

Senior moments

Pets are living longer lives than ever before.

While this allows us to spend more quality time with our furry family, it also leaves us with extra responsibility to ensure they live comfortably in their senior years.

Many of us have had a 'senior moment' or two as we get on in years – keys in the fridge, anyone?

But did you realise that as they age, your cat will have their own version too?

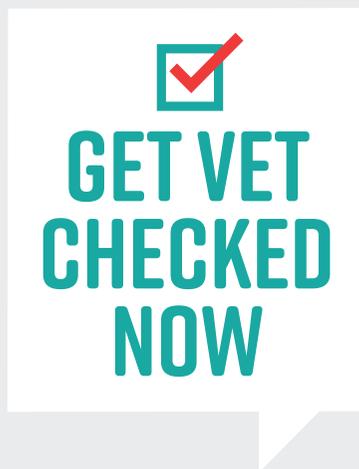
Being aware of these, as well as what you can do to ensure they remain in tip-top shape, will ensure they're with you for as long as possible.



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Senior Cats

Top tips to help you care for your senior cat



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The signs

Just like us humans, cat's go through some very similar signs that let you know they're getting on in years.

- + Their **hair greys**.
- + Their **reflexes aren't as sharp**.
- + Their **senses diminish**, particularly hearing, eyesight & smell.
- + Their **activity levels decrease**.
- + They **sleep longer & more soundly**.
- + Their **movements may appear stiff, laboured or painful**.

Generally speaking, **these signs start to crop up in cats between 7 to 11 years of age**. Desexed, indoor cats often live longer than those out in the elements. For example, a feral tomcat has an average life span of just 3 years. But a castrated male house-cat can live happily and healthily into his late teens or early twenties.

While all cats are individuals and will age at different rates, the best person to help you figure out if your furry feline has entered their senior years is your vet.

If you notice any of these signs, mention it at your next vet visit.



Top health care tips

1. Up your vet visits

Just like their human counterparts, senior cats should visit their doctor regularly for check-ups. Aim for a thorough examination every 6 months, as cats can age as much as 4 years (in human terms) in a year. Thank the universe we don't, right?

Besides the usual physical examination, your vet may do a wee and poo analysis plus a full blood screen. If your cat regularly goes outside, or is part of a multi-feline household, they may also recommend testing for feline leukaemia or immunodeficiency virus.

At these visits, remember to mention if you've noticed changes in your animal's physical condition or behaviour. While such changes could be due to your pet's advanced age, they may also be symptoms of a treatable medical condition like arthritis. Early detection means fast and more effective treatment - a win for you and your cat.

Bonus tip: as they get older your cat's taste sensation changes often leading to a loss of appetite. Try warming food to body temperature - it may be more tempting this way and encourage a good chow down.

2. Rethink your cat's diet

You might notice your pussycat eats less which is quite natural if they're not moving around as much. However, even if they're eating less, they may gain weight thanks to the slowing of their metabolism (yep, your cat's version of the dreaded 'middle age spread!').

It may go the other way too and they lose weight. No matter which one, diet is paramount. Excess weight or nutritional deficiencies can contribute to a variety of health-related issues in older cats (gum/teeth disease, heart, respiratory, skin and joint problems).

Smaller quantities of highly palatable and digestible food are good but table scraps and snacks, hmmm ... not so much. You could also consider two smaller meals per day, rather than one big one. As always, if you're worried about your cat's weight, speak to your vet.

3. Make 'em comfy

As they age - particularly if they are overweight or have sore joints - cats can find it difficult to jump and climb stairs. If their food and drink bowls are in a spot that requires them to do this, re-locate them. Do they have a high-sided litter box? If yes, consider a new one.

Think about your cat's favourite spots around your home. See if you can change things up to make them more comfortable. Maybe a home-made ramp to get on the couch or leaving a light on at night so they can move around easily?

4. Grooming & exercise

There's plenty you can do on these fronts to keep your furry feline strong well into their old age.

- + Stick to a regular worming and parasite schedule.
- + Brush their toothy-pegs regularly (if that's a struggle, your vet can do it on a regular basis).
- + Do a weekly nail check as they may not use their scratching post as often.
- + Ensure they get adequate exercise as appropriate to their capabilities - shorter bursts of activity work well.

5. Some good old TLC

As your precious feline family member slows down, your cuddle-factor can amp up! Nothing beats a good cuddle or a bit of focused attention - so lavish it upon your cat to keep them feeling happy and well-loved. At the same time, if they want space, respect that too. It's common for them to get a bit cranky in their older years (we're all guilty of that one!) so take that point into consideration if it happens.