



## Chronic Condition Care: Hypertension

When you think of hypertension – or high blood pressure - most people think of the disease in humans. Hypertension also affects cats in the same ways. **In cats, if left untreated, hypertension can cause blindness, seizures, disorientation, fluid retention, difficulty breathing and potentially fatal damage to the heart, kidneys and brain.** If diagnosed and treated early, hypertension is very manageable and most cats live out their lives.



Licensed Veterinary Technician, Dawn Hamill, takes a blood pressure measurement.

### Often signals another condition

Cats rarely have hypertension alone. Most often, cats have “secondary” hypertension meaning it’s caused by another disease, typically [kidney disease](#) or [hyperthyroidism](#). Fortunately, both of these diseases are easily diagnosed and managed. [Obesity](#) may also play a role.

Look for these signs often related to the primary disease:

- Kidney (renal) disease - poor appetite, weight loss, increased drinking and urination
- Hyperthyroidism - weight loss, good appetite, vocalization and increase in activity

Additionally, if your cat’s pupils always appear dilated, even in light, this may be a sign of hypertension.

### A diagnosis is easy

If you notice any of the above symptoms, see your veterinarian. Diagnosing blood pressure in cats is easy. An inflatable blood pressure cuff is placed around your cat’s rear leg while an ultrasound probe is placed on the bottom of your cat’s foot. Normal systolic blood pressure (the top number, similar to humans) is up to 170 to 180; slight elevations may be attributable to stress or nervousness. Anything higher is a sign that your cat may have hypertension and should be further diagnosed.

### Treat the underlying condition

Your veterinarian will treat the primary disease responsible for hypertension. If kidney disease is responsible, most often the cat will remain on blood pressure lowering medication long-term. If hyperthyroidism is the cause, treating the thyroid disease will reverse the high blood pressure and your cat will not need to stay on blood pressure medication.