

Introduction

[00:00:00 – 00:00:27]

If you want a wildly healthy, naturally disease resistant pet, who turns heads and starts conversations with awestruck onlookers, you're right where you belong! This is the Vital Animal podcast, with your host, Homeopathic Veterinarian, Doctor Will Falconer.

Will Falconer, DVM 00:33

Welcome everyone! We're on another episode of the Vital Animal podcast. It is my joy to re-welcome my colleague Doctor Andrea Tasi, from out in the Eastern part of the US. And we're going to talk about cats again. Welcome Andrea!

Andrea Tasi, VMD 00:51

Hi Will!

Will Falconer, DVM 00:52

I thought I would open with a thought I've had years ago and see if you vibe with this and we can kind of spin out into some discussion about it. I've had the thought that cats are kind of like the canaries in the coal mine. That they are the species that we care for, and bring into our homes, and love. We as vets see them – I've always had the thought that they're more sensitive than other species. Would you buy that?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 01:25

100%! 100%! Absolutely! Very, very sensitive. Very sensitive and responsive to things around them and it makes sense for how they evolved, both as predators and prey, as I think I mentioned last time we spoke.

Will Falconer, DVM 01:41

Yes, yes. And I've also seen – I think – well, let me just ask you; what were your years at veterinary school?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 01:48

I was at University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine from 84-88.

Will Falconer, DVM 01:54

Okay. So, I was just four years ahead of you; I graduated in 80. And, during that time, we didn't see many sick cats in the clinics, as I recall. It was dogs and mostly routine things, and I remember clearly that, diabetes for instance, was a rarity. We had two twin beagles in my clinic in the vet school that had diabetes and we studied them, and they were like freaks! They were these lovely beagles, and everybody made friends with them and everything, but they were the only case of diabetes we saw in the whole two years of clinics.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 02:31

Wow!

[Laughter]

Will Falconer, DVM 02:34

And, I mean, now, cats and dogs, quite commonly, get diabetes. And so, I've had this thesis and I wonder if it makes sense to you from a cat doctor's point of view; a homeopathic cat doctor's point of view especially. That as cats have grown to partake in more veterinary medicine, they, as a species, in their sensitivity, have become more chronically ill. Do you think that's true?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 03:07

I do. I agree 100%. And I don't think it's confirmation bias, meaning I'm just seeing what I'm thinking about, I think it's true, because my career arc of 33 years of practice has always been in practices where I – these weren't assembly lined practices, these were affluent, educated folks, I was allowed to do workups, I was allowed to figure out what was wrong with my patients and yeah! They're sicker, and sicker, and sicker and sicker!

[Laughter]

Andrea Tasi, VMD 03:29

With chronic diseases. Much less with acute disease but much more with chronic.

Will Falconer, DVM 03:34

Exactly, exactly. And that's the much more worrisome. That's the stuff that can last a lifetime if we're not doing the proper work.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 03:41

Yeah! That's the definition of chronic, it has no end point until you die.

Will Falconer, DVM 03:47

Yeah, yeah. So, the thesis then, I think you agree with, is that, as cats follow dogs and became "owned" more often, you know we can't quite own these wild animals, but they come into our homes, we've brought them in and we're feeding them something that's not prey and we've brought them to the vet more, they've become more ill. And so, some of the things we mentioned that you're seeing now, really caught my ear and I went "Oh my gosh, I didn't know it was this bad". The first one I saw was diabetes and we can relate that probably to diet. Correct?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 04:38

Yeah, I think that we know that most cats – the majority of cats that developed diabetes are developing a type 2 kind of diabetes meaning it's not that they're not making insulin, it's just that they've been so burnt out by eating high carbohydrate diets and then the resistance to insulin from obesity and yeah, its epidemic.

Will Falconer, DVM 05:00

Wow. Yeah. And have you ever seen a raw fed cat get diabetes?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 05:04

I have. And that's pretty disconcerting when they have been raised their whole life on a raw diet and then in old age become diabetic. That's just goes to show you it's not all in our power and there is mistunement at the level of the vital force because diets will work at the

physical level and can support the vital force, but they can't correct mistunement completely in the vital force. Certainty I see a lot less diabetes now than I used to when I was in regular practice seeing lots of cats that ate kibble. So, I can name 1 cat that has developed diabetes on a raw food diet.

Will Falconer, DVM 05:50

Okay, good. So, that's still within our power to –

Andrea Tasi, VMD 05:53

Absolutely! Absolutely. We can do better.

