire it if necessary—just make sure it won't accidentally fall shut on the cat and startle her.

Step 4: Customize your kitty's cave

Place toys and treats in the carrier occasionally so your curious kitty discovers them there. You might try these fun options, depending on your cat's personal preferences:

- > Stuffed mice
- > Catnip toys
- > Feather toys
- > Cat grass

Spraying a synthetic feline facial pheromone in the carrier occasionally may also help.

Note: Never lure your kitty into the carrier and close the door for a trip to the veterinarian. You'll lose the progress you've made—and your cat's trust—and she'll fear the carrier more.

Step 5: Move dinner inside the carrier

When your kitty comfortably dines with her head inside the carrier for several days, you're ready to move the food dish further inside the carrier—a few inches every day until she steps completely into the carrier to eat.

Step 6: Watch and wait

This might be the toughest step, because you need patience. It may take several weeks or months, depending on your cat, but you should start to find your kitty lounging in the carrier sometimes and resting there.

Step 6: Shut the door

Once kitty's comfortable in the carrier, you can start to close the carrier door for a few seconds at a time with your cat inside. If your cat ever acts distressed with the door closed, release her immediately. And next time you close the door, only close it for as long as she tolerated the door closed on a previous session. When you can keep the door closed for long periods of time, you're ready to practice car rides with your cat. Remember, many cats only associate their carrier with a trip to the veterinarian. So your goal is to change your kitty's associations with the carrier and car rides to fun things and special food treats instead of terror and trauma.

Quick tip: Once you find your cat regularly spends time resting, playing and eating in the crate, then on the day you need to take her to the veterinarian, simply close the door and off you go. When you return home, be sure to continue offering food and fun in the crate. As long as more good things happen in the crate than scary things, it should always be easy to take the cat to the veterinarian when necessary.

Information from your veterinarian



WEIGHT LOSS *in cats*

Why a healthy weight is important

If a cat is just two pounds or so over its ideal weight, it's at risk for developing some serious medical conditions. When a cat is overweight or obese, it's not a question of *if* it will develop a related illness, but rather how many and how soon. Some of the common disorders and conditions associated with excess weight include:

- Type 2 diabetes—an obese cat is three times more likely to develop this disease than a normal-weight cat
- Osteoarthritis
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Many forms of cancer, especially intra-abdominal cancers

Veterinarians expect overweight and obese cats to live shorter lives than their fitter counterparts. Heavy cats tend to be less energetic and playful. It's common to think cats that lie around are just lazy, making it easy to overlook the lethargy that results from being overweight or obese. If your cat doesn't run and jump, it might be overweight. But don't worry, your veterinary team can help your cat get in shape and feeling better.

Start with calories

A weight-loss formula seems simple enough: fewer calories in, plus more calories out, equals weight loss. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. For starters, overweight or obese cats must eat. Their physiology is different than people and dogs, and if they go without food for just two days in a row, they can develop a life-threatening form of liver disease known as hepatic lipidosis. Obese people starting a diet program are also vulnerable to this serious condition. For this reason, never put your cat on a diet without your veterinary team's assistance.

The first place you and your veterinary team will start is by calculating the calories your cat needs. First, the veterinarian will examine your cat to determine its ideal weight. (The average domestic cat should weigh about 8 to 10 pounds.) Your veterinarian will use this weight to figure out how many calories your cat should eat each day. After you and your veterinarian have determined how much your cat should eat, the next step is deciding what it should eat and how often. For many cats, the best way to feed is to offer canned diet food several times a day.

Remember, it's vital to count calories during a weight-reduction program. If you feed too much, your cat won't lose weight. If you feed too little, your cat could get sick. To figure out exactly how many calories are in your pet's food, check the label. If the label doesn't tell you what you need to know, visit petobesityprevention.com and click on "Food and Calories" at the left side of the page.

