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Author: Bradley Mark, Nursing Team

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Feline Training

Can you teach an old cat new tricks? “Yes”, says Dr. Debra Horwitz a veterinary behavior consultant in St. Louis, Missouri. The key to successful training is providing information on what you want the animal to do and making it easy for the animal to do it. Reinforcement is something that results in a behavior increasing in frequency. Positive reinforcement is usually food, toys, or play that when given is pleasurable and results in a behavior being repeated. The most commonly used positive reinforcement is a food reward, although play and attention can also be used. For cats, food may or may not be the best reinforcement: the food reward

must be very desirable, and the cat cannot just have finished a meal. Some cats respond well to clicker training. In clicker training, the first step is to associate a “click” with the primary reinforcement (food). You are watching for a behavior you like and then reinforcing it when it happens. Verbal reinforcement phrases like “good kitty” or “yes,” can be paired with the click and food so food can be phased out later. Animals can also be trained by using a “target,” such as a stick with a ball on the end of it. The stick is held near the animal, and when the pet touches it with its nose, the pet receives a click and a food reward. Once this behavior is clearly learned,

the target can be used to guide the cat to do many tasks, such as jump on or off a stool or through a hoop, all of which can later be put under verbal command. Punishment is difficult to use because timing and intensity are essential to obtaining the desired result—a decrease in the desired behavior. Punishment occurs after the behavior happens and does not give the animal any information on how further punishment could be avoided. For example, when the cat has jumped up on the table, you punish him for being there. The behavior you really want to punish is getting on the table. Punishment can also cause anxiety, fear, and aggression.

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- Teach Your Cat to do Tricks
- Feline Training Instructions
- Alpha-Trak
- Cancer
- Dog and Cat Bites: Facts & Care

New Health Care Team Members

We welcomed some new Health Care Team Members to our staff. Cindy Taylor joined our staff last quarter. Cindy came to us from the human medicine field and has shown a great interest in veterinary medicine. Debra Schwartz

joined our Health Care Team last quarter as well. She comes to us with some experience in the veterinary field from another local hospital. Westley Jones is the newest addition joining our Health Care Team this quarter. Westley comes to

us with a great background in customer service and computer repair and applications. All three have been a very good addition to our team. Watch for their complete biographies in an upcoming addition of the Thompson Tribune.

Training to Stop Unwanted Behaviors

Another reason owners may want to train their cat is to stop unwanted behaviors, such as getting on counters, furniture, or even scratching in the wrong location. This is slightly more difficult because many cats enjoy being above ground level and marking is a normal behavior. First of all, remove enticing things from countertops and tables and provide the cat with adequate opportunities and locations for climbing, perching, scratching, hiding, and resting. Then reward him for

using these provided choices. In other words, when you see the cat on the cat tree, walk up and drop a small food reward. This makes the cat tree a more desirable location than, say, the countertop. For cats that jump on tables, providing a perch nearby that the cat is trained to use while you eat may change the behavior. Alternatively, you could train the cat to play with a food-dispensing toy during human mealtimes, thus occupying the cat with another task. If you provide

a scratching post in a desirable location for the cat and reward him whenever he is in the vicinity and finally when he uses it, he will be more likely to use the post rather than furniture. Understanding how cats learn and their motivations for performing certain behaviors will help anyone begin to train a cat. After all, if lions can learn all sorts of tricks, why can't our domestic cats? We have many different products at the office that can help with feline training. Call for more info.

How to Teach Your Cat to “Sit” and Do Tricks

Some owners may want their cat to “sit” on command. Remember, a cat already knows how to sit: what you want to do is put that action under verbal or stimulus control. This is a perfect opportunity to use clicker training but first make the clicker relevant as described above. Then, start by watching your cat or even calling him to you and waiting for him to sit down. The instant that he does, you

“click” and drop a food reward. Then back up and wait again. The cat is likely to approach, and when he sits click and drop another reward. As you repeat this scenario, the length of time it takes the cat to sit down decreases as he learns that sitting results in a reward. The next step would be to add a word to this action. As the cat approaches, just before he sits say the word “sit.” When he does sit, click

and treat. Soon he will learn that “sit” means put your bottom down and you will get a food treat. Now all that is left is to phase out the food as described above. Finally, you can begin to link desired behaviors together. For example, you call the cat to jump onto a stool or through a hoop using targets, clicks, and rewards; the possibilities are endless.