Will Falconer, DVM 05:55

Change. Okay, good. Let's just stay with kibble for a little bit then we will get into some of these other things that you've mentioned to me which kind of scare me. That cats are getting dog diseases that I never knew were. So, what is there about kibble which is just a 'no, no' for cats in your mind?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 06:11

So, I will preface this with saying that I think a lot of people will listen to something like this and they're waiting for me to tell them the one right way to feed their cat. And I don't necessarily think they're is one right way to feed their cat. But there certainly is a wrong way, and the wrong way is to feed a kibble-based diet, especially most of the commercial, mass produced kibble-based diets. I think we can simply start out by comparing it to what cats eat. If a cats ancestral diet – well a good prototype of that is a mouse. And a mouse is about 50% protein, 50% fat, in terms of their nutritional value, and they're about 65-70% water. All animals are about 65-70% water. So, we can say that a cat's diet should be 65-70% water and especially since the evolved in the desert and they don't have must of a thirst mechanism, if we feed them a desiccated, dry food, kibble, then they're not taking in enough water, simple, that the starting point, and if you walk around a bit little dehydrated all the time that's going to put you in trouble in many ways because hydration affects every physiologic process of the body. So, that's the first part.

The second part is that most all kibbles, even grain free kibbles, are too high in carbohydrates. Doctor Steve Marsden presented some data at a lecture I attended, where he gave a lot of data that said, basically 'Diets much over 15 to 20% carbohydrates promote inflammatory response in cats' so, they're too dry, too carbohydratey. The grain free diets you have to be careful because they may not have grain but they'll be full of sweet potatoes or other carbohydrate sources.

The third things is they are high heat processed. So, we are losing some of the nutrition in the food. We are creating what's called the Maillard Reaction which is, you know, that's the browning of food, and that's well recognised, even human medicine, that promotes cancer! It's a carcinogenic process. These foods are addictive, also, because they're sprayed with a flavoured emulsion so that they have the same sensation as putting Doritos in your mouth, where 'Ooo taste!', and then you want to put another one in your mouth –

Will Falconer, DVM 08:39

Texture!

Andrea Tasi, VMD 08:40

Yeah! Crunchy texture. And so, all of these things are just-- they're not good for cats and they hook the cat on the stuff. So, that's some of the things that aren't good.

08:57 And then I often have to refute what people will always say to me, and I said this to you when we spoke earlier, but "My vet that told me it cleans their teeth". It does not clean their teeth, I will say it again, I say it every time, cats don't chew. They don't even have any flat occlusal surfaces on their teeth. Their teeth are pointy and sharp. Their teeth were designed to rip and tear and I just tell folks "your cat's teeth are getting cleaned by kibble? Really? so when he threw up that kibble, was it chewed?", they're like "no". I said, "well then how can it clean their teeth?". So, that's a pretty good argument. In fact, we now know that, probably, these carbohydrates, all these little crummy things, are probably sticking in the cat's gums and actually promoting more dental disease. I see better teeth on cats who aren't on kibble so that's the short answer, I guess.

Will Falconer, DVM 09:37

Yeah. And the carbs is a tricky one because, like you say, grain free has been such a trend in the last decade or so, but in order to get these kibbles to stick together, and be a chunk, they've got to glue together somehow, with carbohydrates, right?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 09:52

Right! Because I call kibble meat cookies. It's a meat cookie! And, you know, you need something to bind it up and whether it's sweet potatoes or something in there and I'm not saying that all carbohydrate sources are inherently evil to cats; one of my cats ate a little bit of sweet potato for dinner tonight, that's fine, fresh cooked sweet potato, but that was after her raw lamb dinner. So yeah, you're not really being -- grain free doesn't mean it's necessarily good for your cat.

Will Falconer, DVM 10:26

Right, right. So, if we had to put food on a spectrum, from kibble, which is way down on the list of 'no don't even go there, cats love it just don't go there, it's not good for them', up to the high end how would that spectrum of choices look?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 10:44

I suppose that the highest end it's pretty much unattainable; that would be a cat catching its own live prey. That would be the barn cat who is spending the better part of its day hunting mice and eating the mice that it's just freshly killed. Barn cats-- some of the barn cats I've met have been some of the healthiest cats, even though they might have a bowl of kibble sitting in the tack room or something, they're still eating some of that but they're counteracting it with catching the mice, the birds, the other things that cats will kill, yes, that's part of their nature, I know people, sometimes, object to that.

So, we're probably not going to get to that top end of the spectrum, for it's probably something like a whole prey, balanced, raw diet, is what some folks do, I don't even do that,

I'm just using ground and chunked meat, turned into a balanced diet with some ground bone and organs, following some longstanding recipes. I do think you're probably at your best when you are in control of things. Most people don't want to make their own food and there are many, many, many, really good frozen raw foods out there, many of them are high pressure pasteurised and we've probably lost something there, I still think they're probably better than anything -- anything in a bag is going to be worse than-- any kibble is going to be worse than some fresh meat thing.

