

Is My Cat Sick?

Cats are masters at hiding signs of illness. Learn how to play detective and recognize these warning signs.

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In the wild, cats are both predators and prey. Because signs of infirmity make them a target, many sick cats just become quiet and withdrawn. This poses a challenge for cat owners to recognize when their cats are sick.

If your cat was healthy and now is not, look for a change from what your cat was doing before: a change in activity, appetite, weight, behavior, type or frequency of toileting, resting time, interactions with you, coat, breathing rate, movement, the sound of its voice or breathing or even a different smell.

If you suspect that your pet is sick, ask yourself, What am I noticing now that I didn't notice before?

What Goes In A sick cat might eat less or more food. Also note increased water intake. Because cats tend to stop eating when they feel sick, most cat owners will call the vet if their cat stops eating, says Arnold Plotnick, DVM, owner of Manhattan Cat Specialists in New York. However, we often erroneously assume that a hearty appetite means that the cat is fine. Not necessarily. Hyperthyroidism and diabetes are often accompanied by signs of excessive appetite.

What Comes Out Look for signs of change in the litterbox. Have your cats bowel movements changed in consistency? Is there diarrhea or constipation? Has the cat started urinating more?

Other discharges are also not normal. Does the cat have a runny nose, goopy eyes or gunk in its ears? Is it salivating excessively or is there blood in the urine? Have you noticed any odd odors?

Is your cats hair falling out or does it have flaking skin? Is there swelling or pus draining from a wound?

Movement and Activity What has changed about your cats movement? Has its activity rate de-creased or increased? Is it reluctant to jump onto things that used to be easy or has it altered how it jumps? Is it shaking its head or scratching its ears a lot?