



Positive
cattitude



Keeping and caring
for your senior cat
WITH A POSITIVE CATTITUDE!

Welcome to your cat's golden years!

When your cat turns 7, the years ahead of you may be some of the closest you and your cat will share, and VCA wants to make sure they last as long as possible.

The American Animal Hospital Association and American Association of Feline Practitioners define a cat as “senior” at 7 years of age (about age 44 in human years). At this life stage, it's often quite normal for cats to change their behavior or habits. Proper care and a bit of diligence may give you more years together than you might expect!

While senior cats can be at a higher risk for health concerns, keeping an eye out and offering regular care vastly increases the chances of catching any trouble early, which means treatment is usually easier, more effective and less costly for you!

We've created this booklet to give you information that will help you care for your senior cat, keep track of important information, and have the Positive Cattitude that keeps senior cats in the best of health!

Do you know how old your cat is in human years?

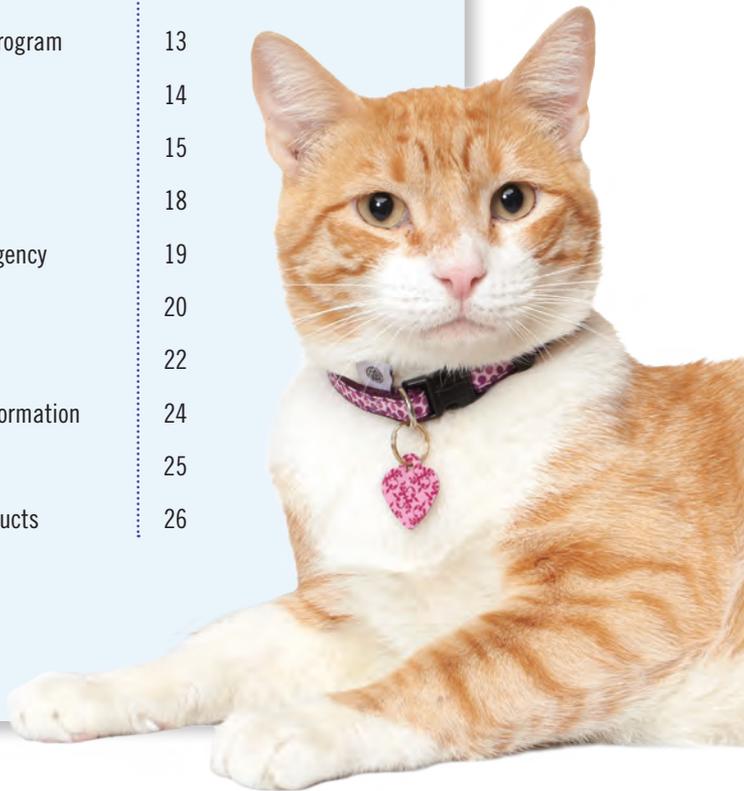
The chart below shows your cat's age translated into an approximate human age. If you have questions on how your cat ages, be sure to give your VCA hospital a call!

CAT'S AGE = HUMAN YEARS

7 = 44	10 = 56	13 = 68	16 = 80	19 = 92
8 = 48	11 = 60	14 = 72	17 = 84	20 = 96
9 = 52	12 = 64	15 = 76	18 = 88	

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Behavioral changes

Perhaps one of the more important parts of keeping a senior cat healthy is recognizing when a behavioral change may be a sign of an underlying problem that needs attention.

As your cat ages you'll likely notice a number of changes. Some of these may be completely normal and innocuous, while others might mean there's something going on that could shorten – or reduce the quality of – your cat's life unless treated. No matter what you notice, always discuss it with your VCA veterinarian to be sure that any potential problem is caught as early as possible. A recent study showed that 90% of cats over the age of twelve had evidence of arthritis on their X-rays, yet only four had been recognized as suffering from it by their owners*.



*Hardie et al., JAVMA 2002.

Lethargy and sleeping longer than usual



A very common change in aging cats is an increase in how much they sleep and a decrease in activity. This is generally normal – a 10-year-old cat is like a 56-year-old human, after all! Don't be surprised if you aren't greeted at the door as often as you used to be, or if it takes a little longer for your cat to come when called. Cats that become less active as they grow older may actually be suffering from painful arthritis. Behavior changes such as hiding and/or reluctance to move or eat can also be the early signs of senior pet ailments including: heart, kidney, liver disease or even cancer. Early diagnosis is important through your veterinarian.



