

My Cat Has Developed a Ravenous Appetite

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, discusses the possibility that diabetes or hyperthyroidism could be the reason.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

Posted: Sept. 11, 2009, 3 a.m. EDT

Q: My cat is 15 and recently all he wants to do is eat. Is this a sign of a medical condition?

A: It probably is. A lot of people think that when it comes to appetite, only a poor appetite could be a sign of illness. They look at a cat with a ravenous appetite and think, "Whoa! Look at him eat! He must be feeling great!" In fact, a ravenous appetite could be a sign of a metabolic disorder.

The most common metabolic disorder causing ravenous appetite in an elderly cat is hyperthyroidism, a glandular condition in which the thyroid gland in the neck produces excessive amounts of thyroxine, the main thyroid hormone. This increases the cat's metabolism, and they lose weight. They try to compensate by increasing their food intake, but they often cannot keep pace, and they lose weight despite a ravenous appetite.

Diabetes is another disorder that can cause ravenous appetite. After a cat eats, the blood sugar level rises. The pancreas releases insulin, which allows the sugar in the blood stream to be utilized by the cells for energy. Diabetics are deficient in insulin. Without insulin, the blood sugar cannot be used for energy. As a result, these cats always feel hungry. The classic signs of diabetes are excessive thirst, excessive urination, ravenous appetite and weight loss. Your typical cat acquires diabetes around 7 or 8 years of age, although cats of any age can be affected. I've diagnosed cats with diabetes at age 15, but it's not very common.

You need to take your cat to your veterinarian and have a senior blood panel performed. Diabetes and hyperthyroidism are easily diagnosed through blood tests.