

# The Curly-Haired Cat Breed People Are Going Nuts Over

He'll cuddle on your lap, make you laugh at his crazy antics and is intelligent enough to open drawers (puzzle toys are a good stand-in). Plus, he'll get along well with people, kids and other pets. Which is fortunate, because everyone wants to touch his unusual coat.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The Selkirk Rex is a relatively new breed of curly-haired cat that resulted from a spontaneous genetic mutation
- Selkirk Rexes are known as “poodle cats” and the “cats in sheep’s clothing” because of their three-layer, wooly coats
- Selkirk Rex cats are one of only four breeds with a curly-haired mutation, which is distinct due to its autosomal dominant inheritance and unique curl phenotype
- Despite their unique curly coats, Selkirk Rex cats require minimal grooming, as frequent brushing can reduce the curl in their fur
- The Selkirk Rex breed tends to be affectionate, playful and attentive to their owners and require only typical grooming to care for their unique coats

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Have you ever seen a cat with curly hair? It does happen, occasionally, due to a charming genetic mutation — a hallmark of the Selkirk Rex cat breed. Even their whiskers are curly.

The Selkirk Rex is a new breed; it's only been around since about 1987, when a breeder of Persian cats, Jeri Newman, adopted a feral kitten with curly hair. She named the kitten Agnes DiPesto (aka “Pest”), after the curly-haired receptionist on the TV series Moonlighting, and all Selkirk Rexes can now be traced back to her.<sup>1</sup>

Newman named the resulting breed Selkirk, after her stepfather, making it the only cat breed named after a person. It turned out that DiPesto had a new rex gene that is dominant for a curly coat (unlike the gene for the **Devon Rex** and Cornish Rex breeds).

These medium- to large-sized cats are relatively heavy-boned and sturdy and can have short or long hair. They're quickly becoming a much-adored breed not only because of their unusual curly coats but also because of their friendly, patient personalities.

## Selkirk Rex — Playful, Cuddly and Smart

The Selkirk Rex breed tends to be affectionate and likes attention. They'll cuddle in your lap while also making you laugh with their playful antics. Selkirk Rex are intelligent and can learn how to open drawers and cabinets (puzzle toys may be a good stand-in).

They're also known for being easy-going, which means they get along well with children, dogs and other cats. As VetStreet put it:<sup>2</sup>

*“True to his parent breeds, the Selkirk is inclined to be patient, loving and tolerant. He is playful and likes to cuddle, but he's not so active or demanding of attention that he will wear you out.*

*Luckily, he is outgoing, because everyone he meets wants to touch his unusual coat. This is a sweet cat who is attentive to his people.”*

If you're looking for a cat that's affectionate and tolerant of being held and pet, yet still likes to explore and play, a Selkirk Rex may be the right cat for you. Grooming-wise, Selkirk Rex do not require special care beyond other cats.

While there are some reports that their coats get greasy easily, requiring bathing, the Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) suggests brushing of either short- or long-hair Selkirk Rexes “should not be as frequent if the curly coat is to be maintained.”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, brush sparingly, or you may brush out the curl. And if you're bothered by “bad hair day” jokes, this breed may not be for you.

*“This breed is not for the uptight organized pet owner,” CFA notes. “These cats' humans must be prepared to take all kinds of hair jokes such as: ‘The cat with the bad hair day.’ ‘Why don't you groom your cat,’ or ‘This cat is our dip and dry variety.’ Such comments lead to the hidden secret: they make you laugh.*

*Although they may not always win the beauty pageant, they always win the title of Miss Congeniality.”<sup>4</sup>*

## Do Selkirk Rexes Have Any Specific Health Problems?

Selkirk Rexes may have genetics from Persians, **exotic shorthairs** or British shorthairs, which means they may be at risk of the following health problems:<sup>5</sup>

- **Polycystic kidney disease** — This congenital condition causes cystic degeneration of the kidneys and kidney dysfunction. Symptoms typically appear between 7 and 10 years of age and include increased thirst and urination, anemia, weakness, hypertension, loss of appetite, vomiting and more.

Most of the symptoms of kidney failure are also common in other diseases, which makes accurate diagnosis really important. Routine blood work can detect a chronic kidney problem at an early stage. For cats 7 and older, tests for kidney function should be performed at least annually, with every six months being ideal for optimal monitoring.

- **Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM)** — The word "hypertrophic" means thickened, so this is a condition in which the walls and ventricles of the heart become much too thick, or hypertrophied. It can be an

inherited disease.

Cats with mild disease often have no obvious symptoms, but in a cat with significant HCM, there can be respiratory distress caused by congestive heart failure or leg paralysis due to a blood clot.

- **Hip dysplasia** — This hereditary defect of the hip socket may cause your cat to avoid jumping or have pain with movement.

## The Cat in Sheep's Clothing

Selkirk Rexes are sometimes referred to as the cat in sheep's clothing because of their “wooly” three-layer coats. Poodle cats is another popular nickname. Interestingly, a 2012 study confirmed that the Selkirk Rex is in fact a distinct breed that originated from a spontaneous mutation.

“Unlike the earlier and well-established Cornish and Devon Rex breeds with curly-coat mutations, the Selkirk Rex mutation is suggested as autosomal dominant and has a different curl phenotype,” the researchers wrote.<sup>6</sup> The Selkirk Rex is one of only four types of curly-haired cats.

If you decide to add one of these endearing felines to your family, check your local rescue organizations first. A “poodle cat” that's meant for you may be just waiting to be your new best friend.

### Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Daily Mail June 22, 2013](#)

<sup>2, 5</sup> [Vetstreet, Selkirk Rex July 10, 2011](#)

<sup>3, 4</sup> [Cat Fanciers' Association, Selkirk Rex \(Archived\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [J Hered. 2012 Jul 26;103\(5\):727-733](#)

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