

# Basic Health Check

## Congratulations – you have a new kitten!

You've anticipated the new arrival by 'kittenproofing' your home and had lots of fun choosing the carrier, bed, blanket, toys and other supplies he will need. This adorable little bundle of fluff is sure to bring you much joy. In return, you can make a major contribution to your pet's longevity, happiness and quality of life by providing him with good nutrition, loving attention in a safe, sanitary environment and regular checkups at your veterinarian's.



## Spaying or Neutering your kitten

Many veterinarians believe that spaying or neutering not only helps solve the serious problem of a burgeoning population of unwanted cats but also makes for friendlier, easier-to-live-with pets. Spayed female cats are more relaxed, playful and affectionate, while neutered males are calmer and less likely to 'spray' or urine-mark their territory, wander away from their home or fight. Plus, sterilization has health benefits - it minimizes the risk for breast cancer in females.

**Spaying** removes the uterus and ovaries of a female cat, usually around the age of six months. A major surgical procedure, it is performed under general anesthesia and most often involves an overnight stay at an animal hospital. Complications are rare and recovery is normally complete within ten days.

**Neutering**, also carried out under general anesthesia, removes the testicles of a male cat. The small wounds that result usually heal in about a week. Less complicated than spaying, it is often performed on a 'day surgery' basis when the cat is 6 to 12 months old.

## Your kitten's basic health check

Your new kitten should visit a veterinarian as soon as possible. The first visit will probably include:

- A thorough physical examination to determine his state of health.
- Check for external parasites (fleas, ticks, lice, ear mites).
- Check for internal parasites (tapeworm, roundworm, etc.), if you can bring a fresh stool sample for analysis.
- Initial vaccination and/or a discussion of the types of vaccinations your kitten needs and when they should be scheduled.
- Discussion about whether your kitten should be sterilized (spayed or neutered) and when.



This first health check will give your veterinarian the information he needs to advise you on your kitten's immediate diet and care. Plus, it will give him a "knowledge base" from which, on subsequent checkups throughout your cat's life, he can better evaluate, monitor and manage your pet's health.

## Make your new kitten feel at home

With sensitive handling and friendly contact for at least an hour a day, your new kitten should soon be very comfortable with you and his new home. If there are young children in the home, make sure that they are taught that a kitten is not a toy but a living creature who must be treated with gentleness and respect. Also provide your pet with lots of opportunities for interesting, challenging play that will satisfy his natural instincts. Toys that he can pretend to 'hunt' and capture and special posts that he can scratch (instead of your carpets and furniture) will help make your kitten a joy to live with.

## Your Geriatric Cat

When is the best time to start caring for your ageing pet? When he's a kitten. Starting off your cat's life with good nutrition, scheduled veterinary appointments and a happy home life sets the blueprint for a high quality of life in his older years. Most cats are considered geriatric by the age of 8 to 10. Much like humans, time takes its toll on vital organ functions as your cat ages. Cats are more subtle than dogs in showing you when they are sick or in pain. Paying attention to your cat's behaviour will make detecting problems easier and help them live healthy lives well into their teens.

## What you can do at home

- Check your cat's mouth, eyes or ears regularly. Watch for loose teeth, redness, swelling or discharge.
- Keep your pet's sleeping area clean and warm.
- Make fresh water available at all times.
- Maintain a regime of proper nutrition and loving attention.



## How old is your cat?

If your cat is...	In human terms, that's
1 month	5-6 months
2 months	9-10 months
3 months	2-3 years
4 months	5-6 years
5 months	8-9 years
6 months	14 years
7 months	15 years
8 months	16 years
1 year	18 years
2 years	25 years
3 years	30 years
4 years	35 years
5 years	38-40 years
6 years	42-44 years
7 years	45 years
8 years	48 years
9 years	55 years
10 years	60 years
11 years	62 years
12 years	65 years
13 years	68 years
14 years	72 years
15 years	74 years
16 years	76 years
17 years	78 years

## Common Problems

**Obesity** is a big health risk. An older cat is a less active cat, so adjustments to your pet's diet to reduce caloric intake are imperative. This will relieve pressure on his joints as well as manage the risks of heart failure, kidney or liver disease, digestive problems and more. Other changes to his nutrition should include increasing fiber, fatty acids and vitamins while decreasing phosphorus, sodium, protein and fat.

**Arthritis'** severity can range from slight stiffness to debilitation. You may detect this problem when he becomes less attentive about his grooming and litter box habits. These signs may also indicate the slowing down of his cognitive functions. Anti-inflammatory medication can help relieve the pain. Your veterinarian will prescribe any necessary medication.

**Intolerance** to hot and cold temperatures occurs because your cat produces less of the hormones which regulate the body's normal temperature. Move his bed closer to a heat source. If he is an outdoor cat, avoid letting him out on cold days.

**Tooth loss or decay** not only makes it harder to chew but also increases the likelihood of infection or tumours. Cats are very sensitive to oral pain. Brushing and cleaning the teeth will keep tartar, gum disease and gingivitis at bay.

**Constipation** may point to colon problems or hair balls. A diet that is easily digestible and rich in nutrients is essential.

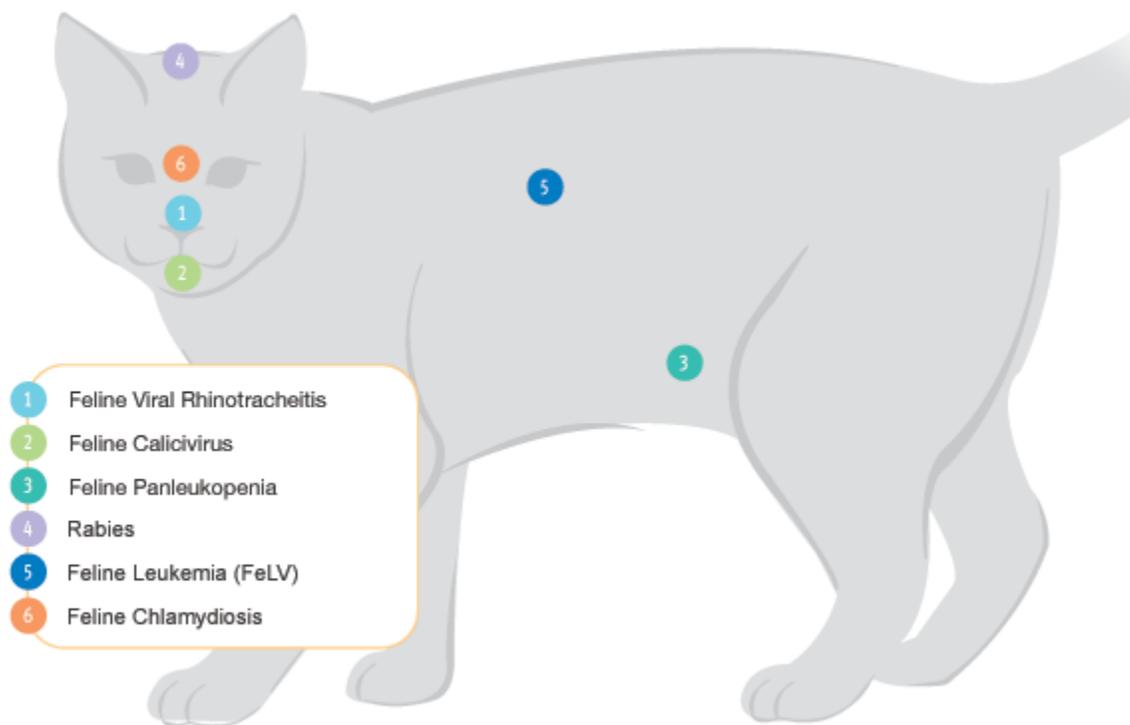
**Skin or coat problems** in ageing cats means the skin loses elasticity, making your pet more susceptible to injury while the coat's hair thins and dulls over time. Regular grooming to maintain the coat's luster and fatty acid supplements are highly beneficial.

**Frequent colds and infections** may indicate an impaired immune system. Bring your cat in for a check-up. Your veterinarian may suggest a test for Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus.

**Increased thirst** is a possible sign of diabetes, kidney failure or hyperthyroidism. Your veterinarian will determine this and prescribe the appropriate medication.

**Decreased sense of smell** may drastically reduce your cat's appetite. Try serving smaller portions more often throughout the day. Ask your veterinarian about foods formulated for geriatric cats.

