

## Caring for Your Senior Cat

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



# COMFORT & CARE

in the senior years

As cats move into the senior phase of their lives, they may be less apt to jump up to an elevated perch, more fussy at mealtime, and less interested at playtime. Cats move into their phase between 8 and 12 years of age, and though it pains us to see our beloved family member change, there are several important things we can do for her to make the transition easier and keep her in optimal health.

By making good nutritional choices, using appropriate medications and supplements, and incorporating exercise into your cat's daily routine, you can make her senior years more joyful and comfortable.

### NUTRITIONAL CHANGES

Some studies suggest senior cats do not digest food properly, and thus may not absorb some nutrients, such as protein, as well as younger cats. This means that they may not be getting the calories or the nutrition they need for optimal energy and function.

Rule out medical problems with your veterinarian, but if your senior cat is shedding pounds due to poor digestion, make sure you're feeding her a [quality diet](#) with highly digestible proteins and fats. In addition, use of a product that supports healthy [digestion](#) can help your cat get the most from her food. Since your cat's senses diminish as she ages, try lightly warming her food before feeding to bring out its flavor and aroma. Make sure she's getting plenty of fresh water, too.

### MOBILITY ISSUES

1. Geriatric cats are no longer the agile little tigers you once had zipping around your home. They may have trouble getting into and out of the litter box, which may make them inclined to eliminate elsewhere.



They may also begin to avoid jumping over obstacles or jumping up to favorite perching sites, which decreases activity level - and enjoyment of their surroundings. If your cat has been diagnosed with arthritis, work with your veterinarian to develop an arthritis management plan.

2. [Stair-Steps](#) or [ramps](#) provide access to favorite perching spots without the pain of jumping. A low-sided litter box or an automatic [litter box](#) is easier on joints, too, and may prevent litter-box avoidance "accidents" around the house.
3. For support of healthy joints, [Joint products](#) with glucosamine and chondroitin can help maintain normal mobility and agility.



### MEDICATING WITH EASE

Your aging cat may be less cooperative at taking medications. You can try one of the [special treats](#) on the market made especially for hiding a pill or medication inside. Your cat thinks she's getting a treat, and you don't have to fight her to take her medication.

### HELP KEEP HER ACTIVE

Activity (physical and mental) is crucial for senior cats. It increases blood flow, which stimulates and oxygenates tissues to help remove toxins from the body more easily. Exercise also helps maintain proper bowel function, especially in constipation-prone senior cats, and can even help cats maintain emotional health. If your cat is still active, take her outside on a [harness and leash](#) for exercise and mental stimulation. If arthritic, take her outside in a [pet stroller](#) in mild weather. [Brush](#) her often to stimulate circulation, especially if she's having difficulty grooming herself. Keep [cat grass](#) handy for her to smell, chew, and paw at for added stimulation.

Whenever you are not certain about any of your aging cat's changes, consult your veterinarian. Timely action will help preserve the quality of life your senior cat deserves.



Veterinary Care  
Essential in

Regular visits to your veterinarian are essential in your cat's senior years, not only to diagnose and treat ailments, but also to prevent a series of related problems that can occur if one ailment goes untreated.

Make sure your veterinary visits include dental exams and regular cleanings. Dental disease is one of the most common problems in senior cats. [Regular at-home dental care](#) is an important bridge between veterinary visits.