Anything in a can is better than dry food. I tell folks "even if you can't afford or don't have time or don't want to feed a fresh meat or frozen meat-based diet, even just going with canned food, even -- we just have to do the best we can". Dry is at the bottom, canned is up there, then we move into probably freeze-dried raw foods, frozen raw foods, and then homemade raw foods. That's kind of my spectrum of things.

Will Falconer, DVM 12:47

So, that's a great perspective; there is a spectrum, people have choices, and anything closer to prey is going to always be better.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 12:58

Yeah. And even if you can't, or don't want to, jump into a whole raw feeding or something like, just bearing in mind that if your cats eating about 75% of a balanced cat food, you can probably play around with that other 25%, bringing in some fresh, raw or lightly cooked meat and still adding something less processed to their world.

Will Falconer, DVM 13:16

Nice. So, even if they were, say, on a canned food, you could play with that 25% and bring something raw in there.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 13:23

Yep. Yep. I have many clients do that. They don't want to make raw food, they don't want to buy raw food, but they will buy some organic, frozen, boneless, skinless, chicken thighs and chop those up and serve them as is or just poach them for a minute, if they are afraid of the salmonella, they think I better just dip them in boiling water for a minute or two so they're a little bit surface cooked and then cut them into chunks and their cats will enjoy them. And yea for that!

Will Falconer, DVM 13:55

Alright. Well, let's talk about some of those diseases that you're seeing now that are part of this milieu of cats kind of being the canaries in the coal mine. One that you mentioned just blew my mind, which is, cats are now showing hip dysplasia, is that right?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 14:15

Yeah, some of the orthopaedic things that we thought-- that I was never taught, occurred in cats. I see hip dysplasia, I see luxating patellar, that's dislocating kneecaps in dogs, I see cranial cruciate, or anterior cruciate ligament ruptures in cats. All these things that, in vet school, I was never taught occurred in cats and I really didn't see that much until maybe the last -- basically, just the longer I'm in this the more I see of that and again I think I've always

been looking for these things.

Will Falconer, DVM 14:53

Yeah, yeah. But I'm sure conventional vets are seeing these things as well, right?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 14:57

Absolutely! Absolutely, because I was in conventional practice until 12-13 years ago and yep, this was the case. When you meet a 2-year-old cat who's lame like those 18-month-old Labrador retriever and you take an X Ray of him and we got no hip sockets! Well look at that!

Will Falconer, DVM 15:16

And so, what we're talking about is chronic disease and in many forms diabetes, hip dysplasia, joint issues. One of your big ones, I think that, again, I didn't know the extent of, is this IBD. Tell us a little bit about IBD and what that stands for what you see clinically.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 15:35

So, IBD is the acronym for Inflammatory Bowel Disease, and I'd like to make sure that people are saying its Inflammatory, some people say is Irritable Bowel Syndrome, it's not Irritable Bowel Syndrome. Irritable Bowel Syndrome is actually a phenomenon in people where the guts are unhappy but there is not inflammation there. It's, sort of, a neurogenic sort of thing. If you biopsy the intestines of a person with Irritable Bowel Syndrome their intestines look normal but the nerve function is different. In cats, this is Inflammatory Bowel Disease.

If we look at these cats, at samples of these cats' intestines there is varying levels of invasion of lymphocytes and plasmacytes; cells that are supposed to be part of the immune system, erroneously, trying to do work in the gut causing -- they're trying to do something but they're setting up a problem. As Richard has explained, Doctor Pitcairn, all chronic inflammation is the body trying to heal, so it's trying to heal, but it can't heal and it's just the cycle of inflammation and these kitties develop vomiting, they can develop diarrhea, they can develop appetite changes, most commonly picky appetites or poor appetites, they will, as the disease advances, lose weight and we feel very strongly that this probably progresses, as many chronic inflammatory processes can, to a higher risk of turning into cancer in the gut.

This is epidemic and the reason -- even a layperson could be convinced this is epidemic. I would say "what is the most common cartoon or joke or punchline for a cat?" it's always talking about cat vomiting. [Vomiting sound effect] Vomit! Hairball! Bill the cat, who you know from the comic strip years ago, who threw up hairballs. Alright, cats aren't supposed to vomit. A healthy cat probably vomits a few times a year, most cats I meet are vomiting few times a week, or more and this is not, it's not right! it's representing GI dysfunction.

