

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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Your cat will reach its growth potential at about 9 to 12 months of age, Hill says. During the middle years, he needs less fat and protein than as a kitten, so consider a good adult maintenance food that uses AAFCO testing. A 10-pound cat needs about 300-350 calories per day, depending on its metabolism and activity level, Hill says.

Most cats become seniors when they're 8 to 11 years old. Annual exams are essential, "as these can be the cancer years," Strother says.

Senior cats may develop diseases of the kidneys and liver, or hyperthyroidism, usually caused by a tumor in the thyroid. Symptoms of hyperthyroidism include a ravenous diet, accompanied by weight loss, anxiety, pacing and irritability. Treatment options include surgery, implants to shrink the tumor, radiation and medication.

"All have complications you'll want to discuss with your veterinarian," Strother says. And each option is expensive the surgery can cost about \$800.

Diabetes can strike older cats, another reason to use a diet designed for seniors. Look for an AAFCO-approved food containing omega 3 fatty acids and antioxidants. Ask your vet if your cat needs senior food.

As your cat ages, he may develop spinal or joint arthritis or cataracts, which can be operated on successfully, Strother says. His hearing may diminish. You'll get your first clue about hearing loss when he doesn't come running at the whir of the electric can opener.

Brush your senior cat more often, as his energy level drops, grooming may become more of a chore.

With cats of any age, be aware of changes in bowel movements, which can indicate health problems. Cats normally have bowel movements every day or so. Watch for mucous in the stool it may mean an irritation in the bowel. Advise your veterinarian and take a sample to the office for testing if you see any blood in the stool. Even a change in the cat-box smell maybe more sour or pungent may signal a problem.

The advice you get during annual exams will help you assess your cat's health and happiness.