

Associations among weight loss, stress, and upper respiratory tract infection in shelter cats.

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J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2012 Mar 1;240(5):570-6.

OBJECTIVE:

To identify associations among change in body weight, behavioral stress score, food intake score, and development of upper respiratory tract infection (URI) among cats admitted to an animal shelter.

DESIGN:

Prospective cohort study. Animals-60 adult cats admitted to an animal shelter.

PROCEDURES:

Body weight was measured on days 0 (intake), 7, 14, and 21. Behavioral stress and food intake were scored daily for the first 7 days; cats were monitored daily for URI.

RESULTS:

49 of the 60 (82%) cats lost weight during at least 1 week while in the shelter. Fifteen (25%) cats lost \geq 10% of their body weight while in the shelter. Thirty-five of the 60 (58%) cats developed URI prior to exiting the shelter, and only 4 cats remained at least 21 days without developing URI. Cats with high stress scores during the first week were 5.6 times as likely to develop URI as were cats with low stress scores. Food intake and stress scores were negatively correlated ($r = -0.98$).

CONCLUSIONS AND CLINICAL RELEVANCE:

Results indicated that cats admitted to an animal shelter were likely to lose weight while in the shelter and likely to develop URI, and that cats that had high stress scores were more likely to develop URI