



Looking after older cats

Advances in veterinary medicine, nutrition and general care mean that cats now often live much longer, healthier lives than they used to. However as they age, their bodies and their requirements change. There is a huge amount we can do to make the twilight years of our feline friends more healthy and comfortable. An understanding of this period of a cat's life will help you and them enjoy it to the fullest.



How old is your cat?

The feline advisory bureau (FAB) has devised a life stage system to help consider the health risks to cats at different ages. According to this scale, cats reach adulthood at 2 years of age (equivalent to 24 human years), but after this every year in a cat's life is equivalent to four human years.

Life stage	Age	Human equivalent
kitten	0-6 months	0-10 years
adolescent	7 months to 2 years	12-24 years
prime	3-6 years	28-40 years
mature	7-10 years	44-56 years
senior	11-14 years	60-72 years
geriatric	15+years	76+ years

Ageing changes in cats

As with people, the effects of wear and tear can take their toll as cats get older, and several of the body's organs can become less efficient.

- Reduced absorption of food from the gut can lead to weight loss and diarrhoea.
- Dental disease, and a reduced sense of smell, may result in a reduced appetite.
- Older cats tend to sleep more, and to be less active. Arthritis is common in older cats.
- Diseases such as hypertension, hyperthyroidism, diabetes, and kidney disease are common in older cats.
- A reduced immune system results in an increased risk of some infections, such as cat flu.



As your cat gets older, look out for subtle changes that might be the first signs of disease. Several conditions seen in older cats, such as hypertension and kidney disease, can be treated effectively if diagnosed early; however if left too long, they may be harder to treat, and may cause permanent damage such as blindness. Older cats often seek more affection - providing the ideal opportunity to give them the “once over”.

Things to look out for

- **Increase or decrease in appetite**
- **Change in weight**
- **Changes in behaviour**
- **Increased vocalisation**
- **Increased drinking**

Health tips for older cats

- **A change to a senior diet** is sensible as the dietary requirements of older cats are different. Because older cats also need more fluids, it may be better to feed them a wet food.
- **Monitor weight and appetite** as weight loss and appetite changes are common in older cats and may be the first signs of disease.
- **Consider the creature comforts of older cats** - provide warm, quiet comfortable spots where they can have a “cat-nap” away from everyday bustle.
- **Regular health checks** are important to pick up old age diseases early when they are easier to treat. We recommend health checks every six months for cats over ten years of age.
- **Keep their nails short** - as older cats can't retract their claws so well and tend to get them snagged in carpets and jumpers. Overgrown claws may also cut into their paws.
- **Keep vaccinations up to date** as reduced immunity in older cats means they are more prone to diseases such as cat flu.
- **Regular grooming**, especially of long haired cats, is important as older cats are less able to look after themselves. Use the opportunity to give them a good check over.
- **Gentle play** with older cats will help to keep their minds and bodies active and healthy.
- **A collar with a name tag, or microchip**, is a good idea, as older cats are more likely to get lost.

