

# Feline basic health check

## Congratulations, you have a new kitten!

You've anticipated the new arrival by 'kittenproofing' your home and had lots of fun choosing the carrier, bed, blanket, toys and other supplies he or she will need. This frisky little creature is sure to bring you much joy. In return, you can make a major contribution to your cat's longevity, happiness and quality of life by providing him or her with good nutrition, loving attention in a safe, clean environment and regular checkups with your veterinarian.



## Your kitten's basic health check

Your new kitten should visit a veterinarian as soon as possible.

The first visit will probably include:

- Thorough physical examination to determine his or her state of health.
- Check for external parasites (fleas, ticks, lice, ear mites).
- Check for internal parasites (tapeworm, roundworm, etc.), if you can bring a stool sample for analysis.
- Initial vaccination and/or a discussion of the types of vaccinations your kitten needs and when they should be scheduled.
- Discussion about whether your kitten should be desexed (spayed or castrated) and when.

This first health check will give your veterinarian the information they need to advise you on your kitten's immediate diet and care. Plus, it will give them a "knowledge base" from which, on subsequent checkups throughout your cat's life, they can better evaluate, monitor and manage your pet's health.

## Desexing your kitten

Many veterinarians believe that desexing not only helps solve the serious problem of a burgeoning population of unwanted cats, but also makes for friendlier, easier-to-live-with pets. Spayed female cats are more relaxed, playful and affectionate, while castrated males are calmer and less likely to 'spray' or urine-mark their territory, wander away from their home or fight. Plus, desexing has health benefits – it minimizes the risk for breast cancer in females and prostate problems in males.

**SPAYING** removes the uterus and ovaries of a female cat, usually before the age of six months. A major surgical procedure, it is performed under general anaesthesia and occasionally involves an overnight stay at the veterinary clinic. Complications are rare and recovery is normally complete within ten days.

**CASTRATING**, also carried out under general anaesthesia, removes the testicles of a male cat. The small wounds that result usually heal in about a week. Less complicated than spaying, it is usually performed on a 'day surgery' basis when the cat is approximately six months old, but can safely be performed earlier if required.

## Make your kitten feel at home

With sensitive handling and friendly contact for at least an hour a day, your new kitten should soon be very comfortable with you and their new home. Be sure, if there are also young children in the home, that they are taught that a kitten is not a toy, but a living creature who must be treated with gentleness and respect. Provide your pet with lots of opportunities for interesting, challenging play that will satisfy their natural instincts. Toys that they can pretend to 'hunt' and capture and special posts that they can scratch (instead of your carpets and furniture) will help make your kitten a joy to live with.



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## Your senior cat

When is the best time to start caring for your ageing pet? When they're a kitten. Starting off your cat's life with good nutrition, scheduled veterinary appointments and a happy home life sets the blueprint for a high quality of life in their older years. Most cats are considered senior by the age of 8 to 10. Much like humans, time takes its toll on vital organ functions as your cat ages. Cats are more subtle than dogs in showing you when they are sick or in pain. Paying attention to your cat's behaviour will make detecting problems easier and help them live healthy lives well into their teens.

## What you can do at home

- Check your cat's mouth, eyes and ears regularly. Watch for loose teeth, redness, swelling or discharges.
- Keep your pet's sleeping area clean and warm.
- Make fresh water available at all times.
- Maintain a regime of proper nutrition and loving attention.

## Common problems

**OBESITY** is a big health risk. An older cat is a less active cat, so adjustments to your pet's diet to reduce caloric intake are imperative. This will relieve pressure on their joints as well as manage the risks of heart failure, kidney or liver disease, diabetes and more. Other changes to their nutrition should include increasing fibre, fatty acids and vitamins while decreasing phosphorous, sodium, protein and fat.

**ARTHRITIS** severity can range from slight stiffness to debilitation. You may detect this problem when they become less attentive about grooming and litter box habits. These signs may also indicate the slowing down of cognitive functions. Anti-inflammatory medication can help relieve the pain. Your veterinarian will prescribe any necessary medication.

**INTOLERANCE TO HOT AND COLD TEMPERATURES** occurs because your cat produces less of the hormones which regulate the body's normal temperature. Move their bed closer to a heat source. If he or she is an outdoor cat, avoid letting them out on cold days.

**TOOTH LOSS OR DECAY** not only makes it harder to chew but also increases the likelihood of nasty infections. Cats are very sensitive to oral pain. Brushing and cleaning the teeth will keep tartar, gum disease and gingivitis at bay.

**CONSTIPATION** may point to colon problems or hair balls. A diet that is easily digestible and rich in nutrients is essential.

**SKIN OR COAT PROBLEMS** Ageing means the skin loses elasticity, making your pet more susceptible to injury while the coat's hair thins and dulls over time. Regular grooming to maintain the coat's lustre and fatty acid supplements are highly beneficial.

**FREQUENT COLDS AND INFECTIONS** may indicate an impaired immune system. Bring your cat in for a check-up. Your veterinarian may suggest a test for Feline Leukaemia Virus, and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus.

**INCREASED THIRST** is a possible sign of diabetes, kidney failure or hyperthyroidism. Your veterinarian will determine this and prescribe the appropriate medication.

**DECREASED SENSE OF SMELL** may drastically reduce your cat's appetite. Try serving smaller portions more often throughout the day. Ask your veterinarian about foods formulated for geriatric cats. They may have a stronger concentration of aromas.

## How old is your cat?

| If your cat is... | In human terms, that's |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1 month           | 5-6 months             |
| 2 months          | 9-10 months            |
| 3 months          | 2-3 years              |
| 4 months          | 5-6 years              |
| 5 months          | 8-9 years              |
| 6 months          | 14 years               |
| 7 months          | 15 years               |
| 8 months          | 16 years               |
| 1 year            | 18 years               |
| 2 years           | 25 years               |
| 3 years           | 30 years               |
| 4 years           | 35 years               |
| 5 years           | 38-40 years            |
| 6 years           | 42-44 years            |
| 7 years           | 45 years               |
| 8 years           | 48 years               |
| 9 years           | 55 years               |
| 10 years          | 60 years               |
| 11 years          | 62 years               |
| 12 years          | 65 years               |
| 13 years          | 68 years               |
| 14 years          | 72 years               |
| 15 years          | 74 years               |
| 16 years          | 76 years               |
| 17 years          | 78 years               |

