

**ELDERLY CATS**

**What happens as cats age?**

🐾Activity levels decrease

🐾Appetite and/or fluid intake may change

🐾Vision and/or hearing may not be as good

🐾Bowel and urinary functions may change

🐾Immune system may weaken

🐾Coat condition may deteriorate

🐾arthritis, diabetes, hyperthyroidism or renal impairment may develop

🐾Senility, aggression or excessive vocalisation

# Feeding requirements

Senior diets available provide balanced nutrition aimed specifically for older cats. Provide smaller meals little and often. Monitor your cat’s appetite closely as this can decrease or increase, depending on a variety of health factors. You can try warming food, as this increases the smell to encourage eating.

# Grooming

Older cats may find it more difficult to wash, which means their coat may have a poorer condition. You may need to help using a soft brush. Check their claws regularly as cats get older, their claws can become thicker and longer. Keep a look out that their claws do not curl into their pads. Vets can advise on this.

# When to take your cat to the vet

If you notice changes to their:

* general health
* appetite and/or thirst
* faeces and/or urine
* mobility or if they seem to be in pain
* behaviour – including vocalisation. A reduction in interaction can be a sign that not all is well

## Cognitive dysfunction

This is a decline in higher brain functions (memory and learning) Signs include:

🐾Being disorientated

🐾changes in sleeping/waking patterns

🐾vocalisation

🐾house soiling

## Deafness

Deafness in cats doesn’t often get noticed. Signs of deafness may include:

🐾not responding to loud noises or when called

🐾being easily startled

🐾loud meowing

🐾showing signs of dizziness or disorientation

Ear disease may cause deafness too and can include:

🐾shaking the head

🐾clawing at the ear

🐾pus, discharge or an unpleasant odour from the ear

## Dental disease

Tartar build up and red, inflamed gums.

## Diabetes mellitus

This condition affects the control of blood sugar levels and usually occurs in middle-aged and older cats, especially overweight cats. Signs of diabetes can be similar to a number of other diseases and include:

🐾increased thirst and/or appetite

🐾passing more urine

🐾weight loss

🐾lethargy/weakness

🐾vomiting

🐾more prone to other infections

Diabetes is often treated more successfully if detected in the early stages.

## Hyperthyroidism

The thyroid is made up of two glands on either side of the windpipe at the base of your cat’s neck. It helps to regulate metabolic rate. In some cats, the thyroid becomes overactive which speeds up the metabolism. Hyperthyroidism mainly affects cats over the age of 10 and can occur in either or both of the glands. The most common signs include:

🐾increased appetite and/or thirst

🐾weight loss

🐾behavioural changes - hyperactivity, restlessness, being more vocal

🐾vomiting

🐾diarrhoea

🐾poor coat condition

Take your cat to see your vet if you notice any of these symptoms. If the disease has been detected and treated early, the cat often lives a normal life and for several more years. If left untreated, it can damage other organs.

## Kidney disease

This is one of the most common issues for middle-aged and older cats. Damage to the kidneys is irreversible and tends to worsen over a period of time. However, with the help of various treatments, cats can often have a good quality of life for several months or years. Normally cats do not show signs of chronic kidney disease until approx 75 per cent of the kidneys have been damaged. Signs can vary but the most common are:

🐾increased thirst

🐾passing more urine

🐾poor appetite

🐾weight loss

🐾poor coat condition

🐾vomiting

🐾lethargy

🐾depression

🐾bad breath

The vet should offer the option of urine and blood tests especially on their routine check-ups or vaccinations. Early dietary management or other treatment may significantly extend your cat’s life expectancy and quality of life.

## Cancer

Cats can develop different types of tumours, they can either be benign – not usually harmful – or malignant – faster growing and usually harmful. Sometimes these can spread to other areas of the body. When you are grooming your cat check for any lumps or bumps. Other signs can include weight loss, increased thirst, passing more urine, depression, poor coat condition, vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

## Arthritis

Inflammation of the joints and is extremely common in cats. It is worth getting your cat checked as treating chronic problems like arthritis will make a huge difference to their quality of life.

Main signs shown in cats are:

🐾a change in behaviour, grumpiness, reduced interaction or tolerance with people

🐾not using the litter tray if the sides are too high to easily get into

🐾reduced interest in play

🐾difficulty grooming

🐾increased stiffness immediately after resting which gets better with movement

🐾an unwillingness to jump or climb

Arthritis is an ongoing problem and cannot be cured. It can be managed successfully allowing your cat to be mobile, pain-free and to lead a reasonably active life.

## Hypertension

High blood pressure often occurs in association with another underlying disease – (kidney disease or hyperthyroidism often have some degree of hypertension as well. It can also occur as a primary problem in itself. The organs most vulnerable to the effects of high blood pressure are the eyes, kidneys, heart and brain. Signs of hypertension include:

🐾blindness

🐾changes inside the eye, including bleeding

🐾disorientation

🐾seizures

This can be stabilised but this will depend on the type and severity of any underlying disease. If left untreated, these signs can become permanent.

# What you can do for your older cat

## Beds

Make sure they have a variety of cosy, well-padded beds in safe warm places that can be readily accessed. Provide easy ways for them to access their favourite areas, such as a ramp or small foot stool. Cushions under windowsills act as crash mats for uncoordinated or wobbly cats.

## Litter trays and toileting

Providing a tray that has a low side to enable them to get in and out more easily. Some litter types that were acceptable as an adult may be too coarse for older cats. If your cat still prefers to toilet outside, provide a newly dug over border as close to the house as possible and maintain it regularly.

## Playing

Older cats still like to play, but gentler. Experiment with different toys to see what captures your cat’s attention. Even if they only watch or slowly swipes the toy with a paw, it is still beneficial mental stimulation.

## Scratching posts

Cats may still want to scratch but can find it difficult as they age. Try providing a horizontal scratching post or one with a lower gradient which they may find easier. Remember to check their claws regularly.