Will Falconer, DVM 17:47

Aha. And how does conventional diagnostic work uncover that inflammatory bowel disease?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 17:54

So, most of these cats, early on, are pretty normal on a physical exam. If the disease is not advanced the veterinarian, if they're taking a proper history, should be asking is the cat vomiting and understanding, making it clear to folks, that vomiting is not only bringing up food. Hairballs are a type of vomiting. Healthy cats don't vomit a lot of hairballs. There's one study done that said, 'probably short haired cats vomit two or three hairballs in a year'. We don't really have any data on long hair cats, and this is all very, sort of, subjective, sort of, self-reporting data so, it's a little bit of a mystery exactly how much is acceptable.

I do think-- I always say in a good year I'm not going to vomit all. In a good year a cat probably is going to vomit a few times but it shouldn't be frequently and many times veterinarians, and I know I saw this happen, veterinarians dismissed the vomit. They think that that is normal for cats, and you and I discussed the difference between normal and common, and the real thing is it's very common in cats, but it is never normal, and many times people are told 'Oh well your cats eating too fast slow them down'. Well, that doesn't make any sense for a predator. A predator should be able to eat quickly, or they quote 'have a sensitive stomach'. What the heck does that mean? What's this sensitive stomach? It means you can't tolerate the food you're supposed to be eating or you're not eating the food that you should be. So, it's starting it -- so many times people are, sort of, they're not told by their vet that this represents illness because the vet doesn't really recognise it as illness. More and more vets are better about this, there is better training and understanding that it isn't normal and so, then if we think about the diagnostics, if there's an exam and then there's typically some blood work that's done for any sick cat. The problem with blood work is it can tell you a lot of things that the vomiting is not caused by, but standard blood work gives you no information about the health in particular of the GI tract and it's lining. So, when I run blood work I can tell folks 'well, your cats not vomiting from liver disease or kidney disease or diabetes or something else' but I don't get an answer on it, and in fact, many people walk away from an encounter with the vet after that and they're told that there's nothing wrong with their cats because the blood work didn't show anything, but if we continue to look harder in cats, if you do abdominal ultrasound on these cats, and the radiologists are getting better and better at looking at the GI tract with ultrasound, what we find, as this disease progresses, is there will be thickening present in, most commonly, the small intestine and then is that worsens, it gets thicker and lymph nodes get enlarged as the whole more and more is recruited into the inflammatory process. So, this is an expensive adventure to exam, bloodwork, ultrasound, some other tests. In my neck of the woods, if you've pursued that, you probably spent about \$2000 on your cat. And then you're often told we still don't know exactly what's wrong.

[Laughter]

Will Falconer, DVM 21:16

Yeah. Why are they inflamed? What can we do about it?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 21:19

Right. Or in a conventional world if you narrow it down to this, you are generally then placed on some sort of prescription, hypoallergenic, or some other sensitive diet or you're placed

on some sort of anti-inflammatory medication, most commonly, some form of corticosteroid.

Will Falconer, DVM 21:41

Oh boy. Long term, I guess.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 21:43

Forever. forever, because it's not -- well because, like all chronic diseases, it's considered incurable, we're going manage this disease, we are not going to cure it. And so, these cats have to, typically, go on medication for the rest their lives, sometimes with a tapering dose, not so much as they started on, and people are often very happy with the results. The patient will stop vomiting, will maybe feel a little bit better, but as you know and I know and anybody who understands the progression of chronic disease, the other shoe is going to fall. The patient's going to develop side effects from the medication or develop some other, and I'm doing air quotes here, "new problem" unrelated to the inflammatory bowel disease, which is just the body sticking the inflammation somewhere else because we squashed it in one place. It's sad.

Will Falconer, DVM 22:30

Yeah, it's whack-a-mole game

Andrea Tasi, VMD 22:32

Yeah, it's whack-a-mole.

Will Falconer, DVM 22:34

Yeah, and I remember as a hiker -- the thought might come to people that, well, my cat licks her fur, you know so, where is that going to go? Why does that-- why isn't it OK to vomit? And I remember as a hiker, seeing these very hairy wild animal stools out on the trail, right, full of hair and maybe little bone pieces that made it through, they were predators, probably fox etc, and that's the way it's supposed to work, right? It's supposed to go right on through.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 22:58

Absolutely, yeah, the hair should pass on through. I pick up my -- I'm scooping my cat's litterbox, sometimes the little balls of poo are all strung together with, like, a little yarn of fur and that's normal. So yes, cats shed, cats tongues pick up the fur as part of the grooming, they ingest it, and most of it should pass through the gut. Yes, maybe in the spring or summer during heavy shed time, yeah, you might throw up a hairball now and again, but it shouldn't be a couple times a week. I have a patient named Sebastian, when I met him, he was throwing up hairballs every day for six years. Everyday!

Will Falconer, DVM 23:34

Wow! Everyday...

Andrea Tasi, VMD 23:35

Everyday!