## Diseases & Vaccination



### Your cat counts on you for protection

One of the very best things you can do to give your cat a long and healthy life is to ensure that he is vaccinated

against common feline diseases. Your cat's mother gave her kitten immunity from disease for the first few weeks of existence by providing disease-fighting antibodies in her milk. After that period it's up to you – with the help and advice of your veterinarian – to provide that protection.

### How do vaccines work?

Vaccines contain small quantities of altered or "killed" viruses, bacteria or other disease-causing organisms. When administered, they stimulate your cat's immune system to produce disease-fighting cells and proteins – or antibodies – to protect against disease.

### When should my cat be vaccinated?

Generally, the immunity that a kitten has at birth begins to diminish after 9 weeks. It is then usually time to begin the initial vaccinations, with the booster following at 3 to 4 weeks later. Thereafter, your cat will require repeat vaccinations for the rest of his or her life. Of course, these are only guidelines – your veterinarian will be able to determine the exact schedule that's right for your pet.

### Which vaccinations should my cat receive?

Most veterinarians believe that your pet should be protected against those diseases which are most common, highly contagious and which cause serious illness. Such diseases could include Feline Panleukopenia, Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Feline Calicivirus, Feline Chlamydiosis, Feline Leukemia and Rabies. Other vaccinations may be recommended, based on your veterinarian's evaluation of the risks posed by such factors as your cat's particular heredity, environment and lifestyle.

- 1 Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis**  
Just as with the human common cold, the virus that causes this upper respiratory-tract infection is easily transmitted from one cat to another, so vaccination is imperative if your pet will come in contact with other cats. Its symptoms may take the form of moderate fever, loss of appetite, sneezing, eye and nasal discharges and coughing. Kittens are particularly affected, but this disease can be dangerous in any unprotected cat, as effective treatment is limited. Even if a cat recovers, it can remain a carrier for life.
- 2 Feline Calicivirus**  
This virus is another major cause of upper respiratory-tract infection in cats. Widespread and highly contagious, its symptoms of fever, ulcers and blisters on the tongue and pneumonia (inflammation of the lungs) can range from mild to severe, depending on the strain of virus present. Once again, treatment of this disease can be difficult. Even if recovery does take place, a recovered cat can continue to infect other animals, as well as experience chronic sneezing and runny eyes. Vaccination is therefore tremendously important.
- 3 Feline Panleukopenia**  
Sometimes known as feline distemper, this disease is caused by a virus so resistant, it can survive up to one year outside a cat's body! Therefore, as most cats will be exposed to it during their lifetimes and infection rates in unprotected cats can run as high as 90% to 100%, vaccination against this potentially fatal disease is absolutely essential. Symptoms can include listlessness, diarrhea, vomiting, severe dehydration and fever. Happily, the vaccine itself is very effective in preventing the disease, as treatment is very difficult and, even if recovery takes place for a period of time, a once-infected cat can spread the disease to other, unvaccinated animals.
- 4 Rabies**  
This incurable viral disease affects the central nervous system of almost all mammals, including humans. It is spread through contact with the saliva of infected animals (which can include skunks, foxes, raccoons and bats) through bites or any break in the skin. Vaccination will provide your cat with much greater resistance to rabies if he is exposed to the disease, but you must be aware that there is no cure once it occurs. For this reason, many

municipalities absolutely require that all cats receive rabies vaccinations on a regular basis. Plus, you will definitely have to prove that your cat is vaccinated if you ever have to travel with him – whether across the province or around the world.

### 5 Feline Leukemia (FeLV)

Infection with the Feline Leukemia Virus can result in a multitude of serious health problems for your cat – everything from cancerous conditions such as leukemia to a wide range of secondary infections caused by the destruction of the immune response system. In fact, it is the leading cause of death in North American cats. After initial exposure to the virus, a cat may show no symptoms of its presence for months, if not years, yet all the while infect others. Testing is available to determine the FeLV status of your cat. If he or she has not yet been infected, but is likely to come in contact with cats that are, vaccination against this potentially fatal disease is highly recommended.

### 6 Feline Chlamydiosis

This bacterial disease is responsible for 15 to 20% of all feline respiratory diseases. It is extremely contagious, especially in young kittens and the infection rate is very high. It causes a local infection of the mucous membranes of the eyes but may also involve the lungs. Chlamydiosis can be transmitted to humans by direct contact. Vaccination is the preferred method for prevention.

## Other Vaccinations

After evaluating your cat's particular situation and risk factors, your veterinarian may also recommend vaccination against other infectious diseases. These might include:

- **FELINE INFECTIOUS PERITONITIS**, which can strike many different organs, including the intestines, liver, kidneys and lungs. It is most often seen in young adult cats.

## How effective is vaccination?

Like any drug treatment or surgical procedure, vaccinations cannot be 100% guaranteed. However, used in conjunction with proper nutrition and acceptable sanitary, vaccination is clearly your pet's best defense against disease. Plus, when you consider what treating a serious illness can cost you and your beloved cat in terms of both money and distress, prevention through vaccination is extremely cost-effective.

## Eye Care

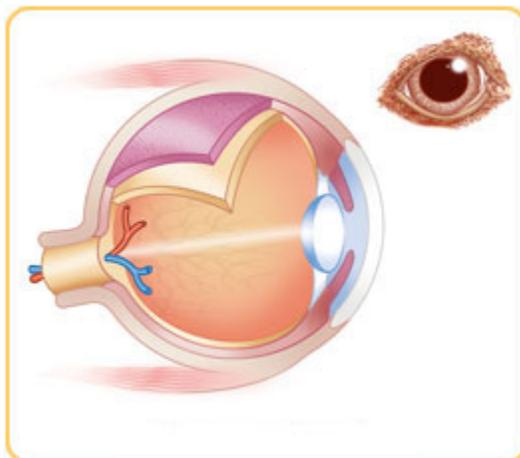
A healthy cat's eyes should be clear and bright and the area around the eyeball white.

### Common Symptoms of Illness

- Red inner eyelids
- Matter 'stuck' on the surface or in the corners of the eye
- Cloudiness within the eyeball
- A dull eye surface
- The 'third eyelid' coming across the eye
- Excessive tearing or unusual discharges
- Tear-stained fur around the eyes

### Eye Tests used to Diagnose Eye Problems

- Fluorescein stain to identify the presence of corneal ulcers
- Schirmer Tear Test to determine the level of tear



- production
- Ocular pressure to detect glaucoma
- Ophthalmoscope to see in the eye chamber

## Common Eye Conditions & Symptoms

**Conjunctivitis** is an inflammation of the membrane that covers both the inner lining of the eyelid and the white of the eye. It may be caused by allergies or by bacterial, fungal or viral infections. In fact, recurrent or chronic conjunctivitis in cats is often the result of herpes viral infections which can return – again and again. It can be contagious, so keep an infected cat away from others.

**Corneal Ulceration** can occur when the surface of the cornea is scratched or damaged, either as the result of a cat fight or more seriously, a bacterial or viral infection.

### Watery Eyes

If your cat's eyes constantly "weep", or if the fur around them appears "stained", he may suffer from this inherited defect, in which a malformation of the tear ducts blocks the normal flow of tears.

### Cataracts & Glaucoma

Cats, just like humans, can have these serious eye diseases. Cataracts, which cloud the lens inside the eye can be seen in elderly cats. A thorough evaluation by your veterinarian is necessary as surgery is the only treatment. Glaucoma stems from too much pressure being exerted upon the eye's interior as a result of a decrease in the amount of fluid draining from it.



## How to Administer Eye Drops

1. Remove any discharge around the eye with a cotton ball moistened with warm water.
2. Hold your cat sideways on your lap or place him on a table at a comfortable height (you may want someone to help restrain your cat if you choose the second option).
3. See the instructions on the bottle for dosage. Shake if necessary.
4. Use one hand to hold the bottle between thumb and index while using the other to support the cat's head.
5. Tilt the head back and, to prevent blinking, use your free fingers to hold the eyelids open.
6. Hold the bottle of drops close to the eye but DON'T touch the eye's surface.
7. Squeeze the drops onto the eye and once the drops are in, release the head.
8. Your cat will blink, spreading the medication over the eye's surface.



## How to Apply Eye Ointment

1. Remove any discharge around the eye with a cotton ball moistened with warm water.
2. Hold your cat sideways on your lap or place him on a table at a comfortable height (you may want someone to help restrain your cat if you choose the second option).
3. Check the instructions on the tube for dosage.
4. Gently pull back upper and lower eyelids.
5. Hold the tube parallel to the lower eyelid, squeeze out the ointment onto the edge of the eyelid.



