

An Annual Exam Can Extend Your Cat's Life

Your cat's health needs change with each passing year. Here's a lifetime guide to veterinary visits.

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Hairballs can be troublesome for cats and their owners. Brush your cat's fur often to reduce ingestion; too much can cause a blockage. Ask your veterinarian about giving your cat a laxative if needed. He may also benefit from a hairball formula food.

Declawing is a sensitive issue. Discuss the pros and cons with your veterinarian. It is rarely necessary in most households, Strother says.

"Maybe a person in the house has a depressed immune system," Strother says. "Have a very frank discussion with your veterinarian. This is a permanent solution. There are risks involved. It's certainly not something to do because you bought a new leather couch."

Scratch toys can keep your cat from destroying your furniture and curtains. Also, keep your cat's claws clipped. Rubber nail caps are available, but some cats try to chew them off, Strother says. "It depends on the personality of the cat."

Adult and Senior Needs Responsible care involves expense and, depending on the problems your cat may develop, you may be talking about a lot of it. Strother knows owners who save \$10 each paycheck for pet care or hold a credit card for emergency veterinary care. Pet health insurance can cover a wide range of treatments, from some vaccinations to spay or neuter, depending on the plan. If you're strapped financially, your veterinarian can tell you the most necessary procedures or treatments.

As your cat settles into his adult years, continue the annual vet visits for routine exams and vaccinations. Vaccination protocols are more individualized now, Strother says, depending on the cat's lifestyle and overall health. Your veterinarian can help you determine the frequency and necessity of vaccinations for your cat.

Your vet may suggest blood work to give the cat a baseline for later comparison. "Blood work can be very important, as can urinalysis," Strother says. They can detect health conditions such as early diabetes and subtle infections.