The art of changing foods

You'll most likely need to offer your cat a diet food if it's overweight. When you're introducing a new food, allow several days for the transition. In general, we recommend gradually adding the new diet over a one- to two-week period. Start by substituting one-quarter of your cat's diet with the new food for two or three days. Then give your cat a diet that's half old food, half new for the next two to four days. Then increase to feeding three-quarters new food for the final three to five days before completely switching to the new diet.

To make dry food more appetizing for your cat, try warming the food or even adding a splash of an omega-3 fatty acid supplement or salmon juice on top of the food. Finicky felines often prefer wet food over dry, so if your cat isn't eating dry foods, canned diet foods may work better.

Cats and heartworm disease: A story you may not have heard

Mosquitoes don't discriminate. They bite you, they bite your cat. But when they sink their teeth into your feline friend, they might cause more than an itch. Mosquitoes can transmit heartworm larvae to cats. If these microscopic larvae settle in cats' lungs, they can cause big health problems. There's no cure for feline heartworm disease, but it is 100 percent preventable. Read below to learn more, then talk with your veterinarian about which prevention method is best for keeping your cat and its ticker heartworm-free.



Do cats really get heartworms?

Heartworms aren't just a dog problem. A Texas study conducted in the late 1990s found that 26 percent of cats had contracted heartworms at some point in their lives. And remember, those pesky mosquitoes will bite any animal regardless of whether its tail wags or flicks.

Just how do mosquitoes transmit heartworms to cats?

Mosquitoes are carriers of heartworm larvae. When a mosquito bites a cat, the larvae enter the cat's system through the bite wound. When these larvae develop into adult heartworms, they eventually die and cause severe heart inflammation that can be fatal. Even though the presence of adult heartworms is potentially deadly, the little larvae can be even more problematic. Most larvae don't make it to adulthood in cats, which means they die in the cat's lungs. The irritation leads to heartworm-associated respiratory disease (HARD). Studies show that 50 percent of cats infected with heartworm larvae have significant disease in the arteries that supply blood to their lungs. To learn more about HARD, see "Heartworms Can't Hide," below.

My cat doesn't go outside, so I don't need to worry, right?

Wrong. Indoor cats are at lower risk for heartworm disease than outdoor cats, but there's no guarantee a mosquito won't

buzz into your house through an open door or window—and it only takes one bite to do the damage. A North Carolina study reported that 28 percent of cats diagnosed with heartworm disease were inside-only cats, so prevention products are smart to use in indoor cats as well as free-roamers.

Mosquitoes aren't common where I live. Does my cat need prevention?

Yes. Cases of feline heartworm disease have been reported in all 50 states. The occurrence of heartworm disease is markedly lower in some states, but mosquitoes are resilient little fellas and they're showing up in more and more places. And don't forget that the game changes when you travel. Anytime you pack your cat's bags, especially if you're heading to lake or coastal regions, you need to arm him with heartworm prevention.

OK, so my cat needs heartworm prevention. What does it involve?

The good news is that heartworm prevention products are some of the easiest to use, least expensive, and most effective items on the market. Your veterinarian knows all about these products and will help you decide which one is right for you and your cat.

Heartworms can't hide

Heartworm larvae are virtually invisible, but if your cat is infected with them, they'll show themselves. Most cats with early-stage disease experience heartworm-associated respiratory disease (HARD) signs. Rather than affecting the heart, the larvae affect the lungs and cause breathing problems often mistaken for asthma or allergic bronchitis. If your cat exhibits any signs of HARD, which are listed to the right, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian.

Coughing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Appetite loss	<input type="checkbox"/>
Panting	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weight loss	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open-mouthed breathing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diarrhea	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rapid breathing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fainting	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gagging	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lethargy	<input type="checkbox"/>

(This form is adapted from information provided by the American Heartworm Society and KNOW Heartworms. Visit knowheartworms.org to learn more.)



