



Caring For Your Senior Cat

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It is not unusual to see a well-cared for cat live to be 18 or older, meaning we have lots of time and love to share with our feline companions. However, just like human needs change as we age, so do cats' needs. The following tips will help make your cat comfortable as he or she ages.

- Get a shallow litter box: As cats age they may become arthritic, making it harder to climb in and out of a litter box with tall sides. A shallow litter box will make it easier for your cat to keep his or her good litter box habits. Also, some cats find it harder to squat due to arthritis and the unstable feeling of deep litter. If you notice your senior kitty having a hard time, you should think about reducing the amount of litter in the pan to only a small amount that covers the bottom. This way your cat can squat without losing his or her balance, but can still cover when she is finished. Likewise, make sure your cat doesn't have to climb stairs to access the area where the litter box is kept.
- Get your cat a heated bed: Many older and arthritic cats appreciate the warmth and comfort of a heated cat bed. The best models plug in, but only turn on when they sense the weight of your cat on the bed.
- Don't forget annual blood work and exams: Annual exams and blood work done by your veterinarian are especially important for senior cats. Blood work can detect problems before you can see them manifest in your cat's behavior and early warning enables you to successfully treat your cat's illness.
- Remember the importance of playtime: Even older cats need the mental stimulation of playtime. Older cats won't be as active as they were when they were younger, but they still appreciate the occasional chance to bat and swat. Many older cats like feather wands that they can bat at, but don't have to chase. High-quality catnip toys are also popular with senior cats and many owners report that they get their senior kitty playing when everything else seems boring.
- Trim nails: Since older cats are less active, they tend to spend less time at the scratching post. Help keep your cat's nails from growing too long by trimming them yourself. It's very easy to do and cat nail trimmers can be found at almost every pet store.
- Cats experience hearing loss too: Senior cats may experience hearing loss, just like people. If you notice that your cat doesn't respond to your normal vocal cues, you may have to come up with something new to help your kitty respond to you, such as tapping the floor.

- Keep an eye on eating habits: There are many reasons why older cats may not eat as well as when they were younger, but it is still very important that they get adequate nutrition. Not eating can affect older cats' immune systems and leave them vulnerable to illness, so special attention needs to be paid to make sure they are eating well. If you notice your cat isn't eating well, consider taking your cat to the veterinarian to make sure there aren't any medical problems that you should worry about. Likewise, make sure your cat isn't eating too much and becoming obese due to decreased activity level.
- Keep food and water down low: Due to the affects of arthritis, your senior kitty may have a harder time getting to a perch or counter where its food and water are kept. Consider moving these items down so they are easier for your cat to access.
- Daily brushing: Brush your senior cat daily. Brushing helps remove dead fur that your senior kitty may not be grooming as well now and also stimulates blood circulation and sebaceous gland secretions to keep your cat's coat healthy and shiny.
- Reduce stress: Older cats tend to be less adaptable to change and keeping stress levels down is important for their health. If you know that your home will be experiencing commotion, keep your cats in a quiet room for the duration. If you are going on vacation, consider hiring a pet sitter or friend to come to your house to watch your cat. This is usually much less stressful for your cat than going to a boarding facility.
- Observe and ask questions: The most important thing an owner of a senior cat can do is to keep en eye on their cat. Knowing what is normal behavior and what is abnormal is important in keeping your cat healthy. Often owners are the first to realize something is wrong with their cat because they sense that the cat is not acting like their normal self. If you worry that something may be wrong with your cat, don't hesitate to ask someone for help!