

What are the health *issues?*

EVERY CAT is unique but certain health problems tend to arise at certain stages of life, as the following chart shows. The list is not exhaustive, as this is an area where more data is required. Hopefully, **WellCat for life** will contribute much of that data to improve the health of future generations of cats. For information on many of these problems go to www.fabcats.org



Kitten (birth to 6 months)

For Tigger and his contemporaries, this is the time to check for problems that may have been present from birth, such as a cleft palate or hernia, and to discuss lifestyle choices, diet, identification and any behavioural issues. Kittens can be neutered from four months old.



Junior (7 months to 2 years)

Common health issues in Sugar's age group include infectious diseases and problems related to hunting, fighting and trauma. Young cats can develop certain life-threatening conditions, such as heart disease, and are masters at hiding the signs of illness. Early detection is important. A priority is your cat's first booster to keep immunity high. After neutering, cats are prone to putting on weight – talk to your vet about your cat's optimum weight and aim to maintain it.



Prime (3 years to 6 years)

Problems encountered at Rosie's stage of life include obesity, dental disease, cystitis, intestinal diseases, heart disease and behavioural problems. Most outdoor cats in their prime are still keen hunters, so parasite control is important.



Mature (7 years to 10 years)

Mature cats such as Nemo start to face an increased risk of 'older cat' problems such as diabetes, kidney disease, high blood pressure, hyperthyroidism and cancer. Close monitoring is important, focusing on common signs of disease in older cats such as poor coat condition, vomiting, diarrhoea, constipation, reduced appetite, weight loss, change in thirst, inappetence, changes in urination, reduced locomotion, reduced hearing or vision, reduced awareness and interaction, agitation or night-time yowling. Obesity peaks in cats aged between six and eight years, so extra care needs to be taken with feeding.



Senior (11 years to 14 years)

George is at an age when several things can go wrong at the same time. However, many diseases are treatable so don't simply put any changes in your cat down to 'old age' and ignore them! Problems such as a hyperactive thyroid, high blood pressure, kidney disease, diabetes and cancer are more likely to occur as cats age. Cats can also suffer from the equivalent of senile dementia, although signs can be confused with other diseases so it is important to establish a proper diagnosis. Older cats with failing kidneys may not drink sufficiently and can become dehydrated and constipated. They may spend less time grooming, leading to coat and skin problems or brittle overgrown claws, and may eat less because their sense of smell is not so acute or they have teeth or gum problems. It is vital to monitor even more closely for the signs outlined above for 'mature cats'. Arthritis is also common in the senior group – the mobility questionnaire on page 13 will help in its recognition.



Geriatric (15 years+)

It is an achievement to be proud of if your cat has reached this life stage – congratulations! For cats like Chinarose, just as for people in their mid-70s onwards, checks need to be more thorough and more frequent to catch any problems as they develop. All the health issues described for the senior cat are even more likely to occur in the geriatric cat. Lavish lots of TLC and make life as easy as possible for your cat (see page 28).