From your veterinarian

5 mouser myths debunked

You know your cat doesn't have nine lives and black cats aren't witches in disguise. But these tall tales have led to incorrect notions about cats. Here are often-heard feline health yarns, and how to unravel them.

1 Cats are aloof, unsocial creatures.

Contrary to popular belief, cats are social creatures and need interaction. Dogs wag their tails and bark in delight when you come home. Cats show affection by nuzzling your leg. Even though they're not boisterous, they still want—and need—attention. Some cats do shun human affection, but these introverts don't represent the whole feline species. In fact, lack of interaction can be an early sign of illness.

2 Indoor cats don't need preventive medicine.

A cat doesn't have to go outside to get sick, especially if it lives with other pets that do head out. When these outdoor pets come back inside, they can bring along—and pass on—all sorts of infections, from respiratory viruses to internal parasites. And fleas and mosquitoes can easily make their way into the house, then jump onto or bite an indoor cat.

3 Cats are independent and don't need care.

Putting out extra food might satisfy their basic needs for a weekend alone, but if a cat gets sick—say from ingesting a foreign object or suffering a urinary tract blockage—while home by itself, it can be severely ill (or worse) by Sunday night when its owner returns.

4 Cats eliminate outside the litter box to be spiteful.

Instead, missing the box often signals an underlying medical condition, such as urinary tract disease or infection, kidney disease, or diabetes mellitus. It can also be a sign of arthritis, which makes getting into the litter box difficult. Or it can be a sign of litter box avoidance resulting from a variety of factors or a sign of territorial marking. When you notice your cat eliminating in the wrong place, contact your veterinarian immediately.

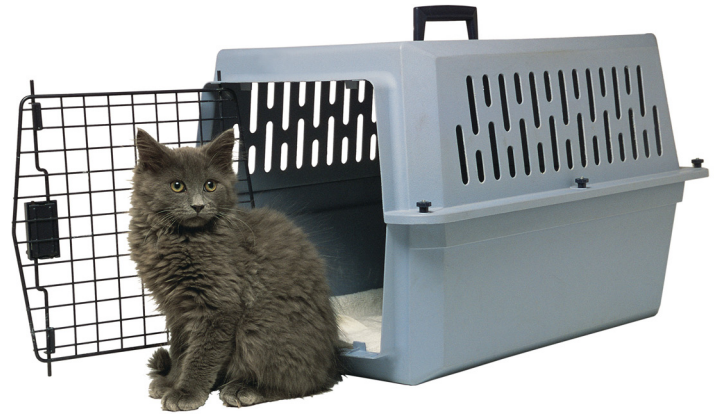
5 Cats don't get heartworms.

Heartworms affect dogs and cats differently, but they do indeed affect cats. Heartworm disease has been reported in all 50 states. Unlike dogs, cats are troubled by heartworm larvae (juvenile heartworms) rather than mature adult heartworms. When the larvae arrive and when they die in cats' lungs, they cause lesions that may lead to airway and arterial disease referred to as heartworm-associated respiratory disease (HARD). Cats that exhibit asthma-like symptoms may in fact be suffering from HARD. The disease can cause severe illness and death and approved treatments aren't available, but it's totally preventable with the proper use of preventive medication.

From your veterinarian

4 TIPS for bringing your cat to the veterinarian

We know it can be tough to wrangle your cat for a trip to the veterinarian's office. Many cats dislike the cat carrier as well as riding in the car, so heading in for an annual checkup can sometimes be a stressful proposition. Follow these four tips when you head to your next veterinary appointment to reduce your cat's stress and make for a calmer car ride.



1 Make the carrier your cat's second home.

Cat carriers are typically associated with many unpleasant things. Many cat owners keep the carrier in a closet or in the garage, so the cat hasn't rubbed on it or slept inside it. Cats who haven't transferred their scent to the carrier, therefore, see it as a foreign object. So give your cat time to mark the carrier with facial rubbing—she'll feel like it belongs to her, and you may find it easier to place her inside. If you have room, make the carrier a part of your family room furniture. That means leaving it out all the time with the door open. Place a soft towel inside to make it a little more cozy. Pretty soon, your cat won't think twice about entering the carrier.

