

FELINE LIFE STAGES

Congratulations with your new feline friend! Remember cats are excellent at hiding signs of illness or pain – they tend to stay still & quiet not to attract attention. If you know the specific characteristics of each feline life stage, you might just catch these problems in time...



1. KITTEN (BIRTH – 6 MONTHS)

- One of the most important choices to make at this stage is whether your cat will be kept strictly **indoors** or have access to the **outdoors**.
- Start **deworming** your kitten from 3 weeks old. Specific **flea & tick** products are available that is even safe for the 1 day old kitten.
- Kittens should be **vaccinated** 3 times; at monthly intervals from 9 weeks of age. Thereafter once yearly.
- Cats can be **sterilised** from 6 months of age.
- Protect your cat by identifying him ASAP: **Microchip** and/ or **Collar**.
- Make a possible trip to the vet as comfortable as possible by acquiring a proper **cat traveling box** in time. Put the box in a place where kitty can get used to it and mark it with his own scent.
- Kittens require about twice the energy per pound of body weight as a mature cat. That's why they should be **fed 3 to 4 times a day** during this period of rapid growth.

Cats are very territorial animals. If we limit them by keeping them **indoors** we need to ensure that what we provide instead is interesting & stimulating. Environmental enrichment is important for all cats, especially **indoor** cats. Boredom can be stressful and may be associated with obesity, and even behavioural problems. Opportunities for play are important and may reflect a cat's normal hunting preferences. Scratching posts, toys, areas to climb, good litter box management to name a few.

Advantages of Sterilisation:

- Prevents unnecessary litters.
- Helps eliminate spraying, fighting ect.
- Decrease risk of feline aids & feline leukemia.
- Prevents uterine infections & decrease the risk of mammary gland tumours.

Felines are Vaccinated against:

- Feline **Leukemia**
- **Panleukopenia** (viral diarrhoea).
- **Upper respiratory** tract viruses (Rhinitis + Calici)
- **Rabies**
- Kennel vaccination: Cats should always get vaccinated against **snuffles** (any cat older than 1 month) before going to kennels or other places where a lot of cats are kept together.

2. JUNIOR (7 MONTHS – 2 YEARS)

- Common problems at this stage include infectious diseases, problems related to hunting, fighting (abscesses), trauma, road traffic accidents ect. These can all be minimised by having your cat sterilised!!!!
- Junior will need a **yearly booster vaccination** with general check-up. Also monthly **flea & tick** control **and** 4 times yearly **deworming**.
- From seven months to one year, Junior should be **fed twice a day**.
- From 1 year of age a cat with normal activity requires only a maintenance diet. Remember caloric needs decrease after sterilisation – feed less! Important to weigh your cat regularly to determine their optimum weight.



Risky viral diseases: Young cats are very prone to get infectious diseases, because of their tendency to roam, fight etc. We cannot cure a cat from **Feline leukemia** or **Feline Aids**. But we can try and prevent and lower the chance of them getting these diseases by:

- Having them **sterilised** asap when they're 6 months old.
- Keeping up their **yearly vaccinations!!!**

Parasites don't only cause irritation, but also blood loss and are carriers of disease to you and your cat. Did you know fleas can transmit worms to your cat?

Did you know that cats have a lower threshold for **stress** than humans? Cats can have a physical stress response to strong odors, loud noises, and extreme temperature changes. They are also sensitive to emotional stressors, like the loss of a person or animal companion. When presented with extreme multiple stressors or a prolonged stressor, their resistance is lowered, leaving them susceptible to certain illnesses ranging from behavioural changes (spraying), upper respiratory disease (Snuffles), feline acne and diarrhoea. Urinary tract infections are highly prevalent in stressed cats.

Simple ways to reduce stress:

- Keep any changes to a minimum or with a gradual introduction (food etc).
- Give your cat a safe place to retreat to, away from other pets and people.
- Have at least one litter box per cat, an extra one is great.
- Offer a variety of toys for fun, exercise and general distraction.
- Offer climbing spaces; up high means "safe".
- Use environmental pheromone treatment, and don't forget about cat nip.

3. PRIME (3 – 6 YEARS)

- Common problems at this stage include obesity, dental disease, cystitis and intestinal problems.
- Remember **yearly booster vaccinations** & general check-up.
- Your cat is now socially mature (behavioural & behavioural related problems).
- **Parasite control** is still very important especially as most cats at this age are still keen hunters.

