

## **Caring For Your Older Cat**

If your cat is seven years or older, he has entered his golden years. In middle and old age, the metabolism slows, the digestive system has more difficulty absorbing nutrients, and joints and muscles become weaker. Diseases such as diabetes, kidney failure, hyperthyroidism, and various cancers are more common. The good news is that many illnesses respond to treatment if discovered early. Here are some simple steps to keep your senior cat healthy and happy.

### **Routine Veterinary Visits**

Even if your cat seems fine, he should visit the veterinarian at least twice yearly. Remember, cats age the equivalent of four or more years for each calendar year. Your veterinarian will perform a comprehensive physical examination and listen to your cat's heart and lungs. He will check for signs of illness, especially conditions that occur commonly in older cats. Your veterinary visits are also a great opportunity to ask questions.

### **Diagnostic Tests**

When people reach middle age, routine tests such as blood analysis, cancer screening, and evaluation of the heart are recommended to maintain good health. The same is true for older cats. The reason, in both cats and people, is that some illnesses are not visible during a physical examination, but can be detected in other ways. Tests recommended for cats seven years or older are listed below.

### **Comprehensive Blood Panel**

Each type of blood cell is counted and the chemical components of the blood plasma are measured. This provides information on the health of the bone marrow, kidneys, liver, pancreas and thyroid, and can help to detect infections.

### **Complete Urinalysis**

The concentration and chemical constituents of the urine are measured. Cells and other solids in the urine are examined microscopically. The urinalysis provides information on the health of the kidneys and bladder, and is also useful in the detection of diabetes.

### **Chest X-Rays**

X-rays allow visualization of the internal organs of the body. Chest x-rays are recommended to assess the condition of the heart and lungs and to detect tumors.

### **Abdominal X-Rays**

X-Rays of the abdomen are helpful to detect tumors and to assess the condition of the kidneys, bladder, intestine, and spleen.

### **Electrocardiogram**

This test measures electrical impulses within the heart, using sensors placed on the skin. The ECG is helpful in detecting heart conditions.

### **Vaccinations**

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Just as he did when he was younger, your cat continues to benefit from the protection of regular vaccinations against infectious disease. Your veterinarian will recommend a vaccine program tailored to your cat's age, lifestyle, and health status.

### **Nutrition**

Healthy older cats require a diet that is lower in calories, while still rich in essential nutrients such as high quality proteins, essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals. Special diets are available to address the more specific requirements of cats with medical conditions. Your veterinarian is your best advisor in selecting a diet that will keep your cat purring.

### **Dental Care**

Keeping your cat's teeth and gums healthy is critical to his well being. Dental disease is painful and can lead to infection in the internal organs, such as the kidneys and heart. Your veterinarian should check your cat's teeth regularly. He will let you know when your cat needs a professional dental cleaning. Under general anesthesia, all of the plaque, tartar, and bacteria is removed from the. After your cat's teeth are clean, it is your job to keep them healthy. Tooth brushing and dental diets are highly effective.