2 Turn the carrier into a meal center.

Put part of your cat's daily food in the carrier to help your cat associate something good with the carrier. Even better: Use a bit of especially yummy food, like canned food or even a little tuna. Or try tossing your cat's favorite treat in the carrier when she wants to be left alone. This will reward her for seeking solitude in the carrier and continue to reinforce the notion that the carrier isn't so bad after all.

3 Try a different kind of carrier.

If you have an emergency and don't have time to let your cat adjust to the carrier, try using a pillowcase as a carrier. With the cat on your lap, slip the pillowcase over her body, head first. Knot the top of the case and support the bottom when holding your cat. Alternately, you can use any type of item your cat likes to nap in—two laundry baskets connected together could also work. These items aren't a trigger for fear like your standard carrier might be.

4 Consider using a synthetic product.

Using a product that contains a feline facial pheromone can help calm cats during stressful events. These products can be sprayed on blankets, towels, or bandanas before you head to the veterinarian. Many cats become less agitated when their owners use these sprays, so purchasing one could make your life easier when it's time to take your cat for a car ride.

Regular wellness exams are crucial for keeping your cat happy and healthy. Use these tips the next time you head to your veterinarian to make it much easier on both you and your cat.

Information courtesy of Dr. Sally J. Foote, Okaw Veterinary Clinic, Tuscola, Ill.

Comstock/Getty Images

How to identify *inappropriate elimination* IN CATS

The first step in helping to solve litter box problems in cats is to carefully observe your cat's behaviors—even better, take short videos of your cat's basic behaviors, so when something changes, you can show your veterinarian what happened before and after the change.

Here are some questions to think about and discuss with your veterinarian:

- Q:** Does the cat leave urine or feces outside the litter box? If yes, where? _____
- Q:** Does the cat spray? If yes, where? _____
- Q:** Do you have concerns, complaints or problems with urination or defecation in the house?
If yes, what location? _____
How frequent is the inappropriate urination or defecation? _____
What is the approximate time of day the event(s) occur (i.e., are you at home or away)? _____
- Q:** Does the cat exhibit vocalization about which you're concerned?
If yes, what types of vocalization (e.g., yowling, growling, meowing, hissing), and when does the vocalization typically occur? _____
- Q:** Is the cat aggressive to people or other cats?

As with all behavior problems, the key to intervention lies in understanding the cat's perspective, which can be discerned by watching for changes in behavior. Identifying potential factors gets you and your veterinarian that much closer to addressing the cat's needs.

Factors that contribute to inappropriate elimination preferences and aversions include:

- > Frequently dirty litter or litter boxes
- > Litter boxes that are too small and discourage active digging and exploration
- > Litter boxes that are too high for cats to enter readily
- > Styles (e.g., covered) and placement (e.g., in closets) that allow the cat using the litter box to be trapped by a child, another cat, a dog, etc.
- > Placement of boxes in locations the cat can't reach because of pain (e.g., arthritis), access or social factors (e.g., being chased by a puppy)
- > Odor entrapment by lids of covered boxes placed in areas without adequate ventilation
- > Illness of another cat in the household that causes changes in bladder and bowel function.

Factors that contribute to marking behaviors generally are based on stressors such as:

- > Addition or loss of another pet in the household
- > Change in the composition of the human household
- > Change in the stress level of the household (e.g., illness, job change)
- > Visitation by an outside cat
- > Illness or change of relationships between cats in the household (e.g., concomitant with social maturity)
- > True inter-cat aggression.

What's in your cat's mouth?