Will Falconer, DVM 23:38

The thing that we see, that is really a scary one to both you and I as homeopaths, who can go deeper than anti-inflammatories, is this thing called Stomatitis and I think you're seeing

it in younger cats than ever, and just describe that, what are we talking about when we say stomatitis?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 24:05

So, I just talked about inflammation lower down in the GI tract in the intestines, predominantly. So, Stomatitis -- Gingivitis Stomatitis is inflammation in the mouth and so, we have inflammation of the gums, in its mildest form, it will just be the gums right along where they meet the teeth and in its worst forms it's all the lining of the mouth these cats can have ulceration all inside their cheeks, all down the back of their throat, their gums are red and very, the medical word is 'friable', meaning you touch them and they're just, sort of, pieces will almost fall off and bleed. These cats are in terrible pain, they smell terrible, and it's just this wretched, wretched, inflammatory process. Most of the time it's accompanied with an active resorbing type of decay of the teeth and that adds a whole other level of pain, so, you not only have the soft tissue pain of the inflammation, but you have that dreadful nerve pain that comes when you got a hole in your tooth. And, I'm seeing this in cats -- see it start when their adult teeth come in and the transient gingivitis, that's part of teething-- cause all kittens and well, all children too, when we teeth, we go through a temporary period of inflammation as our grown up teeth are pushing our baby teeth out, and that's normal, but that should resolve once all the adult teeth are in, if you're in good health, but I see in these cats that at 6-7 months old there's that flaming red gum line and then how far is that going to go? And I actually see it starting in younger cats more than I actually see this arising in older cats now. I don't see 12-year-olds who didn't have a tendency for this then suddenly develop it, I see this starting by a year of age in cats that I deal with.

Will Falconer, DVM 25:58

Wow. And so, that's a so that's a growing concern over the years for you, yeah, you're seeing it more?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 26:03

Absolutely! I see more. More and more and more dental disease. It is now the -- I believe the statistics are that 90% of cats, by the time they're three years of age, will have some pathology, meaning physical changes in their mouth, that requires some dental work, meaning tartar, inflammation, decayed teeth.

Will Falconer, DVM 26:20

Wow.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 26:21

It's, again, this probably works back somewhat to diet, but it's not just diets of course. These cats suffer, they really, really, suffer.

Will Falconer, DVM 26:31

And, do I understand, I haven't read about it for a long, long time, is there actually some sort of an "allergy" to their teeth?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 26:40

So, I'm going to speak about the conventional medicines attempt to explain this, and we don't understand it exactly, we feel that there probably is some over reactivity of the immune system to the bacterial population in the mouth. There is some thought that there actually maybe some contagious aspect to this too, because we see in large like sort of multi, multi, multi, cat households where there is lots of cats, we will see this in a much higher incidence than in places where there aren't so many cats. I own a cat that came out of a 65-cat household and every single cat in that house, every single cat I met, had a rotten mouth.

Will Falconer, DVM 27:29

Wow.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 27:30

So, I suspect there's probably some stress aspect to that and then some aspect of contagion too, be it energetic or germ theory based.

Will Falconer, DVM 27:43

Interesting.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 27:44

But most -- yeah, there is still a big aspect of not understanding, though.

Will Falconer, DVM 27:47

So, let's hear from a homoeopath. We cure things that conventional medicine cannot. How's your success rate been curing these guys?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 27:57

Dismal. Not good. I have been able -- the best I've been able to do with these patients is to make the flames of the fire quieten down a little bit, but I've never been able to get the fire to go out right down to the embers. All these cats that I have treated, I they still they need teeth extracted because I don't care how skillful I am as a homoeopath, if the tooth root has even been eaten away by a resorptive process, I can't make that tooth grow back. So, my patients end up needing conventional intervention and it is often extracting all the teeth behind the canines, if not all the teeth, and then I try to pick up the pieces from there. But I never approach a case of Gingivitis Stomatitis telling folks that I have a really good chance of fixing. I tell folks 'I'm going to do the best I can, we're probably going to need some conventional intervention. My goal is going to make your cat to be as comfortable and happy as possible with the least amount of drug intervention'.

Will Falconer, DVM 29:00

Yeah. So, it's a tough case.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 29:02

It's rotten. It's just rotten. And the dentist-- you know, when I speak to my colleagues, board certified veterinary dentists, really caring ones who really like to not be in the business of pulling all the cats' teeth out, they throw their hands up with this too and say, "we just got

to get their teeth out” and that's just mediaeval, isn't it?