6. Massage upper and lower eyelids together to spread the medication.
7. Release the head and let your cat blink.

**IMPORTANT:** Always administer medicine to its full term for it to be effective. When administering medication stay calm – your pet can sense if you are nervous making it more difficult to apply the treatment. Always praise and reward your pet with a treat.

## Administering Medication

Just like you, your cat is going to get sick occasionally and you'll likely come home from the veterinarian's with some medication to administer. Learning how to do it right will make the process easier both for you and your cat. **Always follow the instructions given by your veterinarian. Be sure to administer the full amount of medication over the number of days instructed by your veterinarian.**



### Tablets & Capsules

#### Step 1

- Place the pill between the thumb and index finger of one hand.
- Hold the top of the cat's head and grasp the cheekbones with the thumb and index finger of the other hand.



#### Step 2

- Tilt the head back until the cat's eyes are facing upward.
- Usually the cat's jaw will drop open on its own. If not, apply a little pressure on the lower jaw with your middle finger.
- Bring the pill to the cat's mouth.



#### Step 3

- Keep your middle finger over the small incisor teeth to keep jaw open.
- Deposit the pill as far back on the tongue as possible.
- Immediately close the mouth.



#### Step 4

- Gently stroke the throat or blow on the nose to encourage swallowing.
- Work fast to avoid being bitten.

### Liquids & Syrups

Read the label for the proper dosage and, if instructed, shake the contents of the bottle.

#### Before starting

- Fill a syringe or dropper with the medication.

#### Step 1

- Hold the top of the cat's head and grasp the cheekbones with the thumb and index finger of



the one hand while holding the syringe or dropper with the other hand.

### Step 2

- Gently squirt the medication into the pouch between the teeth and cheek with the dropper or syringe.

### Helpful Hints

- Always read the label instructions carefully.
- Ask your veterinarian if the medication can be given with food or must be given on an empty stomach.
- Place the cat on a table with a non-slip surface.
- When administering medication stay calm – your pet can sense if you are nervous making it more difficult to apply the treatment.
- Always praise and reward your pet with a treat.

### Pilling Devices

Should you wish, you can use a pilling device to avoid placing your fingers into your cat's mouth. It is a plastic tube resembling a syringe used to deposit the pill.

- Place the pill at the end of the device.
- Hold the device like a syringe between your index and middle fingers, using your thumb to push the plunger.
- Tilt your cat's head back until his eyes are facing upward. Usually the cat's jaw will drop open on its own. If not, apply a little pressure on the lower jaw with your middle finger.
- Place the device over the base of the tongue.
- Push the plunger to deposit the pill as far back on the tongue as possible.

## Ear Care

Clean, odour-free, pale pink colour and a minimal accumulation of wax are indications of healthy ears.

Check your pet's ears regularly.

### Signs of Ear Disease

- Unpleasant odour
- Excessive scratching and pawing of the ear and head
- Sensitivity to touch, often resulting in pain
- Constant tilting/shaking of the head to one side
- Black or yellowish discharge
- Redness or swelling of the ear flap or canal
- Changes in behaviour like listlessness, depression or irritability
- Accumulation of dark brown wax
- Loss of balance or hearing and disorientation
- Bleeding or discharge resembling coffee grinds



### Causes of Ear Disease

**Otitis Externa** infection of the external ear canal and **Otitis Media**, infection of the middle ear, are usually caused by ear mites, bacteria or yeast. Other possibilities include injury, debris or a foreign object lodged in the ear canal. When seeking treatment, act quickly. If your cat has an ear infection, he will be in considerable discomfort. Antibiotics are

used for bacterial infections while antifungals are administered for yeast. Your veterinarian will determine this during your visit and suggest the best course of action.

**Ear Mites** are common parasites that are highly contagious, often contracted from pet to pet. Excessive itching is the most common sign. Ear mites create dark, crumbly debris that look like coffee grinds.

**Hematoma of the Ear Flap** means blood has accumulated in the ear flap (pinna). Vigorous head shaking, scratching or trauma to the ear area result in damage to the blood vessels, often set off by infection, mites, fleas or debris.

**Deafness**, usually brought on by age, trauma, loud noise or infection, can also be hereditary or congenital. Unfortunately, once diagnosed with clinical deafness, it is a lifelong condition.

## Prevention

Ear cleaning solution used on an appropriate basis can be helpful in maintaining your cat's ears healthy.

## How to Administer Ear Drops or Ointment to Cats

- Read the label instructions carefully for correct dosage.
- Pull the ear flap over the head, squeeze out the desired amount and apply it to the lowest part of the ear canal.
- Gently massage the ear area to help work the medication deeper into the ear canal.



**IMPORTANT:** Always administer medicine to its full term for it to be effective. When administering medication stay calm – your pet can sense if you are nervous making it more difficult to apply the treatment. Always praise and reward your pet with a treat.

## Travel Preparation

### Before you go

Ask yourself: will my cat or dog be comfortable and happy on a trip? Some animals simply prefer to stay at home and a 'homesick', possibly motion-sick pet will ruin everyone's trip. In such a case it's probably wiser to leave your pet with a friend, relative or hire a 'petsitter'. If that is not possible, you might consider boarding him at your veterinary clinic or a clean, well-run kennel or cattery.

### Plan ahead

If you do decide to take your pet along, you must take as much care with the preparation of your pet's trip as your own. If you plan to travel by plane, bus, train or boat, find out if your pet will be welcome and what kind of reservations and transport arrangements must be made. If you'll be staying at hotels, motels or campgrounds, you must check if animals are allowed or if kennel facilities are available. If you're staying with friends or family, make sure your pet is also invited.





### Travelling by plane

- Contact the airline you wish to fly well in advance – each has its own regulations and reservations for your pet will be necessary.
- Be sure to ask about the airline's rules for pet crates or carriers.
- Try to book a direct flight or one with a minimum of stops.
- The airline may allow your pet in the passenger cabin if your crate or carrier can fit under the seat in front of you. If your pet must travel in the cargo hold, be at the airport early, place him in his travel crate yourself and pick him up promptly when you land.



### Travelling by car

- If your pet is not used to being in a car, take him for a few short rides before your trip. Your cat will probably be safer and more comfortable in a carrier.
- Pets should NEVER be allowed to put their heads outside the window when riding in a car. Dirt particles can cause injury or infections and cold air taken into the lungs can lead to illness.
- If you're taking a long drive plan 'snacks', exercise and rest stops about every two hours.
- Give the main meal at the end of the day. Dry food is more convenient but if your pet needs canned food, dispose of any unused portions if they cannot be refrigerated.
- It is not recommended to leave your dog or cat in a parked car for a prolonged period of time. If you must leave your pet in a parked car, lock all doors and open windows enough to provide good ventilation, without allowing him enough room to jump out or get his head caught. **Remember, on hot days, the temperature in a parked car can rise to dangerous levels in just minutes and your pet could die of heat stroke.**



### Travelling by bus, train or boat

- Not all inter-city or inter-provincial bus lines allow you to travel with your pet, so phone ahead for information.
- VIA Rail does not permit pets to travel in passenger cars but they may travel in cages as checked luggage.
- Some cruise ships do welcome pets. Check with the cruise line or ask your travel agent.

### Wherever you go

- Ensure your pet ALWAYS wears a collar with complete identification and a license tag.
- Pack his favourite food, toys, dishes, cool water and a leash.
- Have your pet examined and vaccinated, if necessary, by your veterinarian before a long trip.
- If your pet must travel in a crate or carrier, make sure it is strong, large enough for him to stand up and turn around, has a place for food and water, is well ventilated, has a leak-proof bottom and closes securely.
- If you are planning a trip abroad with your pet, contact the consulate or embassy of your destination or ask your travel agent for advice as health and vaccination regulations vary greatly.

## Pre/Post Operation

### Cutting through all the information

Due to illness, disease or trauma, your pet may one day require surgery. While always stressful (for both you and your pet) there are a few basic guidelines that you can follow that will make the process as complication-free as possible and put your pet on the fast road to recovery.

Depending on the type of surgery, whether minor or major, your veterinarian will advise you when your pet can resume his normal lifestyle.



### Pre-surgical instructions

- Your veterinarian will do a check-up on your pet before the surgery to determine if there are any pre-existing conditions that may interfere with the surgical procedure.
- Make sure your pet is current on his annual vaccinations.
- Your veterinarian may suggest a blood test to screen for disease not apparent from a physical exam.
- You may need to administer antibiotics several days prior to major surgery to increase your pet's ability to fight off infection.
- Speak with your veterinarian to find out what are the restrictions for food and water.