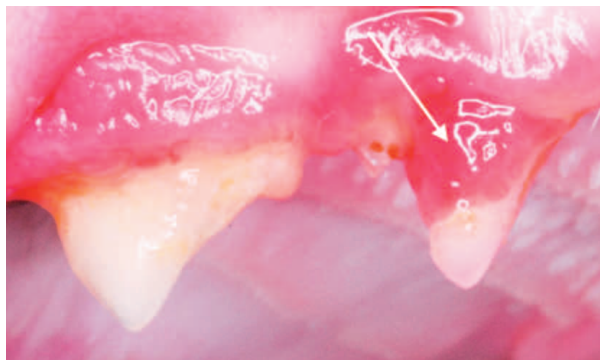
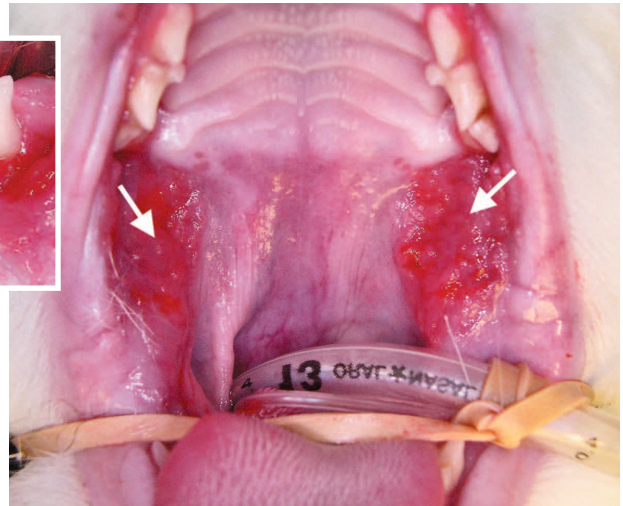
Did you know **70 percent** of cats over the age of 4 have **dental disease**? That's why it's so important for your pet to receive proper dental care. Learn about these different types of dental diseases so you can understand your cat's pain.

1



Stomatitis

Stomatitis is a chronic, painful condition most often seen in cats and is defined as inflammation of the oral mucosa. The inflamed tissue may appear bright red and swollen with a cobblestone or raspberry-like texture, and will bleed easily.



2 Tooth resorption

Tooth resorption is a progressive disease that can be very painful. The resorption begins with the breakdown of the bony substance that covers the root of the tooth and will continue to break down the layers of the tooth, exposing the pulp chamber, nerves, and blood vessels.



3 Periodontal disease

Periodontal disease is a progressive disease that causes inflammation of the gums and a loss of bone and soft tissue around the teeth. This is an example of grade 4 periodontal disease, which is the most severe form of the disease. There's enough soft tissue loss in this example that both roots are exposed on the tooth.

What is good healthcare for cats?



Whether an independent soul or your constant companion, your feline friend needs good care to thrive. Here's a look at what that means—in the veterinary hospital and at home.

At the hospital:

> **ANNUAL WELLNESS EXAMINATIONS.** Cats can often mask how they're feeling—especially if they're under the weather. That's why it's critical to have your cat examined by a veterinarian every year. Older cats or those with behavioral or medical conditions may need to be seen more frequently.

> **DIAGNOSTIC TESTS.** Even if your cat seems healthy on the outside, an underlying problem may be lurking on the inside. Fecal exams, blood and urine tests, and other tests that screen for infectious diseases, such as feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV), may be required, based on your cat's age and lifestyle.

> **VACCINATIONS.** Even if your cat spends most or all of its time indoors, it may still be at risk for certain preventable viral diseases. Your veterinarian will assess your cat's risk and develop a vaccine protocol tailored specifically to its needs.

> **PARASITE CONTROL.** Cats are prime targets for parasites such as fleas and ticks, not to mention the ones we can't see like heartworms and intestinal parasites. Your veterinarian will discuss the best options to keep your cat free and clear of these dangerous pests.

> **DENTAL CARE.** Dental disease isn't just for dogs—cats are susceptible, too. Your veterinarian will examine your cat's mouth and determine if further action, like a full oral health assessment and treatment under anesthesia, is needed to keep your cat's teeth and gums in good shape.

