

## Basic Health Check

### Congratulations – you have a new kitten!

You've anticipated the new arrival by "kittenproofing" your home and had lots of fun choosing the carrier, bed, blanket, toys and other supplies he or she will need. This adorable little bundle of fluff is sure to bring you much joy. In return, you can make a major contribution to your pet's longevity, happiness and quality of life by providing him or her with good nutrition, loving attention in a safe, sanitary environment and regular checkups at your veterinarian's.



### Spaying or Neutering your kitten

Many veterinarians believe that spaying or neutering not only helps solve the serious problem of a burgeoning population of unwanted cats, but also makes for friendlier, easier-to-live-with pets. Spayed female cats are more relaxed, playful and affectionate, while neutered males are calmer and less likely to "spray" or urine-mark their territory, wander away from their home or fight. Plus, sterilization has health benefits – it minimizes the risk for breast cancer in females and enlarged or tumorous prostate in males.

**Spaying** removes the uterus and ovaries of a female cat, usually around the age of 4-6 months. A major surgical procedure, it is performed under general anesthesia and most often involves an overnight stay at an animal hospital. Complications are rare and recovery is normally complete within ten days.

**Neutering**, also carried out under general anesthesia, removes the testicles of a male cat. The small wounds that result usually heal in about a week. Less complicated than spaying, it is often performed on a "day surgery" basis when the cat is 4 to 12 months old.

### Your kitten's basic health check

Your new kitten should visit a veterinarian as soon as possible. The first visit will probably include:

- Thorough physical examination to determine his or her state of health.
- Check for external parasites (fleas, ticks, lice, ear mites).
- Check for internal parasites (tapeworm, roundworm, etc.), if you can bring a stool sample for analysis.
- Initial vaccination and/or a discussion of the types of vaccinations your kitten needs and when they should be scheduled.
- Discussion about whether your kitten should be sterilized (spayed or neutered) and when.



This first health check will give your veterinarian the information he needs to advise you on your kitten's immediate diet and care. Plus, it will give him a "knowledge base" from which, on subsequent checkups throughout your cat's life, he can better evaluate, monitor and manage your pet's health.

### Make your new kitten feel at home

With sensitive handling and friendly contact for at least an hour a day, your new kitten should soon be very comfortable with you and his new home. Be sure if there are also young children in the home that they are taught that a kitten is not a toy but a living creature who must be treated with gentleness and respect. Also provide your pet with lots of opportunities for interesting, challenging play that will satisfy his natural instincts. Toys that he can

pretend to "hunt" and capture and special posts that he can scratch (instead of your carpets and furniture) will help make your kitten a joy to live with.

### Your Geriatric Cat

When is the best time to start caring for your aging pet? When he's a kitten. Starting off your cat's life with good nutrition, scheduled veterinary appointments and a happy home life sets the blueprint for a high quality of life in his older years. Most cats are considered geriatric by the age of 8 to 10. Much like humans, time takes its toll on vital organ functions as your cat ages. Cats are more subtle than dogs in showing you when they are sick or in pain. Paying attention to your cat's behavior will make detecting problems easier and help them live healthy lives well into their teens.

### What you can do at home

- Check your cat's mouth, eyes or ears regularly. Watch for loose teeth, redness, swelling or discharges.
- Keep your pet's sleeping area clean and warm.
- Make fresh water available at all times.

### How old is your cat?



#### If your cat is... In human terms, that's

1 month	5-6 months
2 months	9-10 months
3 months	2-3 years
4 months	5-6 years
5 months	8-9 years
6 months	14 years
7 months	15 years
8 months	16 years
1 year	18 years
2 years	25 years
3 years	30 years
4 years	35 years
5 years	38-40 years
6 years	42-44 years
7 years	45 years
8 years	48 years
9 years	55 years
10 years	60 years
11 years	62 years
12 years	65 years
13 years	68 years
14 years	72 years
15 years	74 years
16 years	76 years
17 years	78 years

### Common Problems

**Obesity** is a big health risk. An older cat is a less active cat, so adjustments to your pet's diet to reduce caloric intake are imperative. This will relieve pressure on his joints as well as manage the risks of heart failure, kidney or liver disease, digestive problems and more. Other changes to his nutrition should include increasing fiber, fatty acids and vitamins while decreasing phosphorus, sodium, protein and fat.

**Arthritis'** severity can range from slight stiffness to debilitation. You may detect this problem when he becomes less attentive about his grooming and litter box habits. These signs may also indicate the slowing down of his cognitive functions. Anti-inflammatory medication can help relieve the pain. Your veterinarian will prescribe any necessary medication.

**Intolerance to hot and cold temperatures** occurs because your cat produces less of the hormones which regulate the body's normal temperature. Move his bed closer to a heat source. If he is an outdoor cat, avoid letting him out on cold days.

**Tooth loss or decay** not only makes it harder to chew but also increases the likelihood of infection or tumors. Cats are very sensitive to oral pain. Brushing and cleaning the teeth will keep tartar, gum disease and gingivitis at bay.

**Constipation** may point to colon problems or hair balls. A diet that is easily digestible and rich in nutrients is essential.

**Skin or coat problems** in aging cats means the skin loses elasticity, making your pet more susceptible to injury while the coat's hair thins and dulls over time. Regular grooming to maintain the coat's luster and fatty acid supplements are highly beneficial.

**Frequent colds and infections** may indicate an impaired immune system. Bring your cat in for a check-up. Your veterinarian may suggest a test for Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus.

**Increased thirst** is a possible sign of diabetes, kidney failure or hyperthyroidism. Your veterinarian will determine this and prescribe the appropriate medication.

**Decreased sense of smell** may drastically reduce your cat's appetite. Try serving smaller portions more often throughout the day. Ask your veterinarian about foods formulated for geriatric cats. They may have a stronger concentration of aromas.

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