

GUIDELINES FOR CARE OF THE HEALTHY SENIOR CAT • AGE 6+



All cats can develop new illnesses or diseases over their lifetimes. We believe that **COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTATIVE CARE and INTERVENTION** are the best approach to provide your companion with a long, happy, healthful life.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HEALTHY SENIOR CAT

The "senior years" bring their own challenges for most individuals. Most of us can expect to experience decreased flexibility, varying degrees of joint pain and arthritic changes, and difficulty with weight management. Other changes can be more serious and can have profound effects on our quality of life. Below are some general recommendations for keeping your senior cat healthy and comfortable.

EVERY 6 MONTHS:

- In an effort to provide the best progressive care we recommend twice yearly **comprehensive physical exams including a dental evaluation**

YEARLY:

- **Annual complete physical exam including dental evaluation**
- Scan microchip – ensure function and placement
- Heartworm blood test
- Fecal exam for intestinal parasites (yes—even indoor cats hunt!)
- +/- Non-adjuvanted Feline Leukemia Vaccine (indoor/outdoor cats)
- Year round monthly heartworm preventative also acts as intestinal parasite preventative
- Flea/tick preventative
- Bloodwork and urinalysis to evaluate organ and overall physical health
- Dental Cleaning and Polish with full mouth X-rays – frequency determined by current dental health
 - Necessary treatment for dental disease found during the oral exam and X-ray evaluation

EVERY 3 YEARS:

- Non-adjuvanted Rabies Vaccination (required by Colorado State Law)
- Non-adjuvanted FVRCP - Rhinotracheitis/Calicivirus/Panleukopenia/Chlamydia ("Distemper") Vaccine

AS NEEDED:

- Nail trim – advise monthly - at home, by hospital staff or groomer
- Anal gland expression – by hospital staff only
 - If anal glands do not express normally during defecation (pooping) then they will become overly full and painful. If left unexpressed they could become infected and even rupture
 - Signs indicating full anal glands include: scooting on rear end, biting at back end, limping, and having difficulty defecating
- Microchip

Common illnesses in senior cats include dental disease, decreased kidney function, over-productive thyroid function, diabetes mellitus, abnormal liver function, and cancer.

It is important to understand that many of these health problems can be managed successfully when detected and treated appropriately.

Signs at home that may indicate a change in your cat's health include vomiting, diarrhea, drinking more water and urinating more, not using the litter box, decreased grooming/socializing, decreased appetite, hiding or changes in vocalization.

If your kitty misses more than 2 meals in a row it is critical to bring your furry friend in as soon as possible for a complete physical exam and additional laboratory diagnostic tests.

Laboratory tests are vital in our assessment of your cat's health and treating underlying disease conditions. Early detection and intervention often allow for successful medical management of serious diseases. When disease is severe or has progressed it is more difficult and more expensive to manage.

In a matter of 30 minutes we can perform a Complete Blood Count (CBC) and Chemistry panel (evaluates blood sugar for diabetes, kidney function, liver status, electrolytes and many other health indicators). Often a urinalysis is indicated to look for infection and evaluate kidney function. Other more specialized tests can provide specific understanding of disease processes and help determine treatment and prognosis.

When indicated we will recommend lab work and/or other diagnostics such as X-rays and ultrasound with most illnesses. **Northgate Animal Hospital strives to recommend diagnostics and treatment based on the best interest of the patient. We will base our recommendations on our evaluation and consideration of each patient, and family, on an individual basis.** Animals age more rapidly than humans and lab values should be reviewed yearly even if they are apparently healthy.

DISCOMFORT/PAIN

At NGAH our doctors and staff are highly trained and attuned to non-verbal/non-vocal communication from your companions. **A large part of our efforts are to perceive/interpret/diagnose and treat pain in our furry friends.** Guardians often misinterpret silence and average behavior as comfort. Although animals will often cry out with sudden pain, animals often do not vocalize chronic pain. Consequently many guardians do not perceive more subtle cues as indicators of pain. We often are told by guardians that their limping cat is not in pain, however a limp indicates pain in an animal just as a human who limps is in pain. Cats are particularly good at hiding pain. Cats who are in pain or not feeling well tend to hide, decrease social activity, decrease jumping, decrease grooming and eating or start peeing/pooping outside of their litter boxes.

DENTAL HEALTH

Healthy cat teeth are vital to maintain a happy, healthy cat. Cats, like humans, build up plaque (soft and gooey) which turns into tartar (cement like) in 24 hours if not brushed away. Bacteria in the mouth and tartar on the teeth, combine together to cause gingivitis (gum inflammation). Tartar and gingivitis result in periodontal disease (infection of tooth root structures) which often requires extraction or root canal of the diseased teeth. Cats are also highly susceptible to tooth decay similar to cavities. **NGAH is highly motivated to help you maintain your furry friend's dental health** and can recommend many at home dental care options including teeth brushing and CET dental health products.

GROOMING

Some cats are great at grooming themselves and some cats are not. Poor groomers will develop mats that may require shaving if let go too long. Moderate to severe matting of fur is painful and can lead to skin infection. **It is very important to teach your cat to tolerate and even enjoy brushing several times per week.** Brushing also greatly decreases shedding and hair ball problems. If you cannot brush your cat and they develop mats, they will need to be groomed and may even need to be shaved by a professional groomer or here at NGAH. Nails should be trimmed as needed every 2-4 weeks. We are happy to teach you how to trim nails at home.

