



Scott's diary

This month celebrity vet Scott Miller has been considering the impact that owners who smoke have on their cats.

Recently, I was asked to comment on ITV's 'This Morning' regarding the possibility of animals suffering as a result of passive smoking. Dr Chris Steele, the resident medic and also a cat owner, was concerned at the rising number of lung cancer patients thought to have caught the disease through passive smoking.

Respiratory disease and lung cancer have been linked with passive smoking for many years. Most of the evidence for this comes from surveys that prove that an individual in close contact with a smoker is more likely to suffer symptoms than those in a smoke-free environment. Pathology and biochemistry have also proved that smoking does not limit its effect to just the smoker. Even without the data from such surveys, I believe that passive smoking very definitely has an effect on the health of your cat.

Asthma is a common disease in both humans and animals; one per cent of cats suffer from symptoms of coughing and exercise intolerance. Siamese and Colourpoint Persians seem to be prone to these symptoms and it is commonly diagnosed in younger animals. It often goes unreported as owners may think that the coughing is due to a furball and normal for their pet. It is through these signs of suffering that I believe passive smoking shows its effects.

When I first came to the UK in 1999, an elderly owner called me out to visit her cat, Minky, who had recently started coughing. On arrival, I was engulfed by a cloud of smoke that sent me into a coughing fit; the owner was a chain smoker of the highest order! Minky, a two-year-old moggy, was her faithful friend and she was concerned

Your smoking habit may be harming your cat's health.



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because he had begun coughing and retching. She said she thought it was a furball, though the rapid, laboured breathing proved otherwise. I immediately raced Minky to our veterinary clinic where he was placed in an oxygen chamber.

After close observation overnight, Minky was completely back to normal without the use of any medication and was discharged the following day. I pleaded with the owner to open her windows more to improve ventilation, as I knew it was impossible to ask her to stop smoking.

She called a few days later when the clinical signs returned. This time we kept Minky in the clinic for a few days, giving him medication. X-rays showed a severe bronchial (the larger airways of the lungs) pattern, giving the appearance of a silhouetted tree. This confirmed chronic inflammation and fibrosis (thickening/scar formation) of the bronchial tree (bronchitis) and suggested that the animal had suffered a reaction to something he had inhaled.

Asthma can be caused by anything that causes an allergic and inflammatory reaction through inhalation, including pollens, dust mites and of course cigarette smoke. In this case I was convinced that Minky's owner had unknowingly exposed her cat to the cause of his problem. With due discretion,

I returned Minky to his home complete with medication and an action plan to decrease his exposure to cigarette smoke. Minky always sat on his owner's lap whenever she was seated and smoking; that being almost constantly. So, I advised her to smoke only in the kitchen with the window open, ensuring that Minky was out of the room. Thankfully, the result was a cat that needed no ongoing medication and coughed only very occasionally.

I have found a brilliant product, which I would have used in Minky's case if it had existed at the time. AeroKat has been designed by leading vets in the USA for treating respiratory disease in cats. The AeroKat feline aerosol chamber is a system that helps the formation of an aerosol cloud and helps to separate the large particles from the small (breathable) particles in the metered dose. Most cats will take to the chamber quite readily. Recently the AeroKat was nominated by the Feline Advisory Bureau expert panel for their prestigious 'Easy to Give' award.

If you are concerned about a possible link between your cat's coughing and your smoking, quit! ■

Look out for me in the new 'Pet Priority' series which is back on TV screens this month (September).