

Five-Point Health Check for Cats

Keep your cat in tip-top shape by practicing preventive medicine at home. Here are five things you can do right away.

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The growing emphasis on preventive medicine for humans is a philosophy that should also apply to pets, experts at the Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition say. The organization recommends a five-point monthly home health check to detect signs of poor health in pets:

1. Weigh your cat regularly. Look for changes in body weight by standing above the cat and looking for a slight "waist" behind its ribs. Then place both hands on the animal's ribs. You should be able to feel them, but they should not stick out. Check for fat pouches in the groin area between the hind legs and under the belly.
2. Your cat's coat should feel uniformly smooth. Part the fur near the head and along the spine to check for flakes, scales or cuts. Check for signs of fleas, including black flakes or specks.
3. Gently pull down the lower eyelid to check for pink color. Whites of the eye should be glossy white with no redness. Look for normal pupil size and responsiveness of the pupil to light. Watch for colored discharge, which can be a sign of infection. Ears should appear clean, pink and free of debris and strong odors.
4. Check your cat's gums. Lift the lips away from the gums and press a finger gently but firmly over an upper tooth. When you remove your finger, the pink color should return to the gums quickly. Inspect all the teeth.
5. Check for unusual lumps or bumps. Place both hands on top of your cat's head and move them down under the chin. Move the hands behind the front legs, under the shoulders, down the back, over the hips and down the legs. Inspect claws and foot pads for cuts or cracks.

If you discover a problem or something unusual during the checkup, contact your veterinarian. For your cat's sake, as the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.