### Post-surgical instructions

- Chances are your pet will be weak or groggy after surgery. Do not let him get too excited.
- Restrain your animal with a leash or put him in a carrier when leaving the hospital. This will protect him from additional injury.
- Provide only small amounts of food and water until he readjusts to being at home and is recovering. Too much food and water can lead to upset stomachs or vomiting.
- If a special post-surgical diet has been prescribed, follow all instructions carefully.
- Limit your pet's exercise. Climbing stairs, jumping or running may open up sutures or cause nausea.
- Make sure his sleeping area is clean, warm and free of drafts.
- Your veterinarian may prescribe medication to administer during your pet's recovery. Follow all label instructions carefully.
- Sutures are usually removed approximately 10 days after surgery. Check the area around the incision daily for redness, swelling or drainage. If you detect any irritation, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- Try to keep your pet from licking or chewing on the wound. If this is difficult to do, you might want to provide a physical barrier by placing an "Elizabethan collar" around his head.

## Household Dangers

### Pet Proofing your Home

Just as parents 'childproof' their home, so should pet owners 'petproof' theirs. Four-legged members of the family, like infants and small children, are naturally curious and love to explore their environment with their paws, claws and mouths. But they can't know what is dangerous and what is not... so it's up to you to make your home a safe haven. The following tips can help ensure that your pet enjoys a long, happy and accident-free life in your care.

### All around the house

- Screen windows to guard against falls.



- Don't let young pets out on balconies, upper porches or high decks.
- Many house plants, including dieffenbachia, elephant ear, spider plants and more are poisonous if eaten. Remove them or put them out of reach in hanging baskets.
- Puppies and kittens love to chew when they're teething, so unplug, remove or cover electrical cords.
- Don't leave a room where a fire is lit or a space heater is being used unattended.
- Plastic bags may be fun to play with, but they can suffocate.
- If your pet can put something in his mouth, he probably will. Don't leave small, sharp, easily swallowed objects lying around.

### **In the garage**

- Cats enjoy naps near a warm engine so, before you drive off, honk your horn and make sure your pet is not under or near the car.
- Pets like the smell and taste of antifreeze and windshield washer. Tightly cover their containers and wipe up any spills.
- Paint, gasoline and other dangerous chemicals should be stored out of reach.

### **In the kitchen, laundry room & bathroom**

- Never leave burners or irons on unattended.
- Dangerous household chemicals such as bleach and ammonia should be stored out of your pet's reach.
- Close washer and dryer lids - your pet might climb in and become trapped.
- Keep toilet lids down - small pets can actually drown, if they fall in.
- Medicines, shampoo, suntan lotions and other personal care items can kill your pet. Make sure he can't get hold of them.

### **Out in the yard**

- Some outdoor plants, like ivy and oleander, can be poisonous to pets.
- Keep pets away from lawns and gardens treated with chemicals.
- Store garden tools and chemicals securely. Keep garden sheds locked.
- Cover swimming pools, hot tubs and ponds - your pet might fall in and not be able to get out.

### **Avoiding cat-astrophes**

- Many objects used as cat toys - yarn, string, rubber bands, aluminum foil - can be extremely harmful if swallowed.
- Cats love to sleep in warm, dark places, so close drawers, trunks and closets - your pet might suffocate if trapped.
- A cat looks adorable with a ribbon tied around its neck... but it could get caught and choke your pet.

### **Home for the holidays**

- Tinsel and icicles, Christmas tree lights and glass ornaments will be sure to tempt your pet's curiosity - but all could be lethal if chewed or swallowed.
- Holly and mistletoe are poisonous to your pets.

# Dental Care

## Your pet counts on you for protection

With major advances in treating serious infectious and other pet diseases, oral disease – most importantly periodontal or gum disease caused by the buildup of plaque and tartar – has become the number-one health problem for cats. It's estimated that without proper dental care 70% of cats will show signs of oral disease by age three. With your help, your pets can have healthy teeth and gums throughout their lives.

You simply need to provide them with a few things:

- A nutritious diet
- Chew treats
- Regular brushing at home
- Yearly dental checkups by a veterinarian



## Good dental health begins with the proper diet

The wrong kinds of food can cause dental distress in pets. Feeding your cat a dry food rather than a moist, canned one will, through its mild abrasive action on the teeth, help remove the bacterial plaque that can harden into tartar. Dry food also provides adequate chewing exercise and gum stimulation. Avoid giving your pet sweets and table scraps as they may also increase plaque and tartar formation. Your vet may recommend the use of special dry foods designed to reduce plaque and tartar buildup, especially if your pet is prone to dental problems due to his breed or individual genetic history.

## Brushing your pet's teeth

Cats need to have their teeth brushed in order to eliminate the dental plaque that can cause tooth decay and the formation of tartar, which can lead to gum disease. You should begin a regular, daily brushing routine as soon as you bring your new kitten home. Even older cats can be trained to accept having their teeth brushed. You simply need to introduce the activity gradually and make the experience a positive one for your pet. Reassure and praise him profusely throughout the process and reward him with a very special treat when it's finished. Here's how it can be done:



### Step 1

- Start by dipping a finger in tuna water or warm water.
- Rub this finger gently over your pet's gums and one or two teeth.
- Repeat until your pet seems fairly comfortable with this activity.



### Step 2

- Gradually, introduce a gauze-covered finger and gently scrub the teeth with a circular motion.

### Step 3

- Then, you can begin to use a toothbrush, either an ultra-soft model designed for people (baby tooth-brushes work well for cats) or a special pet tooth-brush or finger brush, which is a rubber finger covering with a small brush built in at its tip.

#### **Step 4**

- Finally, once your pet is used to brushing, introduce the use of pet toothpaste in liquid or paste form. Most of these contain chlorhexidine or stannous fluoride – ask your veterinarian for his recommendations. Don't use human toothpaste, as it can upset your pet's stomach. Your veterinarian may also advise the use of an antiseptic spray or rinse after brushing.

#### **Don't forget a yearly dental checkup**

Doing your best to ensure that your cat receives the proper diet and regular brushing at home will help maintain his teeth and gums in top condition. To provide optimum dental care at home, you need to start with a clean bill of dental health. That's where your pet's veterinarian comes in.

He will give your pet a thorough examination of the entire oral cavity to determine whether there are any underlying problems and, especially important, tartar buildup. Brushing removes plaque but not tartar, so if your pet's teeth do have tartar, your veterinarian will have to remove it with a professional cleaning and polishing, usually accomplished under anaesthesia. After removing the tartar above and below the gum line, your veterinarian may treat your pet's teeth with fluoride and will provide you with instructions for home care and follow-up.

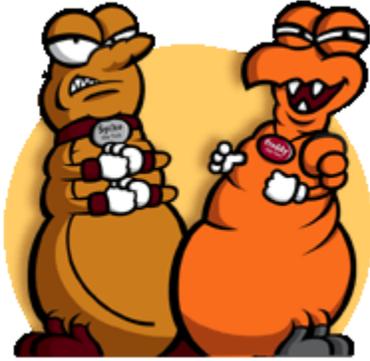
#### **A few tips:**

- Chew treats can help remove plaque, and provide stimulation for the gums.
- Watch out for wood – throwing sticks to dogs or letting your cat pick up a piece of wood with his mouth can result in splinters and gum damage.
- Don't let your pet chew on hard materials like bones or stones. They can wear down, even break teeth, damage gums and lead to infection.

#### **A few statistics:**

- Kittens have their first 26 "milk" or deciduous teeth at 2 to 3 weeks of age. Their 30 permanent teeth begin erupting around 3 months.
- Cats have the fewest teeth of any common domestic mammal.
- Puppies develop their deciduous teeth at 2 weeks of age, with their 42 permanent teeth starting to appear at 3 months.

## Ticks and Fleas



Ticks are small spider-like acarids and fleas are insects, but these two tiny creatures have at least one thing in common – they are both parasites that feed on your cat's blood and can cause a lot of discomfort and more serious health problems.

Flea bites may go unnoticed on some pets, cause slight irritation in others and produce extensive itching, red lesions, hair loss and even ulcers in those animals with flea allergy dermatitis, which is the result of extreme sensitivity to flea saliva. Severe flea infestations can cause anemia, especially in kittens. Fleas can also transmit several diseases, as well as tapeworm. Ticks are “vectors” or carriers of a number of diseases, including Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever which can sometimes be transmitted to humans.

### About fleas...

Adult fleas are wingless insects, generally smaller than a sesame seed, who feed on the blood of animals. Their proportionately enlarged back pair of legs gives them an extraordinary jumping ability. Hanging on to your pet's fur with their claws, their needle-like mouth parts bite through the skin to suck up blood – in quantities of up to 15 times their body weight daily in the case of female cat fleas.



