

## Which Cat Breeds Live the Longest?

A recent study that ranked domestic cats by life expectancy revealed surprising insights. Explore which breeds top the list, which ones fall short, and how factors like breed, lifestyle and breeding practices can impact your cat's lifespan.

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A recent study of the life expectancy of domestic cat breeds in the U.K. revealed that the hairless Sphynx is the shortest lived, with an average lifespan of under 7 years
- The study showed that poor breeding is linked to common birth defects in cats (e.g., heart defects, eye disease, abnormally weak muscles), and unfortunately, the Sphynx is a prime example of the type of breeding that has created a popular but unhealthy pet
- Sphynx cats are prone to hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and a neurological disease called hereditary myopathy that affects muscle function
- The first Sphynx was the result of a natural genetic mutation — in 1966 in Canada, a strange little hairless male kitten named Prune was born; Prune's offspring were also hairless, and a new cat breed was born
- Interestingly, this cat's hairlessness translates to more — not less — upkeep and maintenance; personality-wise, the Sphynx is an extroverted feline who demands almost as much attention as the average dog

Recently, a team of veterinary pathobiologists from the U.K. and Taiwan developed a life expectancy chart for approximately 8,000 domestic cat breeds. The researchers published their findings in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*,<sup>1</sup> and offered some insights into why some cats live longer than others.

### Longest and Shortest-Lived Cats Revealed

The scientists conducted their study based on prior research and anecdotal evidence suggesting that some cat breeds live longer or shorter lifespans than average. Their goal was to categorize the life expectancy of a large number of domestic cats using a chart showing average lifespans.

First, they analyzed death certificate data from the U.K. VetCompass program for 2019 to 2021 and compiled the details of 7,936 cat deaths (in the U.K. only). Then the team used that information to create charts listing cat breeds in order of life expectancy, from the longest-lived to the shortest.

The charts or "life tables" are used to calculate the remaining life expectancy and probability of death across a range of age groups in a given population. Life tables have been used in human health for years and have only recently started to be used for dog and cat populations. According to the researchers:

*"Understanding typical remaining lifespan can also support owners and veterinarians when making complex decisions about the best treatment option to protect a cat's overall wellbeing."*<sup>2</sup>

Some of their findings:

- Overall life expectancy was 11.74 years, with females living on average 16 months longer than males
- The Burmese and Birman breeds were the longest-lived, with a life expectancy of over 14 years, followed by crossbreeds at 11.9 years, and Siamese at 11.7 years
- The Sphynx was the shortest-lived breed, with a life expectancy of just 6.68 years
- Purebred cats lived shorter lives than crossbreeds
- Lifestyle impacts the longevity of cats, for example, overweight and underweight cats had shorter lives

The researchers also noted that breeding practices impact life expectancy; poor breeding has been linked to common birth defects in cats (and dogs), such as heart defects, eye disease, and abnormally weak muscles. Sadly, the Sphynx is a prime example of the type of breeding that has created a popular but unhealthy pet.

## Origins of the Sphynx Breed

For the record, although many Sphynx cats look virtually naked and many people believe they are, these kitties are actually covered in a coat of fuzzy down that is very soft to the touch.

Believe it or not, the first Sphynx cat was the result of a natural genetic mutation.<sup>3</sup> The name and appearance of the Sphynx give the impression this is an ancient, exotic breed, but that's not the case. The Sphynx originated in Canada in 1966, when a strange little hairless male kitten named Prune was born. Prune's offspring were also hairless, and a new cat breed was born.

The name Sphynx was chosen as a reflection of the breed's sleek lines and resemblance to the iconic Egyptian statues. This breed has an unmistakable look, with a wedge-shaped head, enormous eyes and ears, and a well-muscled neck. Sphynx also have muscular bodies, with a barrel chest and a full, round abdomen. The tail looks a bit like a whip, tapered at the tip, and some have a fluff of fur on the end. Sphynx can have the same markings as other breeds (e.g., points, spots, tabby, etc.).

Sphynx have thicker paw pads than other cats, which makes them look at times like they're walking on little cushions. They also have incredibly agile toes they use like fingers to pick up things of interest to them.

## No Hair Means Extra Care

It's important to realize that a lack of hair doesn't mean these cats are low maintenance. It seems counterintuitive, but the Sphynx actually requires more upkeep than a cat with a full coat. An excellent place to start is by feeding a **nutritionally optimal, species-specific fresh food diet**, which will provide the foundation for healthy skin and overall vitality.

Sphynx have a very high metabolism and eat more than other cats. They have a potbelly, which is a normal and healthy characteristic for the breed. The higher quality the diet a Sphynx is fed (especially focusing on optimizing omega-3 fatty acid intake) the less oil his skin will produce. Sphynx skin is naturally oily, and poor-quality food can cause oils to build up more quickly, leading to skin problems, over-production of ear wax, and infections.

Also, because there's no hair to absorb the oil, Sphynx cats tend to leave behind little stains on surfaces they lie on. To control oil buildup, the Sphynx needs a bath every week or two with a gentle, organic, non-toxic cat shampoo.

Sphynx cats tend to get ear infections, so it's very important to keep the ears clean (free of excess wax) and dry, along with the area between the toes where grime accumulates.

These kitties can also develop sunburn and skin damage from too much sun exposure, and since they have trouble conserving body heat, they need help staying warm in cold climates and during the winter. Cat sweaters made from natural, organic, soft fabrics can help keep them warm without irritating the skin.

## Potential Health Problems To Be Aware Of

As discussed earlier, the Sphynx is prone to certain health conditions, including **hypertrophic cardiomyopathy**, and a neurological disease called hereditary myopathy, which affects muscle function. It's a good idea to have these kitties screened regularly for heart issues, which tend to develop with age.

Sphynx can also develop periodontal disease, so regular tooth brushing and frequent dental screenings with a veterinarian are needed.

## More Like a Dog Than a Cat

Unlike their more introverted fur-covered cousins, Sphynx cats are social to the point that they don't do well when left alone for long stretches.

The Sphynx only looks intense and feisty, when in fact, these kitties are not only outgoing and friendly (often more like dogs), but they also crave attention from their humans and love to snuggle.

They tend to follow their humans around the house, curious about everything they're doing and wanting to lend a paw. They're also known to greet guests and entertain them with head butts and a bit of flirting. Sphynx cats can also be quite vocal.

These kitties are also little bundles of energy and incredibly agile, much like monkeys. They can easily balance atop doors, bookshelves, and human shoulders. They love attention, so the Sphynx will often do whatever it takes to be entertaining and bit of a show-off.

Bottom line, in terms of personality, Sphynx cats are highly intelligent, curious, and mischievous, making them a bit of a handful at times!

If, despite their often-short lifespans, this unique breed piques your interest, contact one of the many purebred cat rescues found worldwide, and check out the **Rescue Me! Sphynx Facebook page**.

## Sources and References

[Phys.org, May 10, 2024 \(PDF\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Teng, K. et al. Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, May 7, 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> [CTV News, Sci-Tech News, May 8, 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Cat Fanciers' Association](#)