



The 10 Ps: Feline Blood Pressure Management and Treatment

Blood pressure assessment is an integral part of a senior cat's healthcare. However, many veterinary teams struggle with this procedure. The time required to take blood pressure in a cat may not be practical in the appointment setting, the cat may not be cooperative, and the team may not be comfortable with the equipment. Once obtained, understanding collected readings can be challenging.

Top TEN Tips for Obtaining Reliable Blood Pressure Readings in Cats

1. **PURCHASE** updated, validated equipment, understand how it works, and maintain it properly. Current validated equipment includes Doppler, oscillometric, and high definition oscillometric units. (Inexpensive equipment available online is not validated for use in cats and dogs, and should not be used.)
2. **PROTOCOL:** Follow ACVIM and/or ISFM guidelines for taking blood pressure readings. Some factors to consider include cuff placement, patient positioning, number of readings taken, and stress factors.
3. **PEOPLE:** Select a limited number of team members to be responsible for obtaining the blood pressure series. Veterinarians and veterinary technicians are excellent candidates as they will have a basic understanding of the physiology of blood pressure regulation.
4. **PLACE:** Learn where each individual cat is most comfortable, and make this a part of that cat's blood pressure protocol (examination room, treatment room, or ICU cage).
5. **PATIENT:** The patient may be more cooperative cozied up in warm blankets, sitting on the owner's lap, or in his/her own carrier (lid on or off). How and where the patient is most comfortable should be recorded and made a part of that cat's blood pressure protocol.
6. **PANIC:** Keep in mind that cats do get situational hypertension, and this can greatly impact their readings.
7. **PAIN:** Pain is stressful for cats, and any handling during painful episodes, or in cats with chronic pain, will increase stress. Since stress increases blood pressure, identify and treat pain before obtaining blood pressure series readings. Drugs such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and possibly gabapentin, are unlikely to impact a patient's blood pressure. Narcotics and most sedatives will lower blood pressure and should not be used.
8. **Be POSITIVE** about the diagnosis. It is easy to get falsely elevated readings on a cat, or to misinterpret the readings obtained. Consider all interfering factors, repeat tests, and assess the patient for target organ damage related to hypertension. Medications should not be dispensed until a diagnosis has been confirmed.
9. **PRESCRIBE:** Currently in the U.S.A., only telmisartan (Semintra™) is licensed for the treatment of hypertension in cats. Amlodipine is commonly used, is very effective, but is off-label for use in the U.S.A.
10. **PURSUE** follow-up. Once started on anti-hypertensive medications, the patient's blood pressure should be rechecked in a timely fashion to ensure the dose is adequate and safe. After starting Semintra, follow up in about 2 weeks, possibly earlier. After starting amlodipine, follow up in 3 to 5 days.