



Living with a senior cat has rewards as well as challenges that are a bit different than those encountered when living with a younger cat. This guide gives you advice on helping them live a well and happy senior life.



## TIP

Maintaining a good relationship with your veterinarian is critical when discussing care and quality of life for your cat in their senior years. Ideally, cats over 11 years of age should see the veterinarian every six months.

## LIVING WITH A SENIOR CAT

Living with a senior cat has rewards as well as challenges that are a bit different than those encountered when living with a younger cat. Pain is not something we want to see in any of our pets, however senior cats are more likely to develop conditions and illnesses that create pain and discomfort.

Many of our cats hide their pain very effectively. While we may sometimes see our older cat limping or favouring one leg or another, more often than not our senior cats simply become less active. They spend more time sleeping and resting and may be reluctant to jump onto surfaces that were easily accessible previously.

## SIX TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOUR SENIOR CAT

With good care — and good luck — our cats can live well into their late teens and even their twenties. But as cats age their physical and behavioural needs change.

While these changes are obvious as your kitten matures into an adult cat, the changes when your cat transitions from an adult to a senior — starting at 11 years old — can be harder to spot.

Here are the top six ways to care for aging cats:

### 1. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR CAT'S DIET

Senior cats have unique dietary and behavioural needs. It is more important than ever during the senior years for your cat to be a healthy weight to maintain optimum health.

Talk to your veterinarian about how and when to transition your cat to a senior food.

Your veterinarian will help you assess your cat's optimum weight and can recommend a senior food to help maintain, lose or gain weight.

A cat's digestion is also improved by feeding them small, frequent meals throughout the day and night. Measure your cat's daily food and distribute it in small portions.

It may also pay to promote physical and mental engagement at mealtime. You can do this by using a variety of puzzles and toys that encourage your cat to create solutions to access their food. See point 5.

## 2. INCREASE YOUR CAT'S ACCESS TO WATER

As cats age, they are prone to constipation and kidney disease, especially if they are not staying hydrated enough.

Increase your senior cat's water intake by providing canned food and more options for drinking water.

As your cat gets older, they might not be able to jump up on to counters or access the usual water dish. Add more water stations around the house with plenty of bowls and/or pet water fountains to entice your senior cat to drink more.

## 3. KNOW AND KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THE SUBTLE SIGNS OF PAIN IN CATS

Cats are masters at hiding their pain. As many as nine out of 10 senior cats show evidence of arthritis when X-rayed, yet most of us with senior cats have no idea.

The most important thing you can do to prevent the pain from arthritis is to keep your cat at healthy weight. As little as a pound or two of excess weight can significantly increase the pain of sore joints.

Your veterinarian can help you with a long-term plan to help control your cat's pain with medicine, supplements and alternative treatments, like acupuncture, physical therapy and laser treatments.

## 4. DON'T NEGLECT YOUR CAT'S DENTAL HEALTH

Dental disease is very common in aging cats. Cats can get painful holes in their teeth, broken teeth, gum disease and oral tumors that significantly affect their quality of life.

Infections in the mouth enter the bloodstream and can slowly affect the liver, kidneys and heart. So paying attention to your cat's dental health is essential to caring for them during their senior years.

Often, there is no clear sign of dental disease. Cat parents see weight loss and a poor hair coat as the vague signs of aging rather than indication of a potential problem.

A thorough veterinary exam and routine dental care can drastically improve your cat's quality of life, and can even extend their lifespan.

## 5. GIVE SENIOR CATS DAILY EXERCISE AND MENTAL STIMULATION

Environmental enrichment is an essential part of your cat's quality of life.

All cats need places to climb, places to hide, things to scratch, and ways to hunt and play. All of these things will help your cat stay physically and mentally stimulated as well as healthy.

However, as your cat ages, providing these things may require some extra thought. Your cat's mobility may become more limited so you will need to make your home more accessible so that it's easier on their older joints.

For example, a carpeted cat ramp can act as a scratching post as well as a climbing aid for cats with arthritis. A covered cat bed can give aging cats a cozy, warm place to hide that also helps to soothe sore joints and muscles. You can move their food and water bowls to more accessible locations on the ground instead of on tables or counters.

## 6. MAINTAIN REGULAR BI-ANNUAL VET APPOINTMENTS

Finally, and most importantly, maintaining a good relationship with your veterinarian is critical when discussing care and quality of life for your cat in their senior years. Ideally, cats over 11 years of age should see the veterinarian every six months.

Blood work done during these visits can detect the onset of health issues—like kidney disease—while there's still time to make medical changes that will improve and extend your cat's life.

Weighing your cat twice a year will also show trends in weight loss or gain that can be valuable clues to overall health changes. And oral exams will detect dental disease before it negatively impacts your cat's health.

**For further information on the management of your senior cats health, please contact your vet or the team at Frank Samways Vet on (03) 8379 4498 or [vetclinic@dogshome.com](mailto:vetclinic@dogshome.com)**



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