

# Pawsitive Press

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## Caring For Cats

Wade Matthews, D.V.M.



1 Some people believe that cats are small dogs and they could not be more mistaken. Felines in the wild have a delicate balance of behaviors that help them survive and to some extent these behaviors carry on to the domestic felines we have as pets. A pride of lions is a group that works together and works separately to accomplish what is necessary for their survival. Some cats at home can be very gregarious and enjoy cuddling with other cats and their owners or they can let their owner's pet them for a few minutes and have enough and leave. Depending on the temperament of your cat you may see a lot of them or you may see a little of them.

Cats are easy to take care of if they do the things that come natural for them. Cats like to bury their urinations and defecations, so unless you have soil or dirt as your flooring choice it usually is pretty simple. There are some problems that arise with certain cats regarding this behavior. Factors that can effect this behavior are the type of

litter, location of the box, type of box, frequency of cleaning the box and the number of cats that need to use it. There is also a lot of communication that goes on between cats and sometimes between cats and their owners when cats eliminate. The rule of thumb when veterinary behaviorists are consulted is that to avoid cats not using the litter box is to have one more box than you have cats if you have more than one cat. It is better to use less litter and clean the box more frequently than to put a lot in and clean it less. I would not advise using bleach or ammonia as it will leave a smell that some cats do not like. Soap and water and a good rinse and drying is the best way to keep it clean. It should be in lightly trafficked area, they like to be discreet. The type of litter and the type of box is a personal choice, not yours but your cats. It seems that usually the simpler ones are the best.

Questions arise whether dry or canned food is best for cats and the answer is yes. Dry foods are easier and less expensive for owners to use. In general cats eating dry food will have less problems with their teeth. There are some health reasons for certain disease conditions that it is best to give canned food. Your veterinarian can help you decide what is right for your cat. Most cats will not do well with free feeding, I see too many overweight cats. You can leave the food out but you need to have a certain amount that you feed in 24 hours, not every time the bowl is empty and your cat wants more.

So I believe cats are actually easier to take care of than dogs if you have the correct litter box, litter and food. The biggest mistake that pet owners make is letting their cats get overweight. I see an inverse relationship between weight and longevity. Cats who are normal in body weight live longer. We love our cats or we would not make the effort to do the things we do. So love them enough to feed them the right amount which is usually less.

Another important aspect of cat care is at least a yearly physical exam.

## Cats Cont'd

Clients will tell me that their cat stays inside all the time and is never exposed to any diseases so they don't need to be seen. The truth is that they are less likely to get them but still can and most problems I see with cats are not contagious. It is hard for owners to be able to tell if there is something like kidney disease, liver disease, diabetes, hyperthyroidism or even cancer sometimes until the problem is advanced to the point of not being able to do anything about it. When you have an elderly cat even if they look good on a physical exam, lab work is necessary to find problems before they become a major issue. Regular veterinary visits are a major component in keeping your cat healthy. I hope these things will help your cat have a long and healthy life.

## Fun Cat Facts

- A group of cats is called a clowder.
- A cat's hearing is more sensitive than a dog's.
- The largest cat is the Siberian Tiger, which can be more than 12 feet long and weigh up to 700 lbs.
- Black cats are considered to be lucky in Britain and Australia.
- The oldest breed of domestic cat is the Egyptian Mau. "Mau" is, in fact, the Egyptian word for cat.
- Cats usually have 12 whiskers on each side of their face.
- The oldest known pet cat was found in a 9500 year old gravesite on the island of Cyprus.

## **WHY DO HAIRBALLS OCCUR?**

Cat hairballs can occur for a few reasons, but the vast majority of cases can be attributed to:

### **1. INGESTING MORE HAIR THAN NORMAL.**

Skin diseases (e.g., external parasites, infections, and allergies) can all cause cats to shed and/or groom themselves excessively, which in turn may lead to hairball issues. Extreme grooming can also be associated with stress, boredom, compulsive behaviors, and concurrent illness that is seemingly unrelated to the skin or gastrointestinal system. For example, a cat with osteoarthritis may attempt to soothe herself by stimulating the release of pain-relieving endorphins through repetitive grooming behaviors.

### **2. ALTERED GASTROINTESTINAL MOTILITY.**

When a cat's gastrointestinal tract is not functioning correctly, it may not be able to process even a normal amount of hair in the way that it should. Hairballs can be associated with inflammatory bowel disease, internal parasites, pancreatitis, hernias, foreign bodies, cancers, and other potentially serious diseases.

## **WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS TO PREVENT CAT HAIRBALLS?**

If your cat is having an issue with hairballs, consult a veterinarian. Assuming your cat's veterinarian finds nothing unusual during an exam, the following is typically recommended:

### **1. ADD FIBER TO THE DIET.**

The bulk of additional dietary fiber essentially "sweeps" hair through the digestive tract, preventing it from clumping together in the stomach. Discuss with your veterinarian on the best method to add fiber to your cat's diet. One option is to choose a diet specially formulated with soluble and insoluble fibers to increase digestive activity.

### **2. CHANGING DIETS TO A FORMULA WITH FEWER POTENTIAL ALLERGENS.**

Gastrointestinal inflammation (often caused by food allergies and/or inflammatory bowel disease) is at the bottom of many chronic cases of hairballs. A prescription, hypoallergenic diet is ideal, but over-the-counter limited antigen foods can be tried as long as owners understand that if a cat's response isn't ideal, a more restrictive food trial will still be necessary.