Slower movement

In addition to decreased reaction time and increased napping, you may also notice your cat moving a little bit slower than usual. A senior cat may become reluctant to jump up onto your sofa or bed to cuddle. Middle age and older cats frequently develop arthritis, which makes movement and jumping painful. If you notice this, tell your veterinarian, as there are some treatment options available. (Never give human arthritis medication to your cat, as these are very dangerous for pets.) There are even diets with anti-inflammatory nutrients that can help keep your cat more comfortable.

Increased anxiety

One very common effect of aging in cats is increased stress and anxiety about the unknown. Avoid forcing your cat into new, uncomfortable situations (such as meeting many new people at once). Keeping a routine and minimizing change can be especially comforting, but if the trouble is severe, your veterinarian may recommend some treatment to help.



Litter troubles

There are many possible causes for your older cat to have trouble with the litter box. If arthritis is making it difficult for your cat to climb into the box, replacing your box with one that has a low entry point might help. Kidney or urinary tract problems are common in older cats, so if your cat seems to be having accidents and is not using the litter box, let your veterinarian know. Often the cause can be remedied once it has been found. In the case of inappropriate urination or spraying, ask your veterinarian about Feliway®, a non-drug product that often successfully stops behaviors related to cats' anxiety or stress.

Increased urination and/or thirst

Just like humans (and dogs, too!), older cats are at higher risk for developing diabetes, which can lead to very serious consequences. If you notice your cat's litter needs to be replaced more than usual, or if you need to fill the water bowl more than you used to, let your veterinarian know. Feline diabetes requires treatment, and special dietary changes may be in order as well.



Other behavioral changes

Some cats become more vocal as they get older. Some may appreciate more time alone. Your cat may also exhibit some strange behaviors, like staring blankly into space. Eyesight, hearing, memory, and other functions can begin to weaken as your cat's body ages. What's most important is that you tell your veterinarian about any behavioral

change you notice. You are your cat's best advocate, and your observations will help your veterinarian figure out exactly what's going on and how to keep your cat as alert and comfortable as possible.



Checkups

Because senior cats are likely to have age-related health changes, and because they're very good at hiding them, you should take your cat to see your veterinarian twice a year.

If that seems like a lot, keep in mind that six months for your senior cat is about the same as two years for you. AAFP experts recommend senior cats see their veterinarian twice a year as a routine. This lets us monitor what's happening with your cat and detect early signs of trouble.

The lab tests we run during one visit become benchmarks for the next, as is the case in human medicine, and can help us quickly detect health issues that need attention. Also remember that because our cats can't speak to us or their veterinarian like we can with our own physicians, it's important that we carefully check for any lumps and bumps and do the lab testing that can tell us more about the medical condition of our pets.



Bloodwork, urinalysis, blood pressure and fecal testing

Many conditions such as liver disease, kidney disease and diabetes can be detected by changes in the blood long before the cat shows noticeable signs.

It's recommended that senior cats get a complete blood count, which measures the number of each type of blood cell, as well as an additional set of blood tests to evaluate liver and kidney function at least once a year. For more information on the tests we perform, ask your VCA veterinarian at your next visit.

In addition to testing your cat's blood, testing blood pressure, urine and feces may detect early signs of a number of chronic and acute conditions, such as kidney disease, urinary and bladder infection, and intestinal parasites. These simple and painless tests can help avoid health issues, and make treatment easier if they do occur.

X-rays

Perhaps one of the more important changes in routine screening care for senior cats is the recommendation to do chest and abdominal X-rays on a regular basis.

We recommend X-rays in your senior pet once a year, which is equivalent to once every 4 years for humans. These X-rays help us check for abnormalities such as masses, changes in organ size, an enlarged heart, presence of kidney or bladder stones and other abnormalities that don't show up in blood tests. Early detection can make a big difference in life expectancy and how we treat these silent changes.



Dental check

Gingivitis and periodontal disease are common in older cats and can become quite serious, causing infection and chronic pain.