Will Falconer, DVM 29:26

That's a huge comment on the severity of the disease even though even the dental experts -

Andrea Tasi, VMD 29:32

Yes. Now, I would like to say that, people listening to this, if your cat does need to have teeth extracted, maybe just a few, or sort of, quote, more sort of 'less violent' kind of inflammation, or even in the case of needing all their teeth out, the cats will be okay functionally, they will be able to eat, they will be able to live happy lives if they don't have to-- they're not having to hunt for themselves or defend themselves so, it's not as if I don't think that-- I do think their quality of life can be-- better to be a toothless cat than it is to be a cat with a mouthful of painful teeth; painful and infected teeth.

Will Falconer, DVM 30:21

Yeah, yeah. Well said.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 30:23

It would be nice if this didn't happen in the 1st place.

Will Falconer, DVM 30:25

Right. So, we've talked about diet as something in an owners' control. Let's talk about vaccines as another variable in their life. So, we know vaccines can turn on inflammation that happens in various systems. We know there is a number of diseases we're probably over vaccinating for. What's your take on just helping people see the reality of how can they minimize vaccines and, you know, again, back to the barn cats who probably got none and ate mice, they did fine.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 31:00

Well, some of them did fine. There was an attrition rate of some of those barn kittens who did die from upper respiratory infections, their little eyes were glued shut, their little noses were glued shut, and some of them died but the strong ones lived and went on to generally be healthier.

I think, what I explain to people is that what we've done in vaccinating large populations, be an animal or humans, we have traded a lower incidence of acute disease. We decided that we want to avoid acute disease and the cost we pay for that is greater chronic disease. It means that some individuals who perhaps weren't supposed to survive are going to survive, and I don't mean that in a cold way that it sounds, you know, the western paradigm values the individual very highly and we feel that all individuals should live and that's never been that way in any natural system. I mean, I'm not advocating let kittens die. I don't mean it that way. But, just to acknowledge, that there is a survival of the fittest that was driven by childhood diseases or kittenhood diseases, but now we start vaccinating these kittens-- and I just-- I see so many changes occur. I see it's very rare that I can get my hands on a kitten who hasn't been vaccinated at all. I own a cat, Holly, who came through with no vaccines onboard. She's never had a vaccine; any vaccines other than a rabies vaccine because I live

in Virginia and there's lots of rabies.

But what I see is all the things (sickness) beginning in youth that I used to, like, not see at all or not see till old age and I just have to think that there is some relationship to all that, and I don't think that we're ever going to stop vaccinating animals. I think we could do it more rationally, you and I discussed this, and I think there is some rational support for a vaccine or two in kittenhood to, sort of, set you up to protect you against the most deadly of young cat diseases, which is Feline Distemper, also known as Feline Panleukopenia virus.

What we know is, if you had a vaccine or two as a young cat, properly given, you're probably immune for life for Distemper, according to the work out of the Immunology Department at University of Wisconsin, Doctor Ron Schultz' work. 95% of cats are immune to Distemper for the rest of their life if they had a vaccine or booster and the 5% that aren't, probably aren't responders, they're not going to respond to vaccines because not everybody responds to a vaccine. When you give a vaccine to an individual it is not the vaccine that protects you against the disease, it is your immune system's response to the vaccine. And so, it is patient based, it's not just inoculation based and there are some individuals who you can vaccinate them every day and they still wouldn't respond to the vaccine.

Will Falconer, DVM 33:59

So, duration of immunity plays in here where if we're vaccinating for Panleukopenia throughout their life, we're mistaken, right?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 34:07

Absolutely and you can titer patients, you can check antibody levels, but that's only measuring a little bit. I don't run titers' on my patients because I think they're irrelevant. I think that its spending money on things that I could find better things to spend money on. I'm not saying it's wrong to titer, I've just made that choice based on what I know, in that, all its measuring is circulating antibody levels, and as I'm sure Doctor Pitcairn has explained with his background in immunology, the biggest response we have that protects us against infectious diseases, is NOT antibodies, it is cell mediated immunity. It's all the things in our eyes or nose or mouth. The things that are our first line of defense is and there is no way to measure those responses. But those are the things that keep us all from getting sick every time we go to the grocery store, push the grocery cart and then stick our finger in our eye and don't get sick from it.

Will Falconer, DVM 35:08

[Laughing] Yeah, that was a really important understanding, I think, is that cells do the hard work and the antibodies even come later –

Andrea Tasi, VMD 35:15

Come clean up afterwards, yeah! They were there for whoever breached the castle. Its cell mediated immunity that is the moat and the walls around the castle and the antibodies are the people up in the towers with their spears and arrows. So...