If one flea finds your cat an attractive food source, you can be sure that other fleas will, too! They mate, with females laying 30-50 eggs per day. These eggs will drop to the ground within 8 hours and, as soon as 2 days later flea larvae will hatch and hide in dark places on the ground, in carpets or upholstery. After about a week of feeding on adult flea droppings, crumbs, flakes of skin, etc., the larvae spin cocoons to become pupae. The pupae can remain in this stage for very long periods of time. The cycle continues when, as soon as a week or so later, the pupae develop into adult fleas and emerge from their cocoons when they sense that a cat or dog, or other animal host, is near. The cycle – which can take as little as 12 days or as long as 180 days – can then begin again.

### And ticks...

Ticks are wingless creatures that live exclusively on the blood of animals for three of the four stages of their life cycle. They are equipped with an apparatus called Haller's organ which senses heat, carbon dioxide and other stimuli to allow the ticks to locate the presence of an animal food source. Once found, they crawl on and embed their mouth parts into the animal's skin and proceed to suck up its blood.



You should inspect your pet regularly for ticks, especially if they have been outside in areas where there are woods or tall grasses. A thorough combing within 4 to 6 hours of exposure to such environments can help prevent ticks from attaching themselves to feast on your pet. Should you find a tick, it should be removed immediately, as the longer it is attached to its host, the greater the chance for disease. Do not touch the tick. Wear gloves and use tweezers to carefully grasp the exposed section of the tick's body near your pet's skin. Gently pull until the tick lets go. To dispose of the tick, wrap it in several tissues and flush it down the toilet. Do not crush, burn or suffocate it, as any one of those actions may spread infectious bacteria.

### Controlling fleas and ticks

The best way to control flea problems is to prevent them from happening in the first place. Fortunately, developments in veterinary parasite control in recent years have made the twofold goal of eliminating fleas on pets and preventing further infestations much easier to achieve. Available for both cats and dogs, new insecticides and insect growth regulators in easy-to-use topical or oral forms not only eliminate any existing fleas, but also work long-term to prevent future infestations. This is accomplished either by killing the parasites before they can reproduce or by preventing their eggs from developing into normal adult fleas. Consult your veterinarian for advice about the proper product for your pet. Furthermore, thorough daily vacuuming of high-traffic areas and frequent washing of your pet's bedding will also go a long way in reducing the flea population in your home.

Some of the same types of topical or oral products used to control flea infestation are also effective against ticks. Such treatments should be combined with daily examinations and tick removal for those pets, especially cats, who are frequently outdoors in areas with high tick populations. Ask your veterinarian for information about the situation in your locality. Clearing brush and long grasses and removing leaves, grass clippings and other organic debris will also help reduce the presence of ticks by disturbing their natural outdoor habitats.

## When a parasite picks your pet for a meal

If, despite your best efforts at control, you find that fleas or ticks have crawled (or jumped) on board your pet, you will have to use a product that will kill and/or repel the parasites. These include once-a-month topical treatments, sprays, powders, dips, shampoos, collars and, to combat fleas, oral or injectable medication. Once again, you should ask your veterinarian for advice about what the most appropriate product for your pet is. And remember, it is perfectly normal to see live fleas or ticks on a pet immediately after a topical treatment, spray, shampoo, collar, etc. is applied. Many believe that this means the product is not working, but the fleas or ticks have to fully absorb the product before they will be affected, which may take from a few hours to a few days.

## Facts about fleas

- Worldwide, there are about 3,000 different types of fleas, but the cat flea (*Ctenocephalides felis*) is the most common to be found on cats and dogs.
- Adult fleas can jump 600 times an hour. Each jump, in terms of the flea's size, is the equivalent of a person clearing a 50-storey building.
- The record jump for a flea (usually 2-8 mm long) is 33 cm.
- In just 30 days, 25 adult female fleas can multiply to 250,000 fleas.

## Tips about ticks

- A female tick can lay up to 3,000 eggs.
- Except for eggs, ticks need a blood meal to progress to the next stage of their life cycle.
- Some ticks can live for more than a year without a meal.
- In very rare cases, toxins secreted by ticks can cause pet paralysis.

## A few fundamentals

Cats, now the most popular pet in North America and Europe, were once described as asocial animals, but this is no longer regarded as true. Although very different from dogs, cats also need interaction and most importantly, your loving attention! When you bring a new kitten or cat into your home you'll have to decide whether your pet will live strictly indoors or will be allowed outside. There are advantages and disadvantages in both cases. Free-roaming cats are prone to more illnesses and have a much shorter life expectancy, as they can be hit by cars, attacked by other animals and exposed to internal and external parasites such as fleas, worms and ear mites. Conversely, if your cat never ventures outside you must provide him or her with physical and mental stimulation, including interaction with you, exercise, scratching posts and a clean toilet area. Whatever decision you make, following a few simple guidelines to direct your cat's behaviour can ensure that harmony reigns in your cat-loving household!

### Make sure you have a post that's up to scratch

Scratching just comes naturally to cats. An instinctive activity that begins when kittens are five weeks old, scratching allows cats to leave chemical and visual signals that, among other functions, serve as "messages" to other cats and animals. However, what's entirely normal for your cat can become a big problem for you if he starts scratching your carpets and furniture. If this happens, you can cover or remove the tempting object or use plastic Nail Caps™ that are glued to the cat's claws. Unfortunately, these caps must be cut and replaced every month and some cats don't tolerate them. Therefore, an easier, more practical solution is to provide kitty with a special scratching place, usually a post, of his own. As befits the feline reputation, you may find that your kitten or cat may be slightly picky about what kind of scratching post he or she will agree to use.



Not all commercially available scratching posts are equally attractive to all cats.

Posts that some cats might find acceptable have sisal, cardboard, wood or wood composite surfaces.

Some cat owners have found that making their own posts, whether from soft logs, tree stumps or a piece of 2 x 4 wood covered in sisal or another material with a longitudinal weave does the trick.

The most important characteristics of a post are that it be taller than the cat when he stands on his hind legs, sturdy enough not to tip over and located in a prominent, easily accessible area.

A board about 15-20 cm wide by 30-35 cm long attached to a wall can also work well.

Whatever its construction, the scratching post or board should not be changed as long as your cat is still using it. The more scratched and awful looking, the more your cat will love and use it instead of your furniture!

### Playtime helps keep your cat healthy and happy

Make sure your kitten or cat has lots of opportunities for interesting, challenging play that will satisfy his natural instincts and provide him with much-needed activity. Find toys that bounce or flutter – there are many available – that he can pretend to “chase”, “hunt” and “capture”. Some cats love to chase moving spots of light, whether they're produced by mirrors or flashlights. You can also attach a ball of aluminum foil to a long string and tie it to your belt or waist. As you move about, your cat will have a great time interacting with you while trying to “catch” the ball. Just be sure to make the string long enough that kitty doesn't accidentally catch your leg! You should try to have at least one daily, 15-minute interactive play session with your cat, especially if he is often left alone.



### Cats appreciate clean facilities, too!

Cats are fastidious creatures, so providing your pet with a clean, easily accessible toilet area will help

minimize any litter problems. Cats generally prefer unscented, soft-textured fine litter. Some cats like to urinate in one box and defecate in another so the ideal number of litter boxes is one box per cat plus one. Therefore, a two-cat household should have three litter boxes placed on different floors or in different rooms. Don't put litter boxes next to noisy equipment such as furnaces or washing machines – cats prefer quiet. Scoop out fecal matter (and urine if you use a clumping litter) daily. Wash boxes with water and mild dish soap once a week if you use non-clumping litter or once a month if you use the clumping type. Elimination outside the box can occur for several different reasons, various medical conditions being the most common. If you suspect your cat might have such a condition, consult your veterinarian for a diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

### **Spraying or urine marking**

Spraying, or urine marking, is a normal behaviour in cats with intact sexual organs, and as well in neutered male or spayed female cats. In fact, as many as 10% of castrated male and 5% of sterilized female adult cats spray regularly. Spraying is often associated with the presence of other cats (both inside and outside the home) or other stresses, such as changes in the cat's environment (a new roommate, pet or baby, or perhaps a change in the amount of time the cat is left alone), that can cause anxiety. Spraying may be the way your cat communicates his anxiety. Treatment is available – ask your veterinarian.