Be sure to maintain a good tooth brushing habit and yearly dental cleaning. And if you spot any of the following signs, book an appointment to see your veterinarian.

- Bad breath
- Visible tartar on the teeth
- Swelling under the eyes
- Loose or missing teeth
- Difficulty eating (due to pain)
- Discharge from the nose
- Drooling or excessive salivation
- Pawing at the teeth or mouth
- Discoloration or staining of the teeth
- Red, irritated, swollen or bleeding gums
- Weight loss or loss of appetite
- Lethargy or loss of vitality



There may be no outward signs, so routine exams are very important!

Our senior healthcare program

The most thorough healthcare package for senior age cats.

Comprehensive exams may include important tests – such as blood, urine, fecal analysis, blood pressure, and X-rays of the chest and abdomen – a thorough checkup that ensures complete peace of mind for owners, who know they're taking all the right steps in preventive health care for their older pet. Talk to your veterinarian to schedule an appointment and be sure to ask about available plans and programs for your senior cat.

When cats reach the age of seven, they need a little more support than when they were younger.

Our comprehensive senior package* includes:

Complete history and physical exam

- Check for osteoarthritis, dental disease, lumps and bumps

Diagnostic testing

- Kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Liver disease
- Infection, inflammation, anemia, leukemia, low platelet count
- Urinary tract disorders
- Fecal exam for parasites (including *Giardia*)
- Heartworm test

Five X-ray images (chest and abdomen)

- Check for tumors or cancer growths

* Valid only for pets 7 years and older. Not appropriate for sick pets. Additional fees for vaccinations and/or medications may apply. Inquire about a specific package for complete details.

Vaccinations

Some things don't change with age
– your cat will continue to need
vaccinations during their senior years.

It's as important as ever to maintain the highest level of protection with up-to-date vaccines and all recommended preventive treatments. This is the easiest and most efficient way to protect your cat from a number of potentially fatal diseases and infections. Whenever possible, we recommend non-adjuvanted vaccines.

Vaccines recommended for all senior cats include:

- Feline rabies virus
- Feline panleukopenia virus (FPV – distemper)
- Feline herpesvirus-1 (FHV-1 – rhinotracheitis)
- Feline calicivirus (FCV)

Vaccine recommended for at-risk seniors:

- Feline leukemia virus (FeLV)



Parasite prevention

Cats at every age are always exposed to parasites, so prevention is also a must for senior cats.

Here are the most common parasites:

Fleas

Fleas aren't just irritating for your cat! They can transmit bacteria like *Bartonella* and even parasites, such as tapeworm. Fleas are also sometimes the cause of serious allergic reactions in pets. Left untreated, fleas will reproduce exponentially and eventually infest your whole household, which means you'll probably find yourself scratching, too! Flea control is available in various forms and easy to use.

Ask your VCA veterinarian what's recommended for your cat, and be sure to follow these recommendations carefully.



Intestinal parasites

Intestinal parasites, such as roundworms, *Giardia* and tapeworms can be very easy to catch! Roundworms and *Giardia* can be ingested from the environment, and tapeworms can be contracted just by swallowing a flea. Your VCA veterinarian will test your cat once each year with a fecal analysis, and deworm your cat with safe and easy medication if any parasites are present so that you don't need to worry.

Evaluate your cat's risk for intestinal parasites:

Yes No

- Has your cat ever had fleas?
- Do you have more than one cat or other pets in your household?
- Does your cat spend any time outdoors?
- Does your cat catch rodents, cockroaches or other prey?

If you answered yes to one or more of the above, your cat could be at risk. A recent study revealed that intestinal parasites (roundworms or hookworms) are found in approximately **1 out of every 4 cats** admitted to shelters in the U.S.*

* Blagburn BL. (Obtained in 2013 by Bayer HealthCare, Animal Health). Unpublished study. Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine

Heartworm

Heartworm disease involves very dangerous worms that live in the heart, blood vessels and lungs. Although heartworm disease is more common in dogs, a cat can become infected if bitten by a carrier mosquito, and in some cats, heartworm disease leads to severe damage and even sudden death with no warning signs. Preventing heartworm disease is easy, and your veterinarian will suggest the protection best suited for your friend. Both indoor and outdoor cats should be protected. Studies have shown that over 30% of cats with heartworms are strictly indoor cats. Don't leave your cat unprotected!

