

Prevent, Rather Than Treat

Take these steps to help prevent common feline illnesses. Your cat will thank you for it.

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One of the maxims of feline medicine is that preventing health problems is better, easier, and cheaper than treating cats once they get sick. Prevention is the single most important thing veterinarians wished every cat owner knew, and did on behalf of their feline companions.

The Fundamentals

Before the advent of vaccines four decades ago, cats would typically live less than 10 years. Today, with state of the art vaccines and personalized vaccine schedules, many cats are living into their late teens-even their early twenties.

Longevity can also be increased through factors such as heredity, environment (indoor cats live longer than outdoor ones) and nutrition. Good nutrition is vitally important. I give my cats a good quality, high-protein, high-fat canned diet that is low in carbohydrates (sometimes called the Catkins Diet'), says Margo Mann, a cat owner who lives in Victoria, Canada. Mann also boils and filters her cats' water. She has fountains as well as several water bowls throughout her house.

When to See the Vet

Starting at midlife (7 to 8 years of age), cats should receive veterinary examinations twice yearly, says Alice M. Wolf, DVM, of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. Weight loss and other signs of the early stages of illness may be subtle and difficult for owners to observe.

Diseases emerge around 10 to 12 years of age. If detected early, these diseases can be slowed or reversed. Having routine bloodwork performed every 6 months is recommended for the older cat, says Veronika Kiklevich, DVM, of Dr. K's Veterinary Dental Services in San Antonio, Texas.

Laboratory assessments and other diagnostic procedures performed during these bi-annual visits can detect early changes in organ function. This will allow veterinarians to intervene with therapeutic measures that can slow or arrest the progression of serious diseases in older cats.

All the benefits of twice yearly exams add up, too, and healthy cats can receive the latest high-tech health drugs and treatments. Veterinarians can implement dietary changes as needed to benefit sick and at-risk cats. Comprehensive examinations, professional consultations and laboratory testing catch problems early on before they cause unnecessary pain, expense or worse. Frequent exams can also nip behavior problems in the bud. Most importantly, your veterinarian can continually update your cat's personalized pet health-care plan, which gives her the best chance of a happy, healthy and full life.

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