BEHAVIOR

It is expected that our senior cats will sleep a lot more as they get older. It is important to provide warm, soft, sunny, safe and easily accessible places for our senior kitties to rest. Animal safe heating pads can be purchased which will not go above a safe temperature. These can be very comforting for old kitties. **However, even senior cats can still be full of energy and need to play!** This energy can even turn into unwanted behaviors very quickly. Cats do not inhibit their play behaviors with humans as much as we would think is natural. It is very important to use appropriate toys like laser pointers or strings on sticks rather than using our hands. Cats can become inappropriately aggressive and even start ambushing their guardians when they are not taught to be gentle with our delicate human skin! Scratching posts or mats are very important to minimize destruction of beloved furniture! Cats can be taught not to vertical scratch and to stay off counters by using training and various aids for training. **Cats love to eat the strangest things** including rubber-bands, hair-ties, strings, needles, real and synthetic plants, etc. We must be diligent to kitty proof our homes! Please ask for our help in promoting the development of a happy cat!

Many adult cats are happy and well-adjusted. However **we can help with emerging and/or chronic behavior issues** as the need arises. We see kittens grow out of some behaviors such as hyperactivity and overzealous play. However adult cats can develop behavior issues secondary to obvious and even very subtle stress. Cats will perceive many major or minor changes in and outside of the house as stressful. Humans, other cats and dogs (even their best friends) can cause stress for cats. Cats will often display anxiety and stress by urinating and even pooping outside of the litter box. Please let us know if you have questions and would like help with behavior issues as we have many management options including environmental modifications, handling/ training techniques, and medical considerations as well.



COMPANION HEALTH INSURANCE

We strongly recommend companion health insurance for every furry companion. Health insurance will ease the stress of financial consideration when making decisions for your cat's routine and sick health care. Northgate Animal Hospital has no direct relationship with any insurance company. Clients file claims directly with their chosen insurance company.

FOLLOWING ARE SOME COMPANION HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANIES TO CONSIDER:



www.trupanion.com



www.embracepetinsurance.com



www.gopetplan.com



www.aspcapetinsurance.com



www.petinsurance.com

RELIABLE WEBSITES:



pets.webmd.com



www.veterinarypartner.com



www.felinedocs.com

NUTRITION FOR THE HEALTHY SENIOR CAT

Companion nutrition is a very confusing topic with all of the choices we have for food and diet recommendations from many different and conflicting sources. The companion food industry has become a multi-billion dollar industry in the last several years. While it is wonderful that our furry friends are such an important part of our families, this extreme and rapid growth is leading to many niche diets that are based on fads and media exposure of many human issues that may or may not be relevant or even appropriate for feline nutrition. We often see urinary problems and even gastrointestinal distress directly caused by the well-intentioned but misguided attempts of companion guardians trying to provide what they have been told by the sales representatives of many commercial diets. It is very important that your cat to receive life stage appropriate food throughout his/her life.



GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A DIET FOR YOUR HEALTHY CAT:

Cats are obligate carnivores, which means they must have primarily a protein and fat based diet with some carbohydrates.

FELINE NUTRITION AS RECOMMENDED BY COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY:

	Protein	Fats	Carbohydrates
Kitten	30-35%	9-18%	30-50%
Adult & Senior	26-30%	9-18%	30-50%

Plentiful, clean, daily fresh water is vital to your furry friend's health. While some animals can free feed (food left out at all times) we recommend meal feeding at least every 12 hours (twice daily) a measured amount so that you can more easily manage your companion's weight, and know if there is a decrease in appetite.

- Cats are carnivores. Cats need a much higher percentage of protein compared to dogs.
- Cats require taurine, an essential amino acid that **must be supplemented** in their diet.
- Cats are lactose intolerant. Do not feed them milk or milk based products.
- Many cats are sensitive to plastic and may develop severe chin acne if fed and watered in plastic bowls. Use ceramic or stainless steel bowls washed regularly.
- Carbohydrates may be provided by grain sources and/or non-grain sources. Cats do not need as many carbohydrates but they are not inherently grain sensitive. Some cats may be grain sensitive but many are not.
- Raw meat is an incomplete diet source, may cause GI upset, and even be the source of life-threatening infection of Salmonella and E. coli. Please read the included AVMA policy on raw food diets.
- Meat by-products (heart, liver, spleen, empty/clean intestines, blood, kidneys) are actually highly nutritious and do not include hide, hair, hooves, and teeth.

NGAH recommends companion animal nutrition providers who have been developing and researching appropriate feline nutritional diets for decades. These companies spend millions in research dollars to determine the best sources and ingredients for balanced feline nutrition.

NGAH RECOMMENDS:



www.hillspet.com



www.iams.com



www.eukanuba.com



www.royalcanin.us



www.purinaone.com



www.proplan.com

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Obesity is a common problem in our adult cats. Starting healthy dietary management and habits with your cat will help ensure a happy and healthy adult life. At NGAH we are very proactive in assessing a healthy body condition score and weight for every patient. Obesity leads to joint problems, pain, increased work load on the heart, breathing complications, inability to play, groom, and even diabetes mellitus. Obesity significantly reduces life span by several years. We are very happy to help you develop and maintain a healthy diet, feeding and exercise program for your furry friend.

DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

Cats on a high quality balanced diet do not need vitamin supplements, however Essential Fatty Acids (fish oils) are very beneficial for healthy skin in our very dry Colorado climate.

We hope these guidelines have addressed many of your questions. Please call us at Northgate Animal Hospital if we can be of any further assistance. Our goal is to enable you to provide the best care available for your furry companion!

Thank you!

Dr. Laura J. Scott and the Northgate Animal Hospital Healthcare Team!

