

Senior Cat Is in Extreme Pain

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, offers advice on what to do when diagnosis remains elusive.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: I have a 20-year-old female cat that I have taken to five different surgeons, and have spent over \$5,000, and still have no satisfactory results.

The problems started with her dripping blood from her mouth one day. I took her to emergency clinic, but they said that they needed to anesthetize her to get a good look into her mouth, and they were reluctant to do that to a 20-year-old cat.

I waited three days until a surgeon was able to evaluate her. He found lacerations under her tongue, but wasn't able to tell me how or why they occurred. We tried antibiotics and Chinese herbs with no results.

She developed so much pain that she clawed open her face. I rushed her to a critical care unit. Four surgeons had her under anesthesia for more than four hours, with no answers. They thoroughly checked her teeth, did a CT scan of her head and neck, and they biopsied some tissue from inside her jaw. I'm told that there would be no pain medication that we could use to help her.

She is starving and wants to eat, but can't. Now she is having an issue breathing (sounds like a stuffy head). Anything that you could recommend would be of great help.

A: I recommend that you have your cat humanely euthanized right away.

Clearly, your cat has a serious problem. You have taken your cat to some very sophisticated referral centers, have had high-tech procedures performed (CT scans, etc.) and have had thorough evaluations by five different board-certified surgeons, and a diagnosis still hasn't been achieved.

It is very frustrating when a diagnosis remains elusive, especially after taking her to top-notch specialists, but it happens occasionally. When a diagnosis cannot be achieved, the best you can do is to offer symptomatic therapy.

Your cat is in a great deal of pain, and if you've been told that the pain can't be controlled, then you should let your 20-year-old cat die with dignity. Our job as cat owners and veterinarians is to alleviate pain and discomfort, and this apparently is not going to be possible for your cat. Euthanasia is the appropriate next step.