

Ask the Vet

Brooke Schwabenton, DVM

Dr. Brooke Schwabenton is a Greensboro native and works at Sedgefield Animal Hospital & Dental Center. A graduate of NC State, she has been practicing veterinary medicine in Greensboro for over eight years. Dr. Brooke enjoys working closely with pet owners to provide all of her patients with the best quality of life from puppy and kitten-hood till they are ancient and gray.



Q How old is my cat in people years?

A The old way of thinking was one year in a cat's life equals seven "human" years. However, recent studies have proven this to be not quite accurate. Cats go through puberty much faster than we think. At age two they are actually anywhere from twenty one to twenty eight years of age. However, after they turn two, we see them slow down in aging to about four "human" years per year. Thus, a fifteen year old cat is really in their early seventies.

Q How long will my cat live?

A The answer has changed dramatically over the years as we have grown to provide our cats with better care, better nutrition and a better environment. Just like humans, numerous factors are involved to provide a long and happy life. With regular veterinary care, being spayed or neutered at a young age, good nutrition and taking into account behaviors in this article, our feline friends can live to be twenty or more years old.

Q How do I know if my cat is ill?

A Cats tend to be solitary and stoic creatures often showing little or no signs that they are becoming sick. Changes in your cat's appetite, attitude, activity level and bathroom habits may be indicators of something more than just "an old cat". A "grumpy" cat may be a sick cat and typically older cats that stop using the litter box do so for a medical reason.

Signs your cat may be ill:

- Diminished exercise or an increased amount of sleep - may actually be arthritis or bone and muscle problems. Environmental approaches to improve your cat's comfort can include placing food and water bowls on the floor as opposed to on top of counters, and making sure the litter box has low sides for easy access.
- Inactivity and decrease or increase in water consumption may indicate or lead to kidney disease. Try adding low-sodium chicken broth or tuna juice to their water or food for more moisture. Cats often like to drink from a water fountain or a dripping sink.
- Hearing loss tends to be gradual and may not be noticed until the cat is completely deaf. This is a major concern especially if the cat goes outside and may not hear cars, or approaching predators.
- Hair loss or dry & flaky skin may be prevented or corrected by dietary supplements or special medicated shampoos. Sometimes this is a first indication of hormone changes or thyroid disease.

Remember, "Old age is not a disease; it is a stage of life". If you notice any of these changes in your cat, have them checked out by your veterinarian. None of us would be very happy if we had an ache or pain, lump or bump, and were told "Oh, you're just getting old". Regular examinations and blood work (every six months to a year) by your veterinarian can help identify problems early.

We all love our pets dearly and want them to be happy and comfortable as long as possible. The oldest cat I have personally treated is 26 years old and going strong!

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