



YOUR SENIOR CAT

As your cat ages you may find that new behavior challenges arise. Patience, understanding, and remaining positive will help keep your relationship strong as you navigate these changes.

House soiling

After many years of your cat reliably using the litter box to eliminate you may start to notice accidents in the house. Older cats can develop medical issues that can lead to accidents. One concern could be a urinary tract infection. Your cat may also be experiencing some cognitive changes which could lead to your cat heading toward the litter box, becoming disoriented, and forgetting to eliminate in the box. Finally, your cat may be having trouble getting around due to arthritis, making a normal task such as climbing into the litter box or going up and down stairs to access the litter box more challenging. Speak with your veterinarian about possible medical concerns that may be contributing to house soiling behaviors.

- Properly clean the soiled areas using an appropriate pet cleaner (see our online handout, "Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains").
- Make sure the litter boxes are easy to access. If your cat has trouble getting into the litter box, provide one with shorter sides.
- Stay positive! Punishment will not stop your senior cat from house soiling and can cause stress and distrust.

Aggression

As your cat ages you may find they don't handle change as well or that their tolerance level toward people and other animals has decreased. This may occur when petting or playing. Your cat may start to hiss, growl, swat, or bite in situations where previously there were no issues. Speak with your veterinarian about possible medical concerns that may be contributing to the aggression. It is best to manage the situation by minimizing handling, allowing the cat to interact on their terms, and giving your cat dedicated time and space away from people and other animals.

Reduction in mobility

As your cat ages you may notice a hesitation to jump on things that were normally easy to get on. This could be due to arthritis, especially if you notice discomfort or pain when your cat attempts to jump up. Speak with your veterinarian about possible medical concerns that may be contributing to the issue. If you feed your cat up high, try offering them the food on the ground. You can also provide cat towers, which have levels lower to the ground, to continue to provide your cat with a place to get up high.

Changes in activity level

As your cat ages you may find their activity level changes:

- Their activity level may decrease, resulting in fewer interactions with people and toys. Instead of participating in their normal activities, they may sleep more often or hang out in a back

room away from all the activity. You may also see a reduction in eating or grooming themselves.

- Their activity level may increase, resulting in them being restless or constantly at your side, vocalizing for attention.

Things to do:

- Speak with your veterinarian about any medical concerns that may be contributing to the changes in activity.
- If your cat is disengaging, be sure to give them time every day to be alone and decompress.
- Encourage your cat to engage with new toys, like a wand toy or puzzle toys (see our online handout, "Cat Toys and How to Use Them").
- Teach your cat a new behavior using clicker training (see our online handout, "Cat Clicker Training").

Changes in sleep patterns

As your cat ages you may find their sleep patterns change. They may sleep more often during the day but then excessively vocalize during the night. This may be the result of confusion related to cognitive changes. Speak with your veterinarian about medical concerns that may be contributing to any changes in your cat's sleep patterns.

Hearing and vision loss

You may find that as your cat ages they don't respond to loud noises or their name anymore. Your cat may begin to have issues with their hearing or develop cognitive changes that make them disoriented when they enter a new space. Your cat may also suddenly run into things or misjudge a jump. This could be due to the loss of some or all their vision.

Speak with your veterinarian about possible medical concerns. If your cat is suffering from hearing loss, vision loss, or cognitive changes then you will want to make some adjustments in how you manage your cat, like going to get them when you need them to come. Make sure not to startle your cat when approaching, as this could result in increased fearfulness.

Cats quickly learn routines, including the layout of the house, and can still manage to find their everyday items even if experiencing a loss in vision. To help reduce any stress or confusion, keep items like bowls and litter boxes in the same locations.

Training

Training is important for cats of all ages. For older cats, it can keep their minds sharp. For all cats, we recommend clicker training (see our online handout, "Cat Clicker Training"). This is a great form of positive reinforcement training that can help teach your cat manners, help a fearful cat become more confident, and relieve stress.

Resources

If you have any questions regarding your senior cat's behavior, we offer a free Pet Behavior Helpline. You can sign up for an appointment online at <http://ddfl.org/behavior-help>.