Ear mites

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal. They are transmitted by direct contact from an infected animal, and often cause severe itching in the ear canal, so a telltale sign of infection is persistent scratching in and around the ears, along with the presence of crusty material in the ear canal. Each time you come to see us, we'll take a look to make sure your cat isn't infected.



Nutrition and aging

Obesity has become the #1 health problem for pets in America.

Just like humans, being overweight or obese puts cats at a higher risk for a number of health problems, including diabetes, cancer, and heart and liver problems. It can be hard to spot when a cat is overweight, and even harder to know what to do. Ask your veterinarian to check your cat's weight and get a personalized nutrition and exercise plan to help your cat reach or maintain a healthy weight.

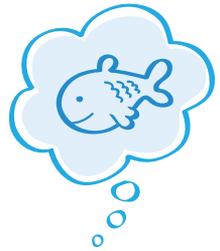
Arthritis

Once diagnosed, medicating a cat in pain can be difficult, but special diets can help. There are many that target specific illnesses and can help keep your cat more comfortable.

Diabetes

Keep an eye out for the symptoms, the most common being increased hunger, excessive thirst, frequent urination, weakness or fatigue, and sudden weight loss. Early diagnosis is important, and your veterinarian can recommend a diet with nutrients that can relieve these clinical signs.

Check out VCAbigpetproject.com to learn more about healthy pet weight.



In the event of an emergency



Here are some signs that emergency care may be needed:

- Sudden collapse or difficulty standing
- Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, or coughing with accompanying/apparent distress
- Swelling around the face and mouth
- Seizure
- Paralysis
- Persistent limping
- Eye injury

- **Stay calm** and, if applicable, make sure that no further danger to you or your pet is present.

- **Keep your cat warm, comfortable** and as **calm** as possible. If there has been an injury or if there's any chance of a **broken limb, keep movement to a minimum.**

- **Call your veterinarian or an emergency animal hospital.**

Phone number:

- If you think that there is an **injury to the spine or neck**, you may be asked to strap your cat to a solid, flat surface with athletic tape for immobilization.

- Make sure **never to block your cat's air passage.**

- Bring your cat in to see us, or an emergency animal hospital, **as quickly – and safely** – as possible.

Transportation

One of the most common reasons cats don't see their veterinarian as often as they should is the stress involved in transportation.



If the mere thought of transporting your cat stresses you both out, here are a few tips to make things easier:

- **Put your cat carrier out** for at least a few days before your visit or travel so your cat gets the chance to see it as a safe space. Line it with familiar bedding and toys to encourage exploration, and offer rewards (such as treats or affection) when your cat enters the carrier.
- Before you leave, **wipe your carrier with Feliway® wipes**, a calming synthetic cat pheromone.
- **Give yourself time** to get your cat into your carrier. Use a familiar towel or bedding to gently wrap and place your cat in the carrier.
- **Keep things calm** when you travel by covering the carrier and avoiding loud and frightening music.
- Cats can soil carriers when they're anxious or aren't feeling well. **Bring an extra set of bedding just in case.**
- If you're coming to your VCA hospital, know that our staff is specially trained to help make your visit as comfortable as possible. **Let us know if your cat is anxious and we'll see what we can do to make the visit and experience as pleasant as possible.**
- And don't forget to ask your hospital about **free VCA Cat Transportation Kits***, including a carrier and plenty of samples and information to make your trip easier!

* While supplies last.



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As you adapt to life with an older pet, these simple “dos and don’ts” can make the transition easier, and even enhance your relationship with your beloved cat.

What to do

- **Keep an eye out** for behavioral changes, and report them to your veterinarian.
- Respect that your cat **may not be as rambunctious as a kitten** anymore. Learn to engage your cat in playtime exercises that are good for the mind and body but are not too physically demanding.
- Understand that **your cat may forget some of the training you’ve given over the years**. As much as possible, use positive reinforcement to praise good behavior rather than punishment for bad behavior. Remember that your cat probably isn’t simply being stubborn!
- Follow your **VCA veterinarian’s recommendations** to maintain your cat’s health and ensure early detection of any trouble that might arise.
- If your cat is beginning to have trouble moving, **make some adjustments** in your home to make things more comfortable.
- Always think of **early detection**. Book those important semi-annual exams for your pet.
- Even a simple nap or cuddling together, can make your senior cat happy. **Your time and attention** is still very important for their overall happiness.

