

## Living With FIV

**Cats with FIV, the feline equivalent of the human AIDS virus, can still live full, happy lives.**

*Arnold Plotnick, DVM*

Cats then progress to the subclinical stage, where they remain clinically healthy, although their immune function continues to deteriorate, as the virus causes a continuous decline in CD4+ cells - white blood cells important for proper immune function. The subclinical stage can last for several months or years.

As a cats CD4+ cells reach very low levels, the chronic stage of disease develops, and signs of illness may emerge.

Like Buster, many FIV-infected cats are healthy and remain in the subclinical stage for years. Others have a history of recurrent illness (see sidebar). Three of the most common disorders associated with FIV are stomatitis (inflammation of the mouth), neurologic disease and cancer.

**Diagnosis** Diagnosing FIV is relatively straightforward. In-hospital blood tests designed to detect FIV antibodies are inexpensive, easy for veterinarians to perform and can provide results in minutes. There are three basic types of blood tests for FIV: enzyme-linked immunoabsorbent assay (ELISA), indirect immunofluorescent antibody assay (IFA) and Western Blot. These tests are accurate, but, because false-positive results are occasionally seen, a cat that tests positive on an in-clinic test should have the test repeated on a different blood sample or have the FIV status confirmed with a different type of test.

**Treatment** Therapy is generally symptomatic. Fortunately, many FIV-infected cats respond as well as their uninfected counterparts to appropriate medications and treatments, although a longer or more aggressive course of treatment is often needed. Oral, skin or gastrointestinal infections are treated with appropriate antimicrobial drugs. Inflammatory conditions may require therapy with anti-inflammatory drugs, such as corticosteroids.

Treatment of the viral infection itself is somewhat limited. Clinical use of antiviral drugs remains uncommon in veterinary medicine. Except for feline interferon now on the market in Japan, no antiviral drugs are licensed for veterinary use. Instead, human drugs are used and most are specifically intended for treatment of HIV infection.