

Is my cat senior?
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It's amazing how true the saying "time flies when you are having fun" can be. Time can fly by with your cat as she progresses from kittenhood through adulthood. During this time, many folks start to ask when will my cat progress from an adult to a senior. The transition from kitten to adult is rather clear. You can see when your kitten has stopped growing and matured. The transition to being a senior is a bit more complicated and can be confusing. Generally, the average cat is thought of as senior between seven and nine years of age however, this is a generalization and will vary by individual.

You can also look for signs in your cat that signal a transitioning to the senior phase in life. Just like people cats can develop gray hair which is most often noticed around the nose or eyes. As cats age, they can also develop dental issues in which they will have noticeably yellow teeth and can have bad breath. Senior cats are not necessarily as active as they once were. This can be challenging to observe in cat since their activity is spread throughout the day. You may notice that she is not jumping on the couch or counters or chasing toys as often. This slowing of activity can lead to weight gain since she is not burning as many daily calories which can lead to obesity problems if not kept in check.

Transitioning to the senior phase does not mean your cat is ready for retirement. In human terms this is like reaching 50 – 55-years-old and starting to adjust healthy habits. This is a time to consider adjusting your cat's health habits that will continue to support a young lifestyle. Here are a few examples to consider:

Veterinary Care: While good veterinary care is important throughout the life of your cat it can lose some emphasis during the healthy adult life stage. However, maintaining a consistent veterinary relationship will help develop healthy baseline information that will make it easier to recognize early signs of age-related health issues and allow for early interventions. Special attention to oral health is important during this life stage. Oral issues are more prevalent with advancing age and maintaining healthy teeth and gums will facilitate good oral health throughout your cat's senior years. Heart disease and decreased kidney function are associated with dental disease so tartar buildup can have very severe consequences in senior pets.

Exercise: As your cat ages, she may not be as active at chasing toys or playing as she once was. This may be due to having less energy or starting to develop achy joints. However, exercise remains to be very important. Consider playing games with you cat such as chase the laser pointer to keep her active.

Weight Management: Along with exercise monitoring your cat's weight is an important consideration during this life stage. As senior cats slow down they can start to get pudgy or obese if kept unchecked. Work with you veterinarian to understand what a good body condition should look like for your cat and adjust her diet to help reach and maintain that goal.

Nutrition: Diet plays an important role during the senior life stage. There are commercial diets that are designed specifically for senior cats. Features to look for include:

- Lower fat and calorie content compared to your current diet to help with weight control.
- High quality protein sources to help support muscle health.
- Antioxidants such as vitamin E and beta carotene to support immune health.

- Nutrients to support joint health such as omega-3 fatty acids, glucosamine and chondroitin

In addition to a quality diet it is also important to provide an ample source of fresh water for your senior cat. Water helps to facilitate digestion and metabolism as well as aid in the regulation of body temperature and elimination of waste in the body.

Understanding the senior life stage and incorporating healthy changes will help your cat maintain her youthful vitality as long as possible.