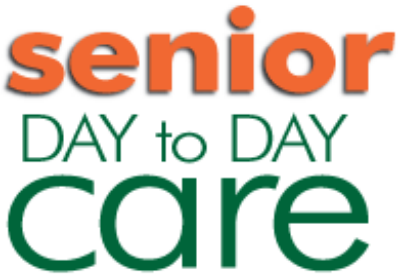
Senior Cat Daily Care

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Today, it is not uncommon to see many inside housecats reach the age of 20 and beyond.

The oldest recorded age of a cat is an unbelievable 34 years. According to many veterinarians, a cat is considered a "senior" between eight and ten years of age and "geriatric" after 12. The manner in which you provide day-to-day care for your beloved friend also changes as she ages. You may begin to notice her teeth and gums require more attention, that her dietary needs may be changing, or that she seems to be less mobile. The following suggestions will help you provide the best care possible for your aging cat.

Food and Senior Cats

Unlike dogs, a cat's metabolic rate does not change vastly as she gets older. Therefore, the energy needs of most cats stay basically the same throughout adulthood. Some studies even show that senior cats do not digest or absorb fat as well as when they were younger, so may actually lose weight. To make sure she's getting proper nutrition, try a vitamin and mineral supplement like Lifestage Select® Premium Vitamins for Cats to ensure she is receiving all the nutrients she requires.

Dental care

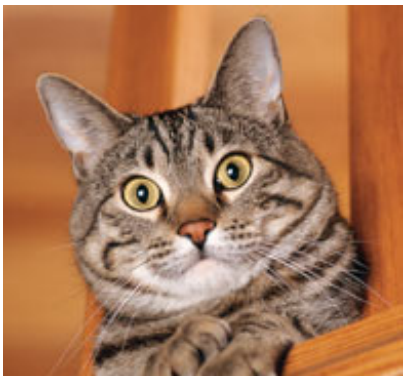
Dental disease is the most common problem found in senior cats that we see in our clinics. Regular at-home dental cleaning with cat-appropriate toothpaste is very important for the older cat. Plaque and tartar fix firmly on any previous buildup and become harder to remove; causing bad breath, gum disease, and tooth loss. Should bacteria migrate into the bloodstream from plaque-coated teeth, your aging pet's system may not be able to fight infection as well as when she was younger. If your cat has lost some teeth, moisten her food for a few minutes before giving it to her or combine wet and dry food.

A good dental care program includes:

- Regular visits to your veterinarian, which include an oral exam.
- Veterinary dental cleaning as advised.
- Daily home oral care, which includes routine examinations of your cat's mouth, and cleaning her teeth. (If daily cleaning is not realistic for you, setting a schedule for two or three times per week is better than no dental care at all.) Try a finger toothbrush along with a pet cleanser, such as Drs. Foster & Smith Dental Cleanser Solution.

Skin/Coat Changes

As with people, some older cats may start to show gray hair, especially black cats. The haircoat may become thinner and duller, which may be one sign of nutritional deficiency. Giving your older cat a fatty acid supplement can help age-related conditions like thinning haircoat and dry skin. Other skin problems associated with aging:



- Lumps and bumps, which can indicate cancer or benign tumors
- Looser, drier skin (injured more easily)
- Grooming laxity - As older cats neglect their own grooming, they often need human help and your brushing distributes natural oils throughout your cat's coat and prevents mats from forming. Invest in a grooming brush to improve your cat's haircoat and to bond with her. She'll love the extra attention she receives when you brush her.

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Nail Care

Just as we see changes in the haircoat, we can also see changes in the nails of older cats. They may tend to become brittle. Care must be taken in clipping the nails of older cats, and they may need to be clipped more often since older cats may not use scratching posts as often as younger cats. A pair of good trimmers, such as the one in the Drs. Foster & Smith Cat Nail Trimmer Kit, will help you keep your cat's nails at a safe cutting length.

Loss of Senses

Seeing and hearing may become diminished as your cat ages. If your senior seems stubborn or irritable, her eyes and/or ears may be failing. The first sign noticed may look like aggression. In reality, it may be the cat was unaware of a person's approach, became startled when touched, and instinctively reacted. Also, her sense of smell and taste may diminish as well. Lightly warming food before serving brings out its flavor and smell. Also, a nutritional supplement like Nutri-Cal for Cats will help cats with diminished appetite get the nutrition they need.

Decreased Activity Level

It is very easy to watch our senior cats sleep all day. They look so content, and throughout their lives they have done so much for us. But as your cat ages, exercise becomes more and more important - you would be surprised what good it will do your senior - how it can improve quality of life and perhaps even slow the progression of aging.

Exercise stimulates all tissues as it increases blood flow. Tissues become oxygenated and toxins are removed from them more easily. In addition, exercise helps bowel function enormously. This is especially important in older pets.

Some appropriate exercise and interaction ideas for cats of any age:

- Interactive toys such as Star Chaser or Da Bird Toy.
- Swinging toys to bat and swat like Kitty Clip Cat Toy or SmartCat Mobile Magic.
- Catnip - plain or in a toy.
- Fetch even works with some cats.

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