


# Senior Care Wellness Programs

## Caring For Your Senior Cat

Statistics show that cats, like people, are living longer. This is great news! We all treasure the companionship we share with our pets. We also hope to provide them the longest, happiest and healthiest lives possible.

It may seem like only yesterday when you brought home that bright, bouncy kitten. However, by 7 years, your cat has entered middle age. At 12 years old, we consider cats to be "elderly," and at 15 or above, the term "age" could even apply. In reality, old age is never just a number but rather a measure of the effects of aging on the body. Many variables affect aging, including genetics, nutrition and environment. Although good genes remain a matter of luck, there are a growing number of ways we can "slow the clock" and promote a healthful, long life for our pets.

### Comparative Ages of Cats and Humans



Cat	Human
1 year	15 years
2 years	24 years
5 years	36 years
<b>7 years</b>	<b>45 years</b>
12 years	64 years
15 years	76 years
18 years	88 years
21 years	100 years




Table 1

As your cat ages, changes in behavior and physical condition inevitably occur. Body systems begin to slow down. The coat and skin change, joints stiffen, the senses are less keen. Just as in people, several diseases increase in likelihood as cats age. Kidney disease, heart disease, thyroid problems, diabetes, arthritis, and cancer are a few common ones. The good news is that many of these conditions can be controlled or even prevented with **early detection and treatment**. This is where pet owners, working closely with their veterinarian, can make such a significant difference for their pets!

## What signs should we look for in our senior feline?

Cats, as you know, are secretive creatures. It takes a watchful companion to notice the first signs of illness. Any unusual symptoms should be brought to the attention of your veterinarian as soon as possible. These may include:

- Change in water consumption (watch carefully for an increase in volume)
- Change in appetite
- Lethargy or depression (listless behavior)
- Change in urine production (watch carefully for increased amounts of urine in the litterbox)
- Constipation
- Change in litterbox habits
- Change in attitude (irritability)
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Weight gain or weight loss
- Bad breath
- Lumps and bumps on the skin
- Lapse in grooming habits
- Stiffness, trouble jumping

## What can my veterinarian do to help care for our senior feline?

The most important way your veterinarian can help is by performing a thorough review of the history and by doing a physical examination on your cat on a regular basis. While an annual exam suffices for younger pets, your veterinarian will want to see your older cat at least every six months (realize six months for a cat equals 2 to 3 years in the life of a human). Special attention will be paid to your cat's teeth and gums, skin and coat, heart, lungs, kidneys, digestive system, eyes and joints.

Your veterinarian will also perform several non-invasive tests and procedures on a regular basis. This may include blood tests, urinalysis, x-rays, EKG and blood pressure measurement (just as is done on routine health examinations in people). These tests help your veterinarian in two ways. *First*, your veterinarian can identify early-stage disease when control or even prevention is possible (and most cost-effective). *Second*, the tests will provide a yardstick with which your doctor can measure changes should your cat become ill in the future.

A proper diet and environment are critical for your cat's health and comfort. Your veterinarian and hospital staff are experts on the special needs of your feline senior citizen and will always be happy to help advise you. Some senior-friendly modifications our hospital team might help you with are:

1. Recommendations on a palatable, highly digestible diet with the proper balance of calories and nutrients (based on your cat's specific needs).
2. Easier-access litterpans
3. A comfortable, heated bed
4. Extra assistance with routine grooming

Finally, your veterinarian may provide you with a Senior Care Checklist for your cat. Your careful observations will assist our hospital greatly in giving your older cat the care he or she needs. As always, if you are concerned about any symptom your cat is showing, please do not hesitate to call our office.

***The goal of senior care is simple. We want to help you maintain the highest quality of life for your pet and thereby enhance the bond we all share. Together, you and your veterinarian can help make the senior years the most rewarding years for you and your pet to share with each other***