Will Falconer, DVM 35:32

Yeah, yeah. And the other thing about it-- and it's not a nature's best interest to keep

making circulating antibody, right? I mean, why bother if you're not getting constantly bombarded with a germ? Why would you keep making a titer?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 35:46

Yeah, it's sort of useless exercises for your body when childhood diseases were a fruitful exercise in giving your immune system a job to do, that taught it to fight foreigners versus-- (foreigners as in foreign bacteria viruses, things like that) versus turning on yourself, which is what all allergies and chronic inflammatory disease is, it is the bodies defense mechanisms turning inwards, and the destruction that wreaks, is just it's terrible.

Will Falconer, DVM 36:07

Yes, yes. And what about feline leukemia vaccine? Is that worth giving?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 36:12

So, I used to be very afraid of feline leukemia disease when I practiced in Philadelphia and I was very much a conventional vet and I lived in an area where there was a tremendous amount of feline leukemia virus. It's a bad disease, it is a contagious disease and if you catch this when you are a young cat there's a very good chance you are going to die from it. But the mature immune system is really good at fighting it off and even the immature immune system in many, many individuals chucks this virus out, and so I no longer recommend vaccinating, even my outdoor patients, against feline leukemia virus. I do say that if your cat is young, let's not let that cat spend a lot of time roaming about outside until it's about a year of age because just letting it mature.

Once we've got a grown-up immune system, I've heard a top specialist in infectious disease say that if you've made it two or three years of age without getting feline leukemia virus, you're not going to get it. You do not need to be immunized, and certainly my practice experience has borne that out. I have seen, I can remember, like 1 case of feline leukemia in a 10- or 12-year-old cat. I just didn't see it. It's a disease of the young, most commonly, and I see less of it. Overall, where I am geographically, I think like many bad diseases, overtime, most bad diseases become less virulent. They kind of burn themselves out. In terms of their danger, sort of like what I tend to believe was going to happen with COVID, it will become more transmissible but less virulent, because successful disease doesn't kill everybody.

Will Falconer, DVM 38:04

Right, right, it's not in their best interest.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 38:05

It's not in the germs best interest.

Will Falconer, DVM 38:07

Right. And there's consequently-- I mean coincidentally, immunity building up in these generations of animals, right?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 38:11

Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So, none of my cats, who all go outside, have ever been vaccinated against feline leukemia. And I screen them. When I do screening blood work on

my cats, I am checking retrovirus tests because that is the right thing to do. I don't -- never had anybody come up positive.

Will Falconer, DVM 38:28

Beautiful. To me, it is always sounded like a disease of the weakened host.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 38:32

Yes, yeah. I very much think that is the case and then when we give, we haven't discussed this specifically in my podcasts, but I'm sure you have in others, is that when we are giving a vaccine, from a homoeopathic standpoint, we're giving this diluted, sort of, what I call a shadow version of an essence of the disease, and this can then set up some sort of slow motion version of the disease in the body and Doctor Pitcairn taught us that and has spoken to you about this, that we just sort of, see many of these inflammatory conditions in cats are kind of like if you slowed the film of an acute disease and you spread it out over 10 years, that's what you see in these chronic diseases.

Will Falconer, DVM 39:17

Yes, similar symptoms, etc. Yeah, yeah, okay. So, vaccines are probably overdone in a lot of cases.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 39:27

I stopped distemper combination boosters in all my adult patients. All my adult patients. And you and I had talked about one thing, one of the distemper combination components is a part of the vaccine is against feline viral rhinotracheitis, that's the FVR part of the FVRCP, that's the cat herpes virus. I've never quite understood that. 90% of cats have herpes virus already. They catch it when they're kittens, and it never leaves their system like any herpes virus, like any of us who had chicken pox, any of us who have cold sores or something like that, it's always there and latent in our nervous system. If we're stressed or whatever, it can flare up, but most cats don't have troubles with it, so I've never understood why do we keep boosting cats for a disease that 90% of them already have?

And I've been told, well, 'that's to keep them from having outbreaks' like, well, they're not having outbreaks anyway! So, if it ain't broke, why are we trying to fix it? And if they are having outbreaks the vaccine isn't going to make their immune system stronger, we need to do something else to support their immune system.

Will Falconer, DVM 40:35

Yes, yes, if anything the vaccine challenges the immune system in ways that are deleterious.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 40:46

Diluting its efforts, fighting another foreign invader. Because that's what vaccines are. It's injecting foreign material directly into the body.

Will Falconer, DVM 40:56

Right, and they've got to do something with it.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 40:57

Yep.

Will Falconer, DVM 40:58

And finally, I think another thing people have in their control, that we mentioned briefly last time, was activity. Cats, cats just can't laze around all day and be expected to stay healthy, right?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 41:11

Yeah, so in caring for our cats in an increasingly quote, "sophisticated and caring" way, we have been told for many years that it's best for cats to stay inside because that's safer. Yeah, it's safer, but we've taken away all the things that make, sorry, make life worth living! Really, that the aspect of change. Life is more interesting when there is change that is perceived every day. It is one of the reasons why COVID lockdown is so hard for us. Because you know, my basement looks the same every day! If I go out and go for a walk around the block, it's different every day, even if I'm looking at the same trees and the same shrubs and the same flowers, they look different every day. I'm going to see different birds and that's wonderful for my brain.

