

## Comfort and Care for the Aging Cat

**Today's cats can live well into their teens with proper care from their owners.**

*Debra M. Eldredge*

Some senior cats become a bit forgetful or lose their orientation. Many cats cry at night or wander around the house as if lost. Usually talking to them, holding them or even leaving a nightlight on can help.

Health Concerns Older cats need regular checkups twice yearly is ideal. Expect your veterinarian to periodically run bloodwork to check for changes in liver or kidney function, along with looking for anemia, diabetes and hyperthyroidism. You may also want to request a urinalysis to detect diabetes and kidney problems. Some veterinarians will check your cat for high blood pressure and do an X-ray or ultrasound to check for signs of heart problems or cancer. Early detection often means more successful and less expensive treatments.

Many older cats become less active and quieter, but some cats suddenly seem to rejuvenate. If your cat is active, hungry all the time and losing weight, it may be hyperthyroid having too much thyroid hormone. Possibly caused by thyroid cancer, this disorder leads to an increase in metabolism. A blood test offers the best method of diagnosis, and several treatment options are available.

Increased hunger may also be caused by diabetes. A diabetic cat tends to drink more and urinate frequently. Veterinarians normally diagnose diabetes with a blood test and urinalysis. Most cats are treated with insulin injections and dietary modifications.

If your cat suddenly drinks more water than usual, get it checked for kidney failure as well as diabetes. Cats with kidney problems are often not hungry, just thirsty, while diabetics are hungry and thirsty. Most kidney diseases cannot be cured, but many cats improve with extra fluids and dietary changes.

Dehydration can be a problem in older cats, especially if their kidneys aren't 100 percent, says Nancy Freeboro, DVM, a veterinarian in Syracuse, N.Y. Having fresh water available at all times, [and] mixing water in with canned food can help.

Cancer can show up in a wide range of disguises. Obvious growths are one way, but subtle weight loss, decreased activity and a decrease in appetite can all warn of a malignancy. Again, routine checkups are invaluable. Caught early, some cancers are curable and many can be controlled for some amount of time.