



# How to spot and manage common health issues in older cats

By Dr Peta Keown, Head Vet, Cat Protection Society of Victoria

**As your cat ages, it can start to slow down, and while aging is normal, sickness and pain are not.**

Sometimes, it can be easy to think that changes in your older cat's behaviour are just a sign of old age. Whilst many older cats do suffer from a range of health issues, many conditions are treatable – and getting a check-up from your vet could help improve the quality of your cat's life, and in fact, extend its life.

Aging cat conditions are sometimes similar to those faces by humans and can include things like arthritis, obesity, vision and hearing problems, as well as some diseases such as diabetes, cancer, kidney or liver disease and thyroid problems. Older cats are also more susceptible to gum disease.

Here, we take a look at some of the more common help conditions in your senior cat, how to spot these issues, and how to manage them to help give your feline friend a long, happy life:

## Arthritis

Arthritis is an inflammation of the joints and can be extremely common in cats. It can often go undetected in senior cats, because often owners of older cats think that their cats are just slowing down with age.

Arthritis however can be painful, so getting your cat checked regularly from your vet and getting treatment at the onset of the condition can make a huge difference to your pet's quality of life.

Signs of arthritis can include less interest in playing, stiffness and reduced mobility, difficulty in grooming itself, and general changes in the cat's behaviour. For example, the cat may be in pain, making it act more aggressively and be less tolerant of people.

There are many treatment options available today, and the vet will work with you to choose pain relief option, natural food supplements or injections that help lubricate the joint and provide comfort.

## Cancer

Cats can develop different types of tumours which can be benign or malignant, and whilst you can check for lumps and bumps by feeling all over your cat's body on a regular basis, there are other signs of cancer. These can include weight loss, increased thirst, a poor coat quality, lethargy, or vomiting and diarrhoea.

These symptoms can be quite common in a number of other health conditions, so if your cat exhibits any of these signs, or just starts to act differently in general, it's best to take them to the vet for a check.

Your vet can provide diagnostics such as blood tests and imaging to get to the bottom of what is going on.

## Kidney Disease

Kidney failure is a common disease in older cats, with many and varied symptoms. Some general signs in cats can include lethargy, a loss of weight, and a greater need to urinate.

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If your cat shows any changes in their mood, personality or behaviour, a visit to your vet for a check is the best way to check for signs of kidney issues. Treatment options have improved dramatically in the last ten years, so talk to your vet about the best options.

#### **Constipation**

Cats can experience changes in bowel and toileting habits as they get older, including constipation. Signs of constipation include passing bowel motions less frequently, pain when going to the toilet, or hard faeces.

#### **Deafness**

While it can be difficult to tell if your cat is losing their hearing, some signs of deafness include not responding to loud sounds or when you call them, being startled easily, loud miaowing, or signs of dizziness or disorientation.

#### **Caring for an older cat:**

Some simple ways to care for your older cat, and help to make their senior years more comfortable include:

#### **Nutrition and Exercise**

Make sure you feed your cat high-quality food that is specially formulated for a senior cat. Speak to your vet about the correct food, particularly if your cat has gum disease, or other health conditions.

It's also important for your cat to maintain a healthy weight, so continue to play with your cat and encourage them to move. Just be aware if they show any sign of discomfort.

#### **Health Checks:**

It's important to have regular health checks with your vet and pay close attention to any changes in your pet's behaviour. By having regular health checks, your vet may be able to spot things that you miss, and catch any health issues before they become too serious. Also make sure that any health checks involve regular dental checks to keep on top of dental health and gum disease.

Talk to your vet if you have any concerns about your cat's health or notice any changes in their behaviour. By catching problems early, you give your cat the best chance of a long, healthy life!

**Dr Peta Keown is the Head Vet at the Cat Protection Society of Victoria, a not for profit animal welfare organisation committed to working with the community to ensure that every cat has the opportunity for a loving, safe and healthy home. With an adoption shelter, a feline dedicated veterinary clinic, retail shop and café, the Society relies entirely on the kindness of donations, legacies and memberships for its day-to-day existence and to ensure they can provide the highest levels of care to cats in need. Visit [www.catprotection.com.au](http://www.catprotection.com.au)**