That's the same thing for cats too, so they're stuck in an often-unchanging environment. Then they are absent challenge and frustration. We might not think that frustration is good for us, but frustration actually is good. If we got everything we wanted easily, every time we tried, where's the joy in that? And it's the same thing for cats. So, all these cats sitting at home on a nice, comfortable chair with the sun shining in on them, with 50 toys laying on the floor, yeah, it's a safe life, but is it a engaging life? No. And I think a lot of cats are too inactive and too bored, and boredom becomes an aspect of stress, and stress is not good for any of us, and stress makes our immune system do funny things.

And sometimes we have too many cats all stuck together inside. Or I shouldn't even say-- it's not about numerical number of cats, but cats, especially cats who don't get along well, and most cats are not that fond of each other. Most cats who live together are enriching companions to each other, but not strongly bonded. But a lot of cats are making each other's lives worse because they are having some low levels or overt and high levels of aggression, because they don't-- they're not compatible. People often miss this, and that's a huge, huge stress, you know? Imagine being locked in your house all the time with someone you don't like. Or maybe someone, not only do you not like them, but when you're coming out of the bathroom, maybe they're going to jump on you and knock you down. And that's what happens in a lot of multi cat households.

Will Falconer, DVM 43:32

Haha. Yeah, and that's when they start peeing in inappropriate places and all that kind of—

Andrea Tasi, VMD 43:43

Well yeah, that could be one aspect, but we now know, looping back to inflammatory bowel disease, in the enlightened folks doing conventional medicine, and there are many caring, super smart, really forward-thinking people doing conventional medicine, and they are

recognising that inflammatory bowel disease probably has a stress origin to it as well.

Will Falconer, DVM 44:15

Uhuh. Yep, makes sense. Well to wrap up Andrea, there's many variables that the average cat owner has in their control and we touched on a few, diet, vaccines and making more interest in their life and more activity available to them. What can we say as kind of a wrap up to this episode to encourage people that it's not all doom and gloom? Yes, we've got more chronic disease and our cats are speaking to us about less is more in terms of conventional medicine's inputs. But what to wrap up with?

Andrea Tasi, VMD 44:45

I think that there's always-- I think all of us who live with cats can look at how we're living them and say, 'where can I do better?', and just pick the level to which you can do better, if you can feed canned food versus dry food, if you can bring in some fresh food, yay for you. If you can, when you go to a vet visit, say "look, I really want my cats inside". Or, you know, "even if my cats not inside, I don't want to do any vaccinations other than perhaps what is legally required" and rabies vaccines are legally required in many States and can get you into a world of trouble when your cat bites somebody if you don't have them, that's a whole other topic, but you can stand up for yourself at the vet and say "No. I don't want this."

You can certainly look, there's many resources online and many good books, there's many things talking about, sort of, this whole-- The buzzword now is 'environmental enrichment' for cats making sure that there is a changing environment. You can bring a cardboard box into the living room for one week. And then the next week is a pile of tissue paper there and then, maybe, a box comes back with some leaves and sticks from outside. Something where there's some change in things. Where you're actively playing with your cat. That is probably where more of us drop the ball than anything. That is really, really powerful, is getting your cats engaged in play, because when they're playing, they are being that ancestral hunter, that's when their brain is probably most feeling like themselves, and happiest, and it doesn't cost anything. It doesn't cost anything. You don't need to buy cat toys. You can have a string, you can have yard stick, you can have paper balls. Go spend money if you want on cat toys, but you don't need to necessarily and in doing that every single day, every single day.

Will Falconer, DVM 46:46

Beautiful. I love it so will leave this on a positive note. Yeah, and thanks so much Andrea for coming on and given us some cat insights from your years in cat practice as a homeopathic vet.

Andrea Tasi, VMD 46:54

You're welcome. Like I said, yeah, if I sound-- I don't want to sound doom and gloom. There are some really serious challenges here, but we can always aspire to do better, and I certainly see that my clients who do, I do see happier cats as a result, and more often healthier cats too.

Will Falconer, DVM 47:11

Sweet, sweet. All right everybody, that's it for this episode and we'll see you next week with some new and exciting stuff. So, stay tuned. Remember, you can subscribe to get alerted to every single episode that comes out. It's Vital Animal Podcasts, wherever you listen to podcasts. I'll wrap up and say this is good night for now and this is Dr. Will Falconer signing off.