

## Caring for Elderly Cats

**As part of Senior Health Care Month, CatChannel.com shares tips on care for your older feline friends.**

Because of their genetic compositions, any cat 7 years old or older is considered elderly. Just like humans, cats who are in the latter stages of their lives have special needs.

Just as people require regular diagnostic tests such as blood work, cholesterol monitoring and blood pressure checks as they age, so do senior pets. In fact, there's a whole checklist of senior cat care requirements.

Veterinarians across the country, as well as organizations such as the American Animal Hospital Association and Pfizer Animal Health, recommend taking these basic preventive steps when looking after the health of an elderly feline:

Take your senior cats to the veterinarian for a checkup at least every six months to effectively monitor changes in their health. Plus, frequent checkups help build a rapport with your veterinarian.

Look, listen and feel for bumps, signs of pain or behavioral changes. Any physical or behavioral changes in a senior cat could be significant. Disorientation, changes in sleep or loss of housetraining may be indications of a health problem. Weight fluctuation, increase in thirst and/or urination or any change in your cats normal behavior could also be problem signs.

Maintain a familiar routine with your cats to minimize stress in their life. Moderate exercise should help with weight control and keep muscles toned. If you notice that your cat tires easily or has trouble breathing while walking, bring it to your veterinarians attention.

As cats get older, their nutritional needs change. Immune and digestive systems can become more delicate. Cats can lose muscle mass, and weight gain is common because of reduced activity levels. Switch to a senior cat food to provide enhanced levels of nutrients that are important to skin and coat health.

Check their teeth. The health of your cats teeth and gums can be indications of both dental and overall health. Periodontal disease can be painful and cause other serious complications, such as respiratory infections, liver disorders, kidney infection, heart inflammation and brain damage.

Have basic blood and urine tests run to help determine the presence of existing diseases before medical procedures requiring anesthetic. Also, regular blood and urine tests can help identify diseases in their earliest and most treatable stages.