



HOW TO KEEP SENIOR CATS HEALTHY

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THE ISSUE

Cats age faster than humans—they are already seniors by the age of 7. By adjusting diet and other aspects of their care as they age, owners can help their cats stay healthier and live longer, more active and more interesting lives. Cats over the age of 12 are geriatrics; if you're lucky enough to have a 12-year old cat, please see our *How to Keep Geriatric Cats Healthy*.

WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

Seniors need yearly check-ups with routine blood work. Contact your vet if there is any significant change in your cat's health, behavior, appetite or appearance. We recommend checking with your cat's vet before making any change to its diet or care. If your cat is receiving chemotherapy, please consult with a veterinary oncologist before feeding raw food.

THE SOLUTION

We've starred (*) the changes we think all owners of senior cats should consider.

***1 Adjust diet to increase digestibility, moisture, & palatability. Maintain protein.**

As a cat gets older, its body changes, and its nutritional requirements change too. Here are three dietary changes most senior cats benefit from:

- **Increase digestibility.** The digestive organs of older cats generally don't work as well as those of younger cats. Improving digestibility helps prevent nutritional deficiencies and also reduces the strain of eliminating waste products on seniors' livers and kidneys. If you're feeding kibble, the best way to increase digestibility is to transition all or part of your cat's diet to a more digestible form of food: raw frozen, freeze-dried or wet.
- **Increase moisture & palatability.** Among the most frequently diagnosed diseases in senior cats are renal (kidney) insufficiency and renal failure. By transitioning cats that have been eating a dry diet (10% moisture) to a high-quality moisture-rich diet (50+% moisture), owners decrease the possibility of dehydration and reduce the stress on their cats' kidneys. As an added benefit, these foods tend to be more palatable and easier to chew, which reduces the chance of weight loss. Raw frozen, wet, pouch and freeze-dried foods (after rehydration) are all more than 50% moisture.
- **Maintain protein.** Past studies done on rats led nutritionists to recommend low protein foods for senior cats, and many senior diets are still made this way. More recently, multiple studies done on cats indicate that most senior cats live longer, healthier lives when they eat high protein diets. (The one exception: cats in end-stage liver or kidney disease feel better on low protein diets.) Unless your cat's veterinarian recommends a low protein diet, we recommend that the diets for senior cats have a minimum dry matter protein of 30%. This correlates to these minimum percentages of protein in the guaranteed analysis: for raw frozen 9.6%, wet, & pouch, 6%; for kibble and freeze-dried foods, 27%.

If a senior cat is in end-stage liver or kidney disease or its vet recommends a low-protein food for another reason, consider the following foods.

***2 Improve dental health**

The best way to improve most cats' dental health (and reduce the need for full dental cleanings) is to give them a 1 to 2-inch piece of raw chicken neck twice a week (cut back on their food on these days). In addition to cleaner teeth, raw chicken necks give your cat mental stimulation, natural enzymes, glucosamine and chondroitin. Alternatives approaches: dental chews, oral gels and tooth brushing.

***3 Improve digestive health and immune function**

70% of a cat's immune system is in her digestive tract. The healthier her digestive tract, the stronger her immune system. Supplementing a cat's diet with prebiotics feeds the good bacteria that play a large role in

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both digestion and immune function. Supplementing with digestive enzymes improves cats' ability to fully use the food they eat and reduces the waste material that passes through the colon where good bacteria live. You may also want to provide supplements designed specifically to strengthen cats' immune systems.

5. Address other health issues: organ support, joint health, excess weight, skin & coat.

If your cat suffers from any of the issues below, they are likely to become worse as she ages. Look for expanded discussions of these issues in future Mud Bay Solution Sheets.

- **Skin and Coat.** Increased hair loss affects many senior cats, so consider an herbal supplement to reduce shedding.
- **Joint Supplements.** Like people and dogs, cats are likely to experience joint pain as they age. Common signs include: slowness, reduced grooming and grumpiness. Owners are frequently amazed by the difference a joint supplement can make.
- **Obesity.** Obesity reduces longevity and quality of life and increases the likelihood of disease. The two simplest ways to help a cat lose weight are reducing portion size and reducing fat content. Make small, consistent changes, not dramatic ones, and look to reduce weight very gradually.
- **Vital Organ Support.** The heart, liver, kidney, and immune systems of senior cats are weakened and often overburdened with the slow build of toxins. Herbal supplements can help support these systems and naturally detoxify seniors' bodies.

RESULTS

Updating your cat's nutrition as she ages can increase her quality of life and possibly reduce or prevent the development of age-related diseases. Some results will become visible within weeks. Other improvements in health may remain invisible throughout her life.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Indoor cats' life spans usually fall between 12 and 16 years (possibly longer due to recent improvements in nutrition and veterinary care). The average lifespan of an outdoor cat is only 5 to 6 years. The difference seems to be due to physical injury and infections.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

Mud Bay staffers are specifically trained to help senior cat owners. Muddies can also help you find the products that match the recommendations on this sheet, so if you need more help or information, please let us know.