Instructions for Owners in Feline Training

Cats respond best to positive reinforcement because they often are unlikely to associate a punishment with their actions. Therefore, when training a cat, the first step is to decide what you want your pet to do, not what you want him to stop doing. For example, if you want your cat to come when called, you first have to teach him to move toward you when you

call his name. To accomplish this, use a food reward held in your hand or a dab of baby food meat on a spoon, and slowly pass it by the cat's face. As the cat begins to show interest, move the food a bit further so the cat has to follow it, while you say “kitty come.” After the cat moves just a short distance, let him eat the food. Repeat this sequence having

the cat come further each time before the food is given. Once the cat reliably and repeatedly comes when called, begin to phase out the food, using it only intermittently. At this point, you can use praise, petting, or playing instead of the food, but the cat will continue to come in anticipation of a reward.

At-Home Glucose Monitoring for Pets

Diabetes mellitus is a common diagnosis in middle-aged dogs and cats. Treatment usually involves appropriate insulin therapy, an adapted food, and exercise. It is often difficult to monitor therapy as there is no reliable correlation between owner observations and blood glucose control. Home monitoring of blood glucose has been recommended in human medicine for 3 decades and has been shown to result in better blood sugar control. The most frequently encountered problems with checking a blood glucose at home were having to

perform more than 1 puncture to obtain adequate blood, creation of a sufficient blood drop, and the need for assistance in restraining the pet. That's why home monitoring for pets has been rarely recommended. Self-monitoring of blood glucose in people with diabetes revolutionized the way diabetes was managed. Abbott has now come out with a blood glucose monitoring system much like the one that humans use. It is called the Alpha Trak Blood Glucose Monitor. It comes with the monitor itself, test strips, and lancets. It

requires a miniscule amount of blood to run the test. The blood can be obtained by utilizing a small vein in the dog or cat's ear. The blood glucose reading is then read within a few seconds. With a little training, most owners can include blood glucose home monitoring in the care of their diabetic pets. We can order this system for any client who is interested, and the clients who are currently using it have been very pleased. Any clients who are currently dealing with a diabetic pet should consider the convenience of home monitoring.

Causes of Cancer

Unfortunately, our office is diagnosing a lot of cancer in our patients. The biggest question asked of us by our clients is "Why did this happen to my pet?" It is rare for cancer to have a single cause-and-effect process. Some genetic factors and mutations may predispose a pet to cancer. In some cases, such as bone cancer, there is both a genetic predisposition and an influence in body conformation. This is why we recommend bi-annual senior wellness examina-

tions in pets over the age of 5 years, because early detection and treatment of any cancer has the best prognosis. There are also endogenous and exogenous chemical factors. Exposure to estrogens can increase risk for mammary cancers. When ovariohysterectomy is performed before 2.5 years of age, there is significant protection from mammary tumors. Environmental tobacco smoke also increases the risk for cancer. In contrast to what is found in humans, no

association between diet and colon cancer has been found. Viruses also increase the risk for some types of cancer. Cats that are feline leukemia positive have an increased risk for cancer. Hearing a diagnosis of cancer is never easy for pet owners. But with the advances of medicine and the availability of chemotherapy and radiation, we are buying more and more time for our clients and their loved ones that are diagnosed with cancer.

Dog & Cat Bites: Facts & Care

Dogs are responsible for 80% to 90% of animal bites, particularly in children. Most attacks are unprovoked, and approximately one third involve the family pet. Dogs can have a biting force of up to 450psi and tend to grind their molars when biting; thus, the extensive injury caused by dogs result not only from the force of the bite, but also from puncture wounds and extensive damage from shear and tear. Excluding

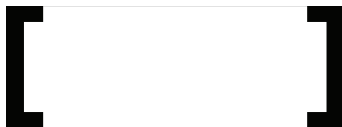
wounds to the hands, only 20% of dog bite wounds become infected. When hands are involved, up to 36% of dog bite wounds and up to 80% of cat bite wounds become infected. The difference in infection rate is attributed to the more superficial nature of most dog bite wounds as opposed to the deep punctures of cat bites, which make wound hygiene difficult. The most important and immediate action is to remove

foreign matter and copiously irrigate the wound with 1% Iodine. Tetanus from an animal bite is very rare, however rabies prophylaxis is obviously necessary in cases in which the animal's vaccination status is unknown. Should you experience a dog or cat bite, call your family physician or the nearest local emergency room immediately for medical advice. If it is a severe bite, call 911 immediately.