### **3. TAKE ON SOME OF THE GROOMING RITUAL YOURSELF**

Increasing the number of times per week the cat is brushed will help any of the above solutions work better since any hair that is removed during the brushing sessions are not swallowed by the cat.

As long as your cat is not losing weight or vomiting up hair more than once a week or so, feel free to try some or all of these recommendations before calling your veterinarian. But if they don't work, it's time to make an appointment. Your veterinarian can look closely for any health conditions that may be playing a role in the formation of hairballs and make appropriate treatment and dietary recommendations.



## How Your Cats Behavior May Change With Age

By Valerie Trumps

Few people want to admit that their beloved “kitten” is approaching her twilight years. While it is possible for cats to live into their 30s, like Crème Puff, who died at age 38, a more likely estimate of your feline’s life span is about 16 years. Here are some changes to expect as your cat enters her golden years.

### 1. More Talkative

Excessive vocalizing as she ages doesn’t mean she’s becoming more conversational, but it could indicate that she’s disoriented due to feline cognitive decline (FCD). It could also be that she’s becoming deaf or is in pain, perhaps from arthritis. Have her thoroughly examined to rule out any medical conditions. If there’s no physical cause, your veterinarian can try to resolve it with pheromones if her meowing stems from anxiety brought on by age.

### 2. Restlessness or Waking at Night

Your aging cat could be experiencing hearing or vision loss, which can impact how deeply she sleeps. Or she may need to use her litter box more frequently but have trouble finding it due to feline cognitive decline (FCD). Geriatric anxiety could also be the culprit, caused by being separated from you because you’re asleep or being worried about finding her way around the house. Medication may possibly help with this.

### 3. Disorientation and Confusion

An aging cat’s mental decline can resemble a human’s Alzheimer’s disease, where the once familiar becomes confusing or forgotten. Predictability in your cat’s schedule and environment can help ease her stress. Keep the location of her litter box and food in the same places as always, and avoid any changes to what she eats or the litter she uses. If her distress is at a fever pitch, keep her in a room with food and litter box at opposite ends. Having both in the same small space can increase her feeling of security.

### 4. Using the House as a Litter Box

If she has taken her elimination habits outside of the box, so to speak, she is not being willfully disobedient. Inappropriate elimination has many causes, such as a decrease in mobility, a more frequent urge to eliminate, less control over her bowels or bladder, and serious organ issues, urine tract infection, kidney disease, or even brain tumors. Take her to the vet to rule out any medical issue and, if that’s not the cause, increase the number of litter boxes. You may need to get a litterbox with lower sides than her current box so that she can comfortably enter and exit.

### 5. Becoming Emotionally Distant or Especially Needy

This sign is fairly easy to spot, since a formerly friendly cat becoming less interested in you and your petting is a stark contrast to her “normal” behavior. Conversely, a previously aloof cat can become clingy and overly dependent — such as following you around the house or meowing plaintively and constantly — and may feel the need for constant physical contact. Try to think of this change as getting to experience the flip side of your cat’s personality.

### 6. Apathy with a Decrease in Activity

Apathy with a drop in her usual activity can also mean illness, so check her eyes to see if her third eyelid (haw) is showing. If she passes this test and is not significantly different, such as not grooming herself at all or being less responsive to activity in her environment, chances are that she’s just slowing down with age. At any time that your cat refuses to eat, get her to the vet immediately. Not eating can cause fatty liver disease, which is both quick and fatal.

### 7. Crankiness and Irritability

When your cat reacts to being disturbed with irritation and crankiness, she could be feeling the physical effects of aging — stiffness, soreness (maybe from arthritis), muscular weakness, or diminished smell or hearing. She also could be feeling some confusion and sadness about her restricted activity and diminished ability to be part of family life. Find ways to include her, even if that means just holding her on your lap as she watches Junior’s antics, and take care to leave her alone when she’s settled in comfortably.

### 8. Unprovoked Aggression

With her reduced senses of hearing, vision, and smell, your cat is less able to sense people or things coming into her personal space and can become startled more easily than in her younger days. Some accommodation on your part can help her with this: Speak softly, gradually increasing the loudness of your voice, when approaching her while she’s resting, or try pheromones (under expert supervision) to help her chill out. Worst case scenarios may require some medication from your veterinarian, but give some behavior modification some serious effort first before resorting to drugs.

### 9. An Upside-Down Schedule

Your cat used to be active during the day and sleep all night as your furry blanket, but now she snoozes when the sun is up and prowls around at night. Besides missing your sleeping companion, you could be subjected to noise and hijinks that keep you awake. Treat her like the inner baby that she is — tire her out before bedtime with some active play and help her settle down by grooming her at night.

### 10. Pacing ... pacing ... and pacing

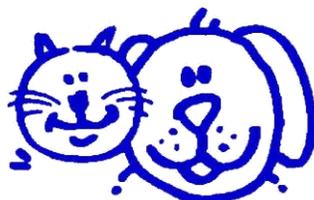
An older cat that continuously paces during her waking hours is showing one of the classic signs of feline cognitive decline (FCD), a condition that mimics dementia in humans. Though it can be unnerving to see your cat constantly walking back and forth, it can also be a bonding experience for the two of you. Try walking along with her and carrying on a conversation, even if it’s one-sided; surprise her with treats along her path; or drag a shoelace in front of her if she seems playful. Consult your veterinarian for possible options for your cat.

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Expires 6/30/15 NL



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\*\*This coupon can not be applied to prescription medications other than heartworm/flea control\*\*

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