

The Bristol Cats Study: a pioneering longitudinal study of cat health, welfare & behaviour

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Background

- Launched in May 2010, approximately 2200 kittens registered initially in the city of Bristol and then from all around the UK.
- 9 years later, there are still 1731 cats actively participating in the study.

Method

- Owners are sent surveys once a year by post.
- Researchers have access to medical histories to compare with owner-reported signs and illnesses
- Cats can then be chosen for further involvement in targeted studies.

Published Studies from the Bristol Cats Study



Prevalence of, and risk factors for, gingivitis:

- Prevalence of gingivitis ranged from 24.5% in cats less than 12 months old, to 56.3% in cats aged 5-6
- Increased risk of gingivitis was found for cats fed a wet/mixed wet and dry diet, cats that were not reported to hunt and cats with an orange coat colour

Risk factors for Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) in cats up to 12 months of age:

- Rural locations associated with higher odds of RTAs than towns, cities or suburban locations
- Increased risk for cats that owners reported hunted at the roadside as well as those owners that said they lived close to a 'long straight section of road'

Owner-reported signs of Lower Urinary Tract Signs (LUTS) in cats:

- Prevalence of LUTS was 4.3%, 3.8% and 6.0% at ages 18, 30 and 48 months, respectively
- Indoor-only lifestyle at the age of 18 months and a change in diet between the ages of 12 and 18 months were risk factors for owner-reported LUTS at the age of 18 months

Early-life risk factors for feline obesity

- Restricted or no outdoor access increased risk of feline obesity
- Feeding dry food as the only or major type of food in the diet increased risk of feline obesity

Health issues and problematic behaviours in cats confined indoors or allowed outdoors

- Identified associations between outdoor access and a range of health and behavioural signs including obesity, negative behaviour towards owners and inappropriate elimination

Current Study by Author: "A Prospective study of environmental risk factors for chronic gastrointestinal disease in cats"

The Study has two aims:

1. What is the prevalence of chronic gastrointestinal disease among the Bristol Cats?
2. What are the environmental risk factors for chronic gastrointestinal diseases and specifically is stress a risk factor?

1. According to the last survey 43 cats visited the vet for **gastrointestinal signs** (to treat worms, weight loss, reduced appetite, vomiting, diarrhoea) out of 1731.

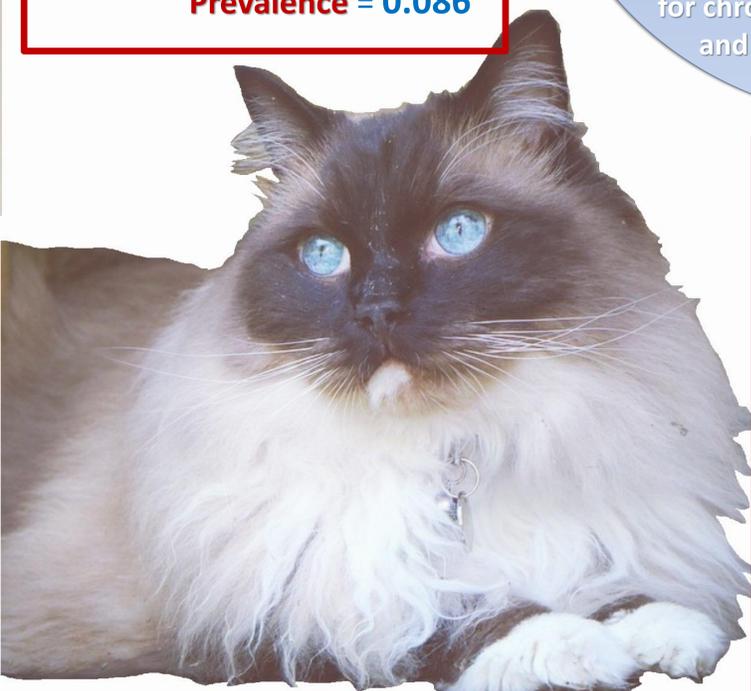
Prevalence = 0.024

150 cats experienced vomiting or diarrhoea without attending the vets.

Prevalence = 0.086

2. To measure stress as a risk factor we have devised a behavioural test to assess cat personality/ability to cope with acute stress comprising of:

- Stranger test
- Novel object test
- Habituation to a novel sound
- Lateralisation study by offering treat in jar
- Hair cortisol testing



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