> **BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT.** Just as your cat needs to be physically healthy, it needs to be emotionally healthy, too. Your veterinarian will ask questions about your cat's environment—whether there are other pets or children in the house and how your cat interacts with them, what kind of playful activities your cat participates in, and so on—and inquire about any behavioral issues that need attention.

> **NUTRITIONAL COUNSELING.** From questions about the type of food you're feeding and the frequency of meals to assessing your cat's body condition score, your veterinarian will want as much information as possible to determine if any adjustments need to be made in your cat's feeding regimen in order to keep it in the most healthy weight range.

At home:

> **NUTRITION.** Your veterinarian can determine the right type and amount of food your cat needs to stay in a healthy weight range, but the environment you provide for meals is important, too. Putting food in a quiet area or offering it in toys like food balls or puzzles can make mealtimes more enjoyable.

> **ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT.** Cats need to be in stimulating and comfortable surroundings, so be sure to provide plenty of toys, hiding spots, scratching posts and elevated resting areas in your home. And don't forget the importance of one-on-one playtime with you. This will also give you the chance to watch for any changes in behavior.

> **LITTER BOX NEEDS.** Provide at least one litter box per cat—and in a multicat house, throw in one extra box for good measure. In general, cats prefer open litter boxes in a clean, quiet environment and unscented, clumping litter. Cats are also finicky, so it's best not to switch up the brand and type of litter you use. And be sure to scoop the box at least once a day.

> **GROOMING.** Cats are pretty good at keeping their coats in good condition, but they may need help when it comes to claw care. Your veterinarian can show you how to trim your cat's nails. Even better, provide scratching posts for a DIY option—and an enrichment activity, too.

> **TRAVEL AND CARRIER ACCEPTANCE.** It's no secret that most cats dislike carriers, but it doesn't have to be that way. Condition your cat to feel comfortable in a carrier at a young age, if possible. Leave the carrier out in the house and let your cat wander in and out of it. Also, take your cat on short rides in the car, so it won't always associate getting in the carrier with a trip to the veterinarian.

What's in your cat's mouth?

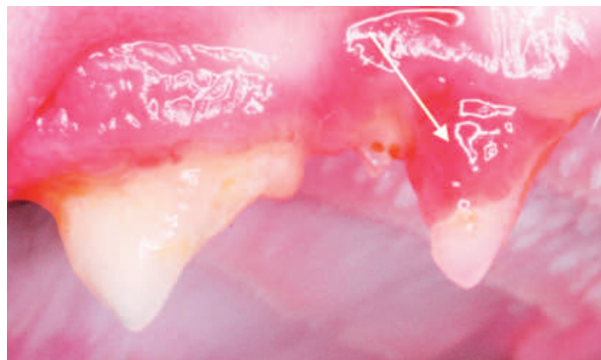
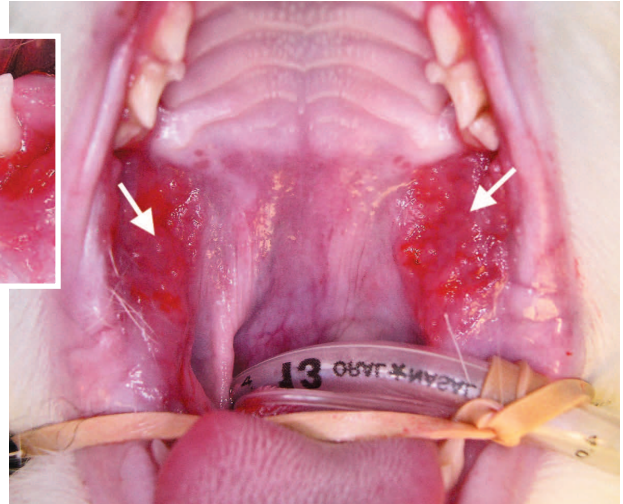
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