Diane Frank, DVM  
Diplomate ACVB

## Your Senior Cat

### Old age is not a disease

As a result of advances in veterinary medicine, more knowledgeable care and improved nutrition, cats are now living much longer, healthier lives. But, just as for humans, the passage of time has its effects, and you may begin to notice that your once-frisky feline seems to have slowed down a bit. Being aware of the natural changes that can occur as your cat reaches his or her golden years, as well as what you can do to help keep your pet as healthy, active and comfortable as possible, can ensure that you both enjoy this final stage in your cat's life to the fullest.



### How-and-when-will I know that my cat is getting "old"?

As cats move into the geriatric phase of their lives, they experience gradual changes that are remarkably like those of aging humans: their hair may turn grey, their bodies are not as limber and reflexes not as sharp as they once were. Hearing, eyesight and the sense of smell may deteriorate and energy levels seem to diminish. In fact, the first sign of aging is often a general decrease in activity, combined with a tendency to sleep longer and more soundly. Such signs may begin to manifest themselves anywhere between the ages of 7 and 11. Furthermore, a healthy cat who lives indoors,



especially one that has been spayed or neutered, will most likely age later than one which has been affected by disease or environmental problems early in life. Thus, while wild or feral tomcats have an average life span of only 3 years, a castrated male house cat that is well cared for can live happily and healthily into his late teens or early twenties. Again, as with humans, the aging process will vary with the individual. Your veterinarian will be able to judge when it's time to consider your pet a "senior".

### Checkup time now comes twice a year

As your cat ages, regular checkups at the veterinarian's become more important than ever. In fact, at this stage of your pet's life, it is recommended that he or she receive a thorough examination every 6 months, as adult cats can age as much as 4 years (in human terms) within the period of one calendar year. Besides the usual complete physical examination, your veterinarian may conduct a urine and fecal analysis and a full blood screen. If your cat goes outdoors, or is part of a multi-feline household, he or she may also recommend that your pet be tested for the presence of feline leukemia or immunodeficiency virus.

### Keep your vet informed

Most importantly, you should tell your veterinarian about any noticeable change in your cat's physical condition or behaviour. A problem that you may assume is simply related to your pet's advanced age may actually be the result of a treatable medical condition. For example, your cat's lack of interest in exercise or play may not stem from the normal decrease in energy that comes with age, but be due to the stiffness and pain that results from arthritis a condition that can be managed with the proper treatment. Regular, semi-annual checkups can thus help your veterinarian work out a suitable preventative health program for your pet and catch any disorders sufficiently early to provide effective treatment. Working together, you can both ensure that your cat's senior years will be healthy and happy ones.



### Put a healthy diet on the menu

As he or she ages, your cat's nutritional needs may also change. You may find that, although your pet is eating less, he still puts on weight. This could be due to a slowdown of his metabolism or a decrease in his activity. Excess weight can aggravate many feline medical conditions, including heart, respiratory, skin and joint problems. To help a portly puss reduce, try feeding smaller quantities of food or gradually switch to a diet that is lower in calories. Other cats have entirely the opposite problem – they lose weight as they age, sometimes as the result of heart, periodontal disease, diabetes or sometimes because of a reduction in their taste sensation, which leads to a loss of appetite. In either case, ask your veterinarian for advice about your pet's individual nutritional requirements.

## Senior cat food do's & don'ts

- Do make sure that your cat's diet is well balanced, highly palatable, digestible and contains potassium and taurine.
- Since food with high mineral and protein content should be avoided, ask your veterinarian for recommendations about a type that's right for your cat.
- Do consider, in consultation with your veterinarian, increasing the level of fibre in your cat's diet, especially if he suffers from frequent constipation.
- Do try warming food to body temperature – it may make meals more tempting to senior cats with poor appetites.
- Don't feed your cat between-meal snacks or table scraps.

## The top 10 health tips for senior cats

1. Take your cat to their veterinarian for twice-yearly checkups.
2. Become informed about conditions and diseases common to senior cats, be on the lookout for symptoms and, should they arise, inform your cat's veterinarian promptly.
3. Feed your cat the best food you can afford and consider giving him several small meals a day rather than one large one.
4. Don't overfeed – obesity causes many health problems and may shorten your cat's life.
5. Make sure your cat receives adequate exercise to preserve muscle tone, preserve bone and joint strength and fight obesity.
6. Look after your cat's dental health. Have his teeth cleaned professionally when your veterinarian so advises, and ideally brush his teeth daily.
7. Have your veterinarian do a risk assessment to determine an appropriate vaccination protocol for your cat.
8. Do your utmost to control fleas and make sure your cat and his environment (his bed, play area, etc.) are always spotlessly clean.
9. Check your cat's nails weekly and trim them as often as necessary, as senior cats may not use their scratching posts as often as they did when younger.
10. Give your cat lots of love and attention and do all you can to keep him interested, active, happy and comfortable.

## Allergies

### Like people, cats can suffer from allergies.

As in the human population, the incidence of allergies in pets seems to be increasing. While allergic humans may often sneeze, wheeze or even have serious respiratory difficulties, allergic reactions in pets are characterized by skin problems, exacerbated by their primary symptom – itching and scratching. Cat allergies fall into three main categories: flea allergy dermatitis, atopy, and food allergy. Many pets can be affected by one or more allergy.



### Food Allergy

#### What is food allergy and what are its symptoms?

Food allergy is an allergic reaction to one or more ingredients in a pet's food. The most common allergens are beef and milk products, cereals (wheat, corn, soya), chicken and eggs. The exact cause of food allergy is not known. Perhaps a change in the pet's immune system causes certain ingredients to be perceived as "foreign", initiating inflammatory mechanisms to fight off the perceived "intruder".

The most common symptoms of food allergy are itching, licking or chewing. Skin problems are also common in conjunction with food hypersensitivity. Some pets may also have diarrhea and other digestive problems. Symptoms can appear at any age, whether a pet has just started a new diet or has been eating the same food for several years.

#### How is food allergy diagnosed?

The only effective way of diagnosing a food allergy is to put your pet on a "hypoallergenic" or "exclusion" diet for a minimum of 8-12 weeks. Such a diet contains ingredients to which the animal has not been exposed in the past. Because the source of protein causes most allergic reactions, exclusion diets use proteins – often venison, fish or

duck – that are normally not found in regular pet food. An exclusion diet may comprise home-prepared food or prescription commercial hypoallergenic products. Ask your veterinarian for his recommendation.

If your pet has a food allergy, there should be a significant reduction in the symptoms after the recommended period on the exclusion diet provided your pet is not also allergic to the newly introduced ingredients. To identify all the food allergens, add a single protein for 1-2 weeks at a time, while watching for a recurrence, or worsening, of symptoms. If this happens, remove the offending ingredient from the diet. Consult your veterinarian for the correct procedure.

#### **How is food allergy treated?**

The best way to treat your pet's food allergy is to carefully monitor his or her diet, in order to avoid flare-ups. In rare cases, your veterinarian may also prescribe antihistamines and steroids.

## **Flea Allergy Dermatitis**

#### **What is flea allergy dermatitis and what are its symptoms?**

Flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), also called "flea bite hypersensitivity", is a skin disease caused by an allergic reaction to flea saliva. A single flea bite can trigger the disease's intense itching. Cats with FAD scratch their necks, sides, bellies, inside thighs and the area above their tails with excessive grooming often resulting in hair loss. FAD often leads to "hot spots", or localized skin infections. You may find fleas and flea dirt (the flea feces look like black specks) on your pet, although many cats with FAD have very few fleas, since they are constantly licking and chewing.

#### **How is flea allergy dermatitis diagnosed?**

Your veterinarian looks for the usual signs (scratching, skin sores, the presence of fleas and/or flea dirt). He or she may also order an intradermal or skin test as FAD symptoms can resemble those of other conditions, including external parasites (mites, lice), infections and other allergies, that cause severe itching.

#### **How is flea allergy dermatitis treated?**

The best way to treat FAD is to prevent fleas from attacking your pet. Various insecticides and insect growth regulators that eliminate flea infestations are available. Your veterinarian can recommend the right product for your pet. Daily vacuuming and frequent washing of your pet's bedding can also reduce your home's flea population.

To break the "itch-scratch" cycle that leads to skin infections, your veterinarian may prescribe steroids, antihistamines and essential fatty acids to relieve irritation. Warm water baths and anti-itching shampoos and conditioners also help.

What is most important to realize is that there is no cure for FAD: your pet will always be allergic to flea bites and you must be continually on your guard to prevent further problems.