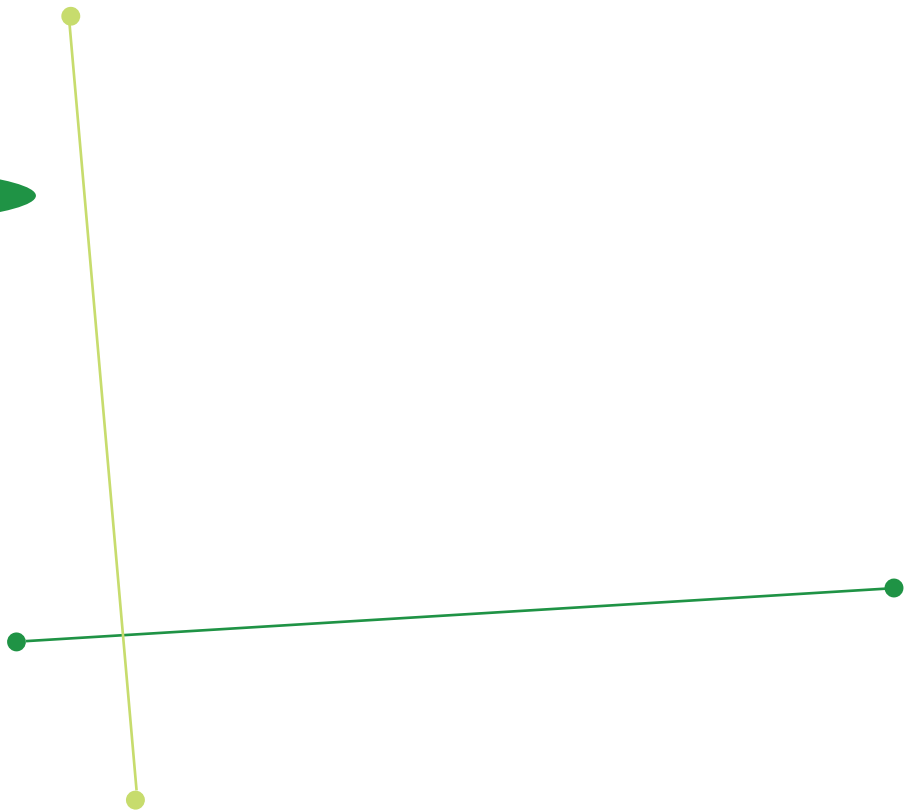


East Stroudsburg Veterinary

353 Prospect Street
East Stroudsburg, PA 18301
Phone: 570-421-0931
Fax: 570-421-3178



● Celebrating Healthy Pets Through Wellness



“Staff Stuff”

Cathy and Carmen went to the North American Veterinary Conference in Orlando, FL this January. They attending many lectures on practice management while they were out there. Carmen gave a lecture to the staff during one of our team training meetings about dealing with client customer service. Cathy gave a lecture on obtaining the most information in a medical history.

Carol and I returned from the Western Veterinary Conference in Las Vegas, NV. We attended many great lectures including a full day of new cancer treatments and protocols, a full day on ophthalmology, a full day on skin disorders and much more. I gave a lecture to the staff on the emergency evaluation and treatment of snake bites and envenomation and Carol gave a talk on dermatology.

Dr. Sammie got her new puppy! We welcomed Climber to our practice this quarter. If you haven't had a chance to see him, stop in and meet him. He's a cutie, but he's growing up fast!

Tina also got a new puppy. His name is Punxy. He's adorable. He's also growing quickly, but he doesn't spend much time here at the office.

Sadly, Carmen had to leave our Health Care Team to spend more time with her children. Carmen was a great addition to our Health Care Team and will be missed. We wish her lots of luck in all her future endeavors.

Well, we had another great Christmas party this year. Dr. Clair and Dr. Sammie took us to New York City in a stretched limousine motor-coach. It was beautiful. We

arrived in the city around 1:00pm and went sight-seeing around the city. We went to the top of the NBC studios building which afforded us a spectacular view of the city. We also went to Rockefeller Center and Carol almost went ice skating. When we were done, we went to Mars 2112 a themed restaurant in Times Square. We took a virtual reality ride in a space shuttle that transported us from Earth to Mars in the year 2112. We were greeted by aliens and had an awesome extraterrestrial meal! We were surrounded by craters and even watched a Martian news channel. When we finished, we then had to be beamed back to earth. Our night continued at Dangerfield's comedy club where we saw some very funny comedians. The staff would like to thank Drs. Clair and Sammie for their generosity and another great party!