



MUD BAY

HOW TO KEEP GERIATRIC CATS HEALTHY

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THE ISSUE

Cats age faster than humans—they are seniors by the age of 7 and geriatrics by the age of 12. Many geriatric cats suffer from feline cognitive dysfunction (similar to Alzheimer's disease in humans), and at least 1 in 5 geriatric cats will suffer from kidney failure. By adjusting diet and other aspects of their care as they age, owners can help their geriatric cats stay healthier and live longer, more active (and more interesting) lives.

WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

Geriatric cats need check-ups up to every 6 months with routine blood work yearly. 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 her 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 geriatric cats should consider.

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

As a cat gets older, her body changes, and her nutritional requirements change too. Here are three dietary changes most geriatric 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 geriatric's 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, wet or pouch.
- **Increase moisture & palatability.** Among the most frequently diagnosed diseases in geriatric 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 geriatric cats, and many senior diets are still made this way. More recently, multiple studies done on cats indicate that most geriatric 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 geriatric cats have a minimum dry matter protein of 30%. This correlates to these minimum percentages of protein in the guaranteed analysis: for raw frozen foods, 9.6%; for wet foods, 6%; for kibble and freeze-dried foods, 27%.

***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**

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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 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.

4. Improve mental health with antioxidants and Omega-3s.

An increasing number of geriatric cats are being diagnosed with Feline Cognitive Disorder, a condition correlative to Alzheimer's disease in humans. Symptoms include disorientation, house soiling, loud vocalizing (especially at night), and loss of interest in food or water. This disease is not yet well understood, but some studies have shown significant improvement with antioxidant supplementation. Mitochondrial co-factor L-Carnitine has also been shown to be beneficial.

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.

- ***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.
- ***Vital Organ Support.** The heart, liver, kidney, and immune systems of geriatric cats are weakened and often overburdened with the slow build of toxins. Herbal supplements can help support these systems and naturally detoxify geriatric's bodies.
- **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.
- **Skin and Coat.** Increased hair loss affects many geriatric cats, so consider an herbal supplement to reduce potential shedding.

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 geriatric 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.