

Special Needs: The Inspiring Lives of Disabled Cats

Cats with disabilities can live long, happy lives, and surprise their owners with their resilience.

Don Vaughan

He's not really inhibited by his disability at all, she said. In fact, I think he was relieved because he didn't have to drag the leg around anymore.

While the long-term prognosis for a physically disabled cat is usually quite good, the first few days or weeks following the loss of a limb can be traumatic. Some cats become depressed, as indicated by decreased appetite, increased vocalization, decreased play or simply giving up. However, most cases of feline depression can be successfully treated with medication.

Thankfully, most cats aren't going to need [medication], Crowell-Davis said. In most cases, recovery is a mechanical issue. For example, a cat that loses a hind limb won't be able to jump as high as it used to. The owner can help by making access to favorite spots easier, perhaps by providing a ramp.

Life can also be made easier for a three-legged cat by carpeting hard surfaces and monitoring its weight. Fat is an extra burden a three-legged cat doesn't need, Kiklevich said.

Be prepared for a very different animal when he or she first comes home, said Robert Conrad of Canastota, N.Y., whose 10-year-old domestic shorthair, Leo, lost a hind limb to cancer. The first two days or so will be rough for your cat as well as you, he said. But after a couple of days, you will be amazed at how quickly it copes and, before you know it, your cat will be back to normal.