

Caring for Older Cats

Cats will often need a little bit of extra TLC as they are reaching their twilight years. It is worth watching how your cats are behaving and carrying out their daily routine as any subtle changes may not just be a case that they are 'getting old' and 'slowing down' but can be a sign of underlying health problems. The earlier we know that there are problems the more we can help your OAP's grow old gracefully and enjoy a happy and healthy old age.



There are several health problems that are seen more commonly in older cats these can include

- Arthritis
- Kidney disease
- Dental disease
- Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid gland)
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure (Hypertension)
- Diabetes

These problems all have lots of different clinical signs but there are certain things that you can look out for at home that might indicate your cat has a problem.

What can you look out for?

- Change in appetite – this could either be eating more or less food or even just being more selective with what type of food they are eating. Perhaps choosing wet food over biscuits and dropping the food when they try to eat
- Have you noticed smelly breath or them rubbing at their mouth
- Increase in thirst - are you finding you are having to top up their water bowl more frequently or seeing them drink from odd places
- Reduced grooming, their coat might not be looking in its best condition, are they getting matted fur in certain areas that they can't reach
- Reduced / change in activity – have you noticed them not able to get to their favourite place or not jumping, climbing, and playing as much as normal, are they limping and getting a bit stiff or are they just sleeping more than they used to



What can you look out for? Continued...

- Weight loss - do they feel a bit bonier when you give them a fuss or are they starting to look a bit skinny
- Have you felt any lumps and bumps
- Change in urination / defecation – have you noticed them going to the litter tray or going out more, have they been having accidents in the house or not using the litter tray, is there any sign of incontinence, are they just having trouble going to the toilet
- Excessive meowing / howling are they being more vocal
- Vomiting / diarrhoea
- Change in coat quality / condition – sometimes their coat might start to look a bit dull, or they may even have dandruff, are they losing fur
- Change in personality sometimes its just a case that they are just not their normal self not wanting attention and fuss and just keeping themselves to themselves or just being a bit vacant



The main thing is you know your cat and if there is anything you are concerned about our vet and nursing teams are around for help.

What can be done to help older cats?

Regular check-ups / senior bloods

We offer consultations for senior pets where they will be given a full MOT from top to toe and keep an up-to-date weight for them. We will ask you questions about their lifestyle at home and about any problems or concerns that you might have and please never be afraid to let us know if there is a problem as there are lots we can do to help our OAP cats. A blood sample can be taken (your cat will need to have been starved for 6 hours prior to this) which will help to assess their internal organs and will often pick up problems before they might be showing and clinical signs – cats are very good at hiding problems! We can then give you any advice or tips and discuss any medication and treatments that may help.



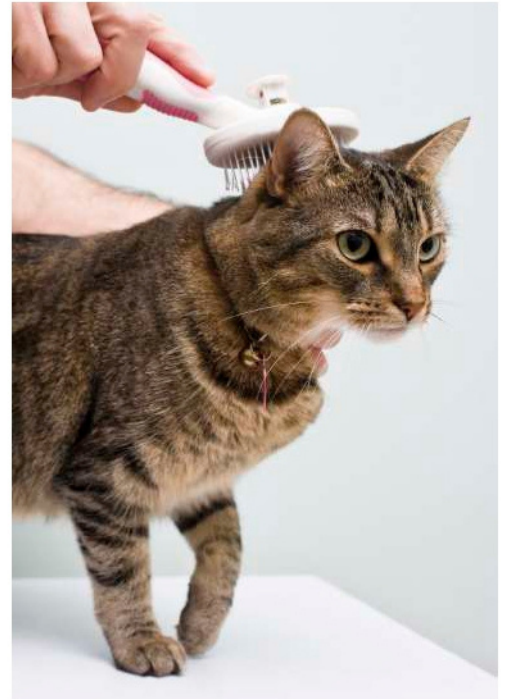
Diet and Feeding

There have been a lot of advances in veterinary diets, many companies provide diets created for older cats or for specific medical problems which are tailored for their individual needs. If they are a little reluctant to eat there are several tips and tricks you can try. It may be as simple as having softer food if they are finding it hard to eat and swallow biscuits, warming the food up if they have lost a bit of their sense of smell (they are more likely to eat if they can smell and warming it up will intensify the smell), feeding them little and often or even just spending time with them while they are eating.



Help with grooming and clipping nails

If they are getting a bit arthritic and not able to reach certain areas they may appreciate a bit of help with grooming, as older cats are often a bit thinner you may need to think about using a different type of brush / comb than you would on a younger cat. By helping them with their grooming it will help to prevent uncomfortable mats, if you do notice any mats do not be tempted to cut them out as they are often very close to the skin and as older skin is more fragile it is easy to cut the skin by mistake, they can sometimes be teased out but if they are large clipping them out is best. A soft and gentle groom can also act as a form of physiotherapy. If they are not going out as much, they may need to have their nails clipped to prevent them over growing into their pads which is painful for them and can cause infections. Keeping their nails short will also stop them getting caught in carpets and rugs and on furniture. Cats may suffer from crusty residue around their eyes and nose, you could help by cleaning it away with a bit of warm water.



While you are spending time grooming them it gives you the opportunity to check for any lumps and bumps or even notice if they are feeling thinner or losing muscle mass.



Litter trays

For older cats it is always useful to have larger litter trays to make it easier for them to turn around in and get into a comfortable position to go to the toilet, consider trays with lower sides or uncovered tops again making for easier access. Also think about the type of litter you use as some of them are hard and abrasive and uncomfortable for elderly feet. Ensure you have enough litter trays for the number of cats you have (one per cat and then one extra) and that they are in accessible areas and won't tip over if your cat is a bit

wobbly. Even if your elderly cat has always toileted outside a litter tray may be useful when they are older if they are more reluctant to go out, finding it harder to get out of the cat flap or even being more anxious to go out as they are no longer the toughest cat on the block.

Food and water bowls

This could just be as simple as moving their food and water to a more accessible area especially if they are not able to jump to where the bowls always used to be or having food and water upstairs too making it more accessible. Using bigger bowls may make it easier for them to get their food or even just lifting them up slightly in case they are a bit sore when moving their neck.

Beds

A warm, cosy, and comfortable well-padded bed kept out of draughts is what they would appreciate to give them the optimal place to sleep. If they have always liked sleeping on the windowsill think about some padding underneath just in case they fall to act as a crash mat.



Play time

Although they may not want to play as much as they used to as a kitten, they often still enjoy a bit of playtime and this also keeps them stimulated both physically and mentally. As they are often not as agile and flexible you may need to use different toys or not move them as fast. A bit of gentle exercise will help keep their muscles active and still gives you that bonding time. A simple cardboard box can often provide hours of fun.

Ramps and Steps

These can help if they are not able to get to their favourite areas, they may still want to sit looking out of the window to see the local wildlife even if they are not going out as much and make it safer rather than trying to jump putting less pressure on potentially painful joints.

Routine

Cats really are creatures of habit so a daily routine is important to them also trying to keep everything in the same place around the house can help in case their vision is not as it used to be

Pheromone diffusers/sprays

Pheromones are released from glands in several areas around the body and are how cats often communicate and know if things are safe, as cats get older, they may start to feel a bit unsettled or stressed and so using artificial pheromone products may help them feel more secure