## **Atopy**

#### **What is atopy and what are its symptoms?**

Atopy, or environmental allergy, is an allergic reaction to airborne substances like pollen, moulds, house dust mites and animal dander (skin or hair fragments). It is most common in dogs, but some cats are also affected. The incidence of atopy depends as much upon a pet's genetic susceptibility as exposure to the allergen itself. (An allergen is any agent causing the allergic reaction.)

Itching, mostly around the face, feet, lower chest and belly, is the primary symptom. Depending on the cause, this may occur only seasonally (pollen) or year-round (moulds, dust mites and dander). "Hot spots", other skin infections and ear problems can develop. Frequent scratching due to chronic irritation may lead to hair loss. While the onset of these signs can be seen from 4 months to 7 years of age they are typically first noticed between 1-3 years of age.

#### **How is atopy diagnosed?**

Atopy is confirmed through a process of elimination. Other causes of itching, such as fleas, mites, lice, bacterial and yeast infections, as well as food allergies, must be ruled out first. Your veterinarian will ask you for a detailed history of your pet's itching problem. Skin or serum (blood) testing for different allergens may then be performed to help pinpoint the exact cause.

#### **How is atopy treated?**

Atopy is a lifelong condition and there is no known cure. However, there are a number of ways to manage the problem:

- Anti-itch therapy, including the use of drugs, medicated shampoos and conditioners.

- Removing the source of the allergy from the environment as much as possible.
- Hyposensitization uses a series of injections to gradually accustom your pet's system to the allergen(s) causing the problem. Although its effectiveness varies, it provides at least some relief for around 75% of pets with atopy.
- If the atopy is relatively mild (for example, occasional itching during the pollen season), you can use "Elizabethan collars" and socks to reduce irritation by physically preventing your pet from scratching or biting itself.

## Bereavement

### Dealing with the Loss of a Pet

The death of a beloved pet can be very distressing. Our pets are not only members of the family, they are our faithful friends, our children's devoted playmates and reliable, affectionate companions for the elderly or disabled. They enrich our day-to-day lives and their passing makes for a deeply felt loss.



### There are many reasons why we may have to face a pet's death:

- Terminal illness
- Old age or senility
- Fatal accident or unexpected occurrence
- Behavioural problems
- Long-term or chronic illness entailing heavy burdens in terms of care and/or finances

Most of these factors may place you in the heartbreaking position of facing your pet's death or having to contemplate euthanasia. As an owner, you are responsible for your pet's overall health and welfare. When his or her quality of life deteriorates, determining to do the humane thing and end the pet's needless suffering may be one of the hardest decisions you will ever have to make. That is why bereavement often begins before the actual death of a pet.

### Points to consider when assessing your pet's quality of life:

- Pain or serious discomfort when walking or moving
- Drastic loss of appetite
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea following eating or drinking
- Difficulty in breathing
- Incontinence or other serious problems with urination or defecation
- Capacity to see and hear properly
- Unresponsive, unmanageable or dangerous behaviour

### Being Kind

Talk to your veterinarian. He or she can give you a complete assessment of your pet's health and level of suffering, as well as assist you in evaluating your options. This will go a long way in helping you make your decision. You should also speak about your concerns with family and friends in order to enlist their support during this difficult time.

### Adult Grief

Losing a friend, and that is what your pet is, is always very painful. Facing such a loss is not easy, and may evoke feelings of denial, anger, guilt or depression before acceptance is reached. These reactions are entirely natural and should be expressed. Everyone grieves in his or her own way. You may experience some or all of these feelings, in varying degrees and for different lengths of time. Acknowledging them is an important step in the mourning process, one that will help you understand why you may have withdrawn from, or lashed out at, people who care about you. You should realize that it is perfectly natural to need comforting. It will not only help you cope with your emotions and adjust to life without your pet, but may allow you, in the future, to provide welcome support to others around you who

are experiencing the same loss.

### **Children's Grief**

Be honest. Children are very intuitive and know when something is wrong. In wanting to safeguard them from a painful experience, you may feel it's wiser to exclude them from the decision-making process. Once the decision is made, talk openly about what has happened. Provide your children with honest, simple answers that are appropriate for their age group, using terms they know and understand. Not only will they respect you for your honesty, but they will also be better prepared to deal with the situation.

Avoid euphemisms. Younger children can be confused by phrases like "went to sleep". Indeed, employing such terms may lead to fear and cause some children to become anxious about actually going to sleep.

Encourage children to speak freely about their pet's death and give them the opportunity to vent their grief and sadness. Share some of your own feelings and involve them in the pet's funeral preparations, if any. This will help them deal with their concerns and give them the chance to say goodbye in their own way.

Make sure that children understand that no one is to blame for the pet's death. Such an occurrence may arouse their curiosity about death and its consequences in general. A factual, straightforward approach, using answers or illustrations that are appropriate for their age group, will help guide children through the grieving process and lead to their acceptance of the pet's death, without pangs of unnecessary guilt.

### **The Healing Process**

Even though we may not believe it at the time, the old adage "time heals" does hold true when we are faced with the loss of a beloved pet. Recognize that loss and give yourself the emotional time and space to grieve. Getting over the sorrow, guilt and pain varies from person to person. Seek help. Many hotlines, chat rooms, message boards and support groups are available on the Internet, and books on adult and child bereavement may help you better understand what you are experiencing. And, if you need to, don't hesitate to reach out for others' personal and professional assistance. Talk to your veterinarian, trusted friends, or a therapist. Make a donation or volunteer your services to a pet shelter or Humane Society. With time, the pain will lessen and you and your family will be able to fully cherish happy memories of your special friend.



# Osteoarthritis

If your cat no longer appears interested in playing with her favourite mouse toy for hours on end, there may be a good reason – osteoarthritis. A chronic, degenerative joint disease that makes movement difficult and painful, osteoarthritis mainly strikes pets in their middle and senior years. However, younger animals can also be affected. In fact, studies show that approximately 20% of dogs have the condition in some form and, even though they are less prone, cats can also suffer from it.

It can be heartbreaking to see your once lively, always active best friend begin to limp, or notice his or her obvious pain when moving around. There is, as yet, no cure for osteoarthritis, but there is a great deal that you and your veterinarian can do to decrease your pet's discomfort and increase his or her mobility – especially if it is treated promptly.

## Early warning signs of osteoarthritis:

- Difficulty in walking, climbing stairs, or getting in and out of the litter box
- An overall decrease in activity, especially play
- Resting more than usual
- Slowness in getting up from a lying position
- Failing to groom themselves or eating less, with a resulting loss of weight
- Slow or stiff movements upon waking, after a rest, or in cold weather
- Beginning to limp
- Swollen joint(s) that is warm to the touch
- Licking or biting at a joint
- Choosing a warm and soft or cold and hard place to lie down
- Personality change – your pet no longer likes to be touched
- If you notice any of the signs above, don't just think that your pet is "slowing down with age". Take him or her to see your veterinarian! The faster osteoarthritis is first diagnosed and treated, the better your pet's quality of life will be.

## What causes osteoarthritis?

There are many causes, but practically all can be grouped into two main categories:

### 1. Abnormal stress on normal joints

- An injury that damages a joint
- "Wear and tear": joints are subjected to repeated loads or stress
- Obesity: an excessive load is put on joints

### 2. Normal stress on abnormal joints

- Developmental defects that alter the shape or stability of a joint
- Poor limb configuration: bow legs or knock knees can cause an uneven load on a joint

Whatever the specific cause, stress on a joint can begin a destructive cycle of inflammation of the joint area and damage to the cartilage that leads to pain for your pet.

## How is osteoarthritis treated?

Treatment includes three main components, each equally important.

**1. Weight control** Cats that suffer from chronic pain caused by conditions like osteoarthritis often become inactive, which can result in obesity. Controlling your pet's weight will lighten the load on arthritic joints and make it less difficult to move around. Just as for humans, weight loss for animals involves both a well-balanced, calorie-reduced diet and regular exercise. Ask your veterinarian for advice on the proper diet for your cat.

**2. Exercise** is essential because it contributes to strengthening the muscles that support joints. Daily, moderate

amounts of low-impact exercise also improves joint mobility and can help get a lethargic, arthritic pet active again. Cats can profit from play that keeps them moving without excessive jumping. Consult your veterinarian about what amount and type of exercise would be best for your pet. Also, be aware that your cat's osteoarthritis may be more severe at certain times than others. If this is the case, let your pet take a break from his or her exercise routine for a few days, until the painful flare-up subsides.

**3. Anti-inflammatory** drugs combat inflammation in the joints, thus relieving pain, increasing mobility, and protecting the joint from further damage. NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) are the drugs of first choice for the treatment of canine osteoarthritis. Treatment is not curative, but will help control pain when needed.

