

## EXERCISE

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Exercise is important, not only for weight control but overall health. Senior cats frequently become less agile as arthritis develops and muscles begin to atrophy. Regularly engaging your cat in moderate play can promote muscle tone and suppleness, increase blood circulation, and help reduce weight in cats that are too heavy. During times of exercise, be alert to labored breathing or rapid tiring that may suggest the cat has a disease. It may also be necessary to relocate litter boxes to more accessible locations to prevent senior cats from eliminating in inappropriate locations. Purchasing a litter box with low sides, cutting down high sides, or constructing a ramp around the box may help senior cats gain entry more easily.

## SIMPLE TEST

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If you can't answer "yes" to all of the following statements, please call Dr. Flanary or Dr. Walter as soon as possible.

## MY CAT

- Is acting normally; seems active and in good spirits
- Does not tire easily with moderate exercise
- Does not have seizures or fainting episodes
- Has a normal appetite
- Has had no significant change in weight
- Has a normal level of thirst and drinks usual amount of water (about an ounce per pound of body weight per day, or less)
- Does not vomit often
- Does not regurgitate undigested food
- Has no difficulty eating or swallowing
- Has normal appearing bowel movements (formed and firm with no blood or mucus)

- Defecates without difficulty
- Urinates in normal amounts and with normal frequency; urine color is normal
- Urinates without difficulty
- Always uses a clean litter box
- Has not developed any new offensive behavioral tendencies (such as aggression or urine spraying)
- Has gums that are pink with no redness, swelling, or bleeding
- Does not sneeze and has no nasal discharge
- Has eyes that are bright, clear, and free of discharge
- Has a coat that is full, glossy, and free of bald spots and mats; no excessive shedding is evident
- Does not scratch, lick, or chew excessively
- Has skin that is not greasy and has no offensive odor
- Is free of fleas, ticks, lice, and mites
- Has no persistent abnormal swellings
- Has no sores that do not heal
- Has not bleeding or discharge from any body opening
- Has ears that are clean and odor free
- Does not shake its head or scratch its ears
- Hears normally and reacts as usual to its environment
- Walks without stiffness, pain, or difficulty
- Has feet that appear healthy, and has claws of normal length
- Breaths normally without straining or coughing

## SUMMARY

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Cats are experts at hiding illness, and senior cats are not an exception. It is common for a cat to have a serious medical problem, yet not show any sign it until the condition is quite advanced. Since most diseases can be managed more successfully when detected and treated

early in their course, it is important for owners of senior cats to carefully monitor their behavior and health.

Just as your observations can help detect disease in the early stages, so too can regular veterinary examinations. Dr. Flanary suggests a thorough physical examination every six months. During your cat's examination, Drs. Flanary and Walter will gather a complete medical and behavioral history with your assistance, perform a thorough physical exam in order to evaluate every organ system, check your cat's weight and body condition, and compare them to previous evaluations. The doctors recommend at least once a year to do a blood test, fecal examination, and urinalysis. In this way, disorders can be found and treated early, and ongoing. If your senior cat has a medical condition, more frequent evaluations may be necessary.

Never assume that changes you see in your older cat are simply due to old age, and therefore untreatable. Any alteration in your cat's behavior or physical condition should alert you to contact Dr. Flanary or Dr. Walter. [www.flanaryvet.com](http://www.flanaryvet.com)



## YOUR SENIOR CAT

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Cats are individuals and, like people they experience advancing years in their own unique ways. The percentage of cats over six years of age has nearly doubled in just over a decade, and there is every reason to expect that the “graying” cat population will continue to grow. Many cats begin to encounter age-related physical changes between seven and ten years of age and most do so by the time they are 12.

Aging is a natural process. Although many complex physical changes accompany advancing years, age in and of itself is not a disease. Even though many conditions that affect older cats are not correctable, they can often be controlled. The key to making sure your senior cat has the healthiest and highest quality of life possible is to recognize and reduce factors that may be health risks, detect disease as early as possible, correct or delay the progression of disease, and improve or maintain the health of the body’s systems.

Compared to younger cats, the immune system of older cats is less able to fend off foreign invaders. Chronic diseases often associated with aging such as these listed below can impair immune function even further.

- Feline Diabetes Mellitus – Type 1 o 2
- Kidney Disease
- Feline Hypertension
- Hyperthyroidism
  
- Hepatic Lipidosis – Fatty Liver Disease
- Heart Disease
- Cancer

- Degenerative Joint Disease or Arthritis
- Dental Disease

Owners of older cats often notice changes in their cat’s behavior, but consider these changes an inevitable and untreatable result of aging and fail to report them to their veterinarian. Failure to use the litter box, changes in activity levels, and alteration in eating, drinking, or sleeping habits are examples. While the doctors at Flanary Vet Clinic believe that some behavior problems are due to the diminishing mental abilities of aging cats, it is a mistake to automatically attribute all such changes to old age. In fact, the possibility of some underlying medical condition should always be the first consideration. Disease of virtually any organ system or any condition that cause pain or impairs mobility can contribute to change in behavior. For example:

- A fearful cat may not become aggressive until it is in pain (e.g., dental disease) or less mobile (e.g., from arthritis).
- The increased urine production that often results from disease common to aging cats (e.g., kidney failure, diabetes, or hyperthyroidism) may cause the litter box to become soiled more quickly than expected. The increased soil and odor may cause cats to find a bathroom more to their liking.
- Many cats that do not mark their territory with urine, even if exposed to intruding cats, may begin to do so if a condition like hyperthyroidism develops.
- Cats with painful arthritis may have difficulty gaining access to a litter box, especially if negotiating stairs is required. Even climbing into the box may be painful for such cats; urinating or defecating in an inappropriate location is the natural result.

- Older cats may be more sensitive to changes in the household since their ability to adapt to unfamiliar situations diminishes with age.

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## SKIN CARE

Senior cats groom themselves less effectively than do younger cats, sometimes resulting in hair matting, skin odor, and inflammation. Daily brushing or combing removes loose hairs, preventing them from being swallowed and forming hair balls. Brushing also stimulates blood circulation and sebaceous gland secretions, resulting in a healthier skin and coat. They may not use their scratching posts as frequently if at all, nails should be checked weekly. The claws of senior cats are often overgrown, thick and brittle.

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## PROPER NUTRITION

Many cats tend to move toward obesity as they age. Drs. Flanary and Walter can modify your cat’s diet so that a normal body condition can be restored. Other cats actually become too thin as they get older, apparently as part of the normal aging process. Subtle changes in weight are often the first sign of disease; ideally you should weigh your cat every month on a scale sensitive enough to detect such small changes. Keep a record of the weight and notify the doctors of any significant changes.