An ideal body condition score is one which:

- The cat is well proportioned
- Has an **observable waist** behind ribcage
- **Ribs** can be **felt** with only slight fat covering

Associated risks with obesity:

- Diabetes mellitus
- Osteoarthritis
- Hepatic lipidosis (liver problem)
- Cardiovascular disease
- Increased anaesthetic & surgery risk

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THE OLDER CAT:

Remember: Old age is not a disease; it's a natural part of life!

As result of advances in veterinary medicine, more knowledable care and improved nutrition, cats are now living much longer & healthier lives. An aging cat's hair may turn grey, their hearing, eyesight & smell deteriorate, energy levels decrease with a tendency to sleep longer & more soundly and their bodies are not as limber anymore.

Common problems in the older cat:

1. **Chronic renal disease**
2. **Periodontal disease** (oral disease)
3. **Endocrine disease** (Diabetes mellitus)
4. **Osteoarthritis**
5. **Cancer**

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT:

Cats are obligate carnivores, they cannot survive without the nutritional components found in meat, like taurine. This is why Garfield should only eat cat food and not dog food or our left overs. Specific food for specific **life stages** are very important, because while kitten food promotes healthy bones & normal growth, the elderly cat's diet will play a more supportive role of major organ systems, prevent weight gain & promote oral health. There are also **prescription diets** available for some diseases. For example diets for renal, bladder, liver, intestinal, oral health & also hairball problems. These conditions needs to be diagnosed first.

4. MATURE (7 – 10 YEARS)

- **Obesity** peaks between 6 – 8 years, because older cats rest more and move less. This means they need fewer calories. This is a very critical time to change your cat's **diet** - to reduce caloric intake and still make sure he gets all the nutrients his aging system needs. Another reason to change their diet is the aging cat is prone to **constipation**. Also keep their weight down by encouraging object and active play. Remember to weigh him regularly.
- Please remember **yearly booster vaccinations** with **parasites control** and **yearly check-up**.
- Be sensitive for possible **oral problems**. This can be a problem at any life stage, but normally peaks from 7 years of age. Be sensitive to difficult chewing, stinky breath and inappetance.
- This is a good age to start getting basic **baseline data** for **organ functions: urinalysis and blood glucose** is the most important for the aging cat.
- Increased importance of easy access to litter box, bed, food, because arthritis also affect cats!
- Increased focus on **mobility**, duration and progression of specific signs.

5. SENIOR (11 – 14 YEARS)

- **Yearly vaccinations and parasite control** are still very important since there will be a drop in immunity from this age on.
- Continue with baseline data for organs.
- More likely to suffer from **arthritis** – for which treatment is available - and can also suffer the equivalent of **senile dementia**.
- Environmental needs change even more: soft bedding, more blankets (intolerance to hot & cold temperatures with aging).

Pain & Arthritis medication are available for your cat – but be careful.

Important fact: Felines lack certain metabolic pathways present in dogs and humans. This means many drugs suitable for humans and top spots/dips that can be used on dogs can harm cats and some might be fatal!!!

6. GERIATRIC (> 15 YEARS)

- Keep **yearly booster vaccinations & parasites** control up to date.
- Even at this age, your cat is still eligible for treatment now available for all these conditions. So continue monitoring **vital organ functions**.
- At this age it becomes increasingly more difficult for a cat to groom & keep claws in good condition, so brush them & clip their nails.
- Monitor cognitive function; vocalisation, confusion, signs of pain.
- Discuss **quality of life**. Although a cat at this age will love a good nap even more than at other life stages, too much sleep might indicate other serious problems. So if we are unable to keep your feline friend relatively pain free with a healthy appetite and zest for life, it might be time to say good-bye. Remember euthanasia is a way to say good-bye to your pet with dignity.
- Regular review of medication & supplements & diet.

In order to try and recognise problems early, the following are recommended for cats older than 7 years:

- **Yearly check-ups** with specific focus on renal health – urinalysis & blood glucose.
- 1 of these visits can include the **annual vaccination**.
- Specific problems you picked up at home to be discussed; weight loss / gain, increased water intake, bad breath, moving with difficulty, not as active anymore, vomiting, poor coat condition, diarrhoea etc.
- Be sensitive to the conditions / diseases common to older cats so you can be on the look out for symptoms.

Care for all life stages at home:

- Fresh water at all times.
- Changing nutrition depending on life stage .
- Clean, warm sleeping area and clean litter area.
- Regular check for external parasites.
- Check their ears, eyes, mouth for any obvious changes.
- Loving attention!!!



Remember Cats are not small dogs, give them the care they deserve!