Things to watch out for:

- Weight loss
- Decreased appetite
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Increased thirst
- Lethargy
- Any lumps felt
- Any change in routine
(cats generally are very routine in their life habits)



What *not* to do

- **Don't punish bad behavior.** Cats of any age don't respond well to punishment, and bad behavior in a senior cat might be the result of a health problem.
- **Don't be neglectful,** even if your cat prefers more alone time. Be respectful of your cat's wants and know that you're still needed.
- **Don't jump to conclusions** if you see behavioral changes. Always speak to your VCA veterinarian before assuming anything or taking any action.
- **Don't try to force your cat** to become accustomed to new things at this age. Cats often become more anxious about the unknown as they grow older, and forcing them into new experiences can make them very uncomfortable.
- Just because your **cat may become irritable** doesn't mean that you should! You two have a special bond, and your cat's behavioral changes shouldn't change that special relationship.



Your cat's important information



It's always a good habit to have important information about your cat handy in case of an emergency. Keep all of it together in this table.

Your Cat's Name: Date of Birth:

Useful Information

Your VCA Animal Hospital:

Phone: Your Pet's Doctor(s):

Your Pet's Microchip Number:

Emergency

VCA Emergency Hospital:

Phone:

Poison Control

Phone:

Cat Sitter

Name: Phone:

VCA recommended products

Here are some of our favorite products for your best friend!



VCA, CAPC and most major veterinary associations including the AVMA agree that all pets should be protected against parasites year-round. Make it easy with **Vethical® Paradyne®!**



VCA recommends **Zoetis™ FELOCELL®** vaccines for your cat. FELOCELL 3 is for vaccination of healthy cats as an aid in preventing feline viral rhinotracheitis (FVR) caused by feline herpesvirus-1, respiratory disease caused by feline calicivirus (FCV), feline panleukopenia (FPL) caused by feline parvovirus (FPV). FELOCELL 4 adds protection against feline chlamydiosis caused by *Chlamydia psittaci*. Felocell is a non-adjuvanted MLV vaccine.



PUREVAX®, the **Merial** line of feline vaccines, is developed with state-of-the-art technology just for cats and kittens. PUREVAX vaccines deliver everything needed to induce immunity without any of the unnecessary proteins or adjuvants. Adjuvants are additives that increase the immune response and may present potential risks to feline patients, such as injection site reactions and chronic inflammation. VCA proudly recommends PUREVAX Rabies and Feline Leukemia vaccines for your cat.



Quality Nutrition to Improve Quality of Life™

Older pets may be less able to cope with nutrient excesses and deficiencies, or change in nutrient intake and quality. Foods for senior pets should therefore meet recommended daily allowances strictly and consistently. Hill's® Prescription Diet® pet foods for senior pets are formulated to address specific canine and feline medical conditions.



Did you know your senior cat could be suffering from arthritis without your knowledge? Hiding, moving less and sleeping more can actually be subtle warnings. Ask your veterinarian about diets that are now available with anti-inflammatory nutrients that can help keep your cat more comfortable.



Even healthy-looking cats can be infected with intestinal parasites. Ask your veterinarian how Profender® Topical Solution may fit into your cat's treatment protocol.



You can use CareCredit over and over* either for follow-up visits with your veterinarian or to pursue the pet dentistry you've wanted. Whether it's an everyday checkup or an emergency surgery, we offer you special financing options, so you can worry about the important stuff. You know, like playing fetch and learning new tricks. Apply for CareCredit today - your pets are counting on you.

*Subject to credit approval.

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VCAcattitude.com

Don't hesitate to give us a call if you have any questions.
And most importantly, remember that your cat may be getting older,
but that's no reason to stop having fun together!



Learn more at VCAHOSPITALS.COM
or call **1-800-VCA-PETS (822-7387)**

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Animal Hospitals