Newer NSAIDs are proving to be especially effective in reducing inflammation and pain, and improving mobility without the significant side effects – including gastrointestinal problems – previously associated with NSAID use. Ask your veterinarian for more information.

In addition to the above, your veterinarian may also suggest physical therapy, cold or hot packs and baths, massage or acupuncture as well as nutraceuticals such as glucosamine and chondroitine to help control pain. In extreme cases surgery may also be indicated.

### **What's the outlook for a pet with osteoarthritis?**

Osteoarthritis may progress very slowly (over several years) or very quickly (you might notice a major change in just a few weeks or months). It all depends on your pet's age, his or her activity level, the joints involved and the underlying cause.

Some pets' pain and loss of mobility can be kept to a minimum for long periods of time with a simple regimen of weight control, moderate, regular exercise and the occasional use of anti-inflammatory drugs if flare-ups occur. For others, severe damage to the joints may occur rapidly and require long-term medication and other treatments. In either case, your veterinarian can determine the best course of treatment for your pet's particular condition. There is no reason why, with your loving attention and committed care, as well as your veterinarian's guidance, your osteoarthritic pet cannot have a happy, healthy and comfortable life for many years to come.

# Diabetes

## What is Feline Diabetes?

Diabetes in pets, just as it is in humans, is on the rise. In Canada, an average clinic will diagnose 8 in 50 cats with feline diabetes. This number may be higher due to non-diagnosed animals! (Source: Ipsos Survey 2008)

*Diabetes mellitus* or “sugar diabetes” is caused by a lack of available insulin in your pet’s body due to insufficient production by the pancreas, or failure of the body cells to respond to insulin, or both.

In a healthy cat, food is broken down during digestion into nutrients that can be used by the body. Carbohydrates (starches) are converted into sugars, including glucose. Glucose is absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract into the blood and provides the body cells with energy. Insulin transfers the glucose from the bloodstream to the body cells - but this can only occur if enough insulin is present. In a cat with diabetes, the pancreas, a special gland situated near the intestines produces insufficient insulin for this to occur, resulting in blood glucose concentrations that exceed the “glucose threshold” of the kidneys.



When this happens the excess glucose is excreted in the urine, causing your cat to drink and urinate more. And because this energy source is being lost, your cat may eat more than normal, but still lose weight.

## Signs of Feline Diabetes

- Increased thirst
- Excessive urination and/or inappropriate urination in the house
- Increased appetite
- Weight loss
- Lethargy, weakness in hind legs
- Deterioration of coat and/or body condition
- Lowered resistance to infection-especially urinary tract infections

Feline diabetes has been diagnosed in cats of all ages, sexes and breeds. Although diabetes most typically occurs in middle-aged to older cats, a pet that is overweight has a higher chance of becoming diabetic. Castrated male cats are most commonly affected.

*The exact cause of diabetes mellitus in cats is not known, although genetics, obesity, pancreatic disease, hormonal imbalances and certain medications (certain corticosteroids) are all possible factors.*

**Prevention through early diagnosis is the best treatment you can give to your pet.**

## Diagnosis of *diabetes mellitus*

If you suspect your cat may be suffering from, or may be predisposed to developing diabetes, take your cat to your veterinarian for a general examination. Symptoms of *diabetes mellitus* can also be seen in other conditions and infections, and some diseases can be obstacles to treatment. Early screening and a confirmed diagnosis is essential to establishing the right care.

Your veterinarian will check your cat's general health to rule out the presence of other diseases and/or infections. He or she will also conduct the following tests:

- Urine samples (To determine if there is glucose in the urine and/or a urinary tract infection.)
- Blood samples (To confirm the diagnosis and determine the blood glucose concentration in your cat's blood.)

If the **blood glucose concentration** is consistently higher than normal, it may indicate that your cat's pancreas is not secreting (enough) insulin. Or it may indicate that your cat's body is “**resistant**” to the insulin its pancreas is producing, or both situations may exist. In both cases, your cat suffers from **diabetes mellitus**.

## Complications

Long-term complications of diabetes are a result of prolonged high blood glucose.

The most common complication of feline diabetes is **neuropathy- weakness in the hind legs**. Persistently high concentrations of glucose in the blood may cause nerve damage, resulting in weakness and muscle wasting, usually of the rear legs. Although there is no specific treatment for neuropathy, control of high blood glucose concentrations can help prevent, reduce the severity, or even delay the onset of this condition.

***If left untreated, feline diabetes can also cause kidney damage, recurring infections and even death.***

In the early stages of feline diabetes, cats remain active and alert, with few obvious signs. Sometimes the diabetes progresses so slowly symptoms can be missed. If left undetected, your pet can become very sick, very suddenly, which is why this disease is sometimes referred to as a “silent killer.”

A diagnosis of diabetes sounds frightening, but it doesn't have to be. Although it is a serious condition, diabetic cats can enjoy a good quality of life for many years. Early diagnosis and treatment is critical for stopping the signs of *diabetes mellitus* and to prevent further complications from developing.

## Treatment

You can successfully manage your diabetic cat's health with insulin therapy and a proper diet.

The majority of cats with *diabetes mellitus*, will need insulin injections twice a day. Your veterinarian will determine the dose that's right for your cat and teach you everything you need to know about administering the injection and monitoring your cat's blood glucose (sugar) level.

- **Hyperglycaemia** indicates a **high** level of blood sugar
- **Hypoglycaemia** indicates a **low** level of blood sugar

Based on blood and glucose levels and clinical signs, your veterinarian will adjust the dose until the correct dose is established.

Most diabetic cats will require insulin treatments for the rest of their lives, but many diabetic cats no longer need insulin after a few weeks or months of treatment- this is known as clinical remission.

Diabetic cats that go into clinical remission have remaining functional cells in the pancreas which are able to produce sufficient insulin once persistently high blood sugar levels are treated adequately with insulin.

**Remission does not mean a cure, and in order to delay the return to diabetic state, care must still be taken with your cat's diet and lifestyle.**

## Administering insulin to your cat

### Step 1

- Gently mix the insulin by inverting the bottle a few times.

### Step 2

- Fill the syringe slightly past the recommended dose.

### Step 3

- Remove any small air bubbles by tapping the syringe with your finger.

### Step 4

- Depress the plunger up to the correct dose of insulin for your cat.

### Step 5

- Draw the loose skin on the cat's side gently upwards.

### Step 6

- Make a small hollow with your index finger.

### Step 7



- Rotate injection sites on each side of and along the spine. This will avoid fibrosis and decreased insulin absorption.



#### **Step 8**

- After inserting the needle, release the skin and depress the plunger slowly.

## **Living with your diabetic pet**

Following a regular routine, as recommended by your veterinarian, is vital for successful diabetes management.

### **Monitoring your pet's blood glucose level**

You may be asked by your veterinarian to monitor your pet's clinical signs as well as regularly checking the glucose concentrations in urine and/or blood samples using a handheld glucose meter.

Based on your findings, your veterinarian will be able to make the right decision about the insulin dose your pet is receiving (increase, decrease, or maintain). One of the most important aspects of managing the health of your diabetic cat is consistency. Medication and food must come at regular times, so make sure you always have an adequate supply of both and never skip or substitute.

### **Nutrition and diet**

As well as a strict regimen of insulin therapy, your diabetic cat will also require a regular feeding schedule. The diet should be consistent from day to day. A diet high in protein and fibre, and low in carbohydrates is preferred. Ideally

the diet for a diabetic cat should supply more than 40% of the calories from carbohydrates and less than 25% of the calories from fat. A high quality, highly digestible protein source (e.g. chicken, lamb, etc.) is preferable to protein from cereal sources (soya bean meal, corn gluten meal). The caloric value should maintain or reach the ideal body weight.

Clean drinking water should be available at all times.

***Always ask your veterinarian before making any change to your diabetic pet's diet.***

### **Exercise**

Talk to your veterinarian before starting any new exercise routine with your cat.

For most diabetic cats, strenuous exercise is not an option due to fatigue, obesity or nerve damage (neuropathy). This doesn't mean that you can't set aside a few minutes a day for some active play. Whatever exercise you do with your cat, it should be reasonably consistent. Start carefully, in short sessions, and don't force your cat to move around if he or she clearly does not want to.

***Effective treatment of feline diabetes is very rewarding. You, along with your veterinarian, can restore your cat's quality of life for years to come.***

Visit [cat-dog-diabetes.com](http://cat-dog-diabetes.com) and [caninsulin.ca](http://caninsulin.ca) for more information.