

Mistakes Owners Make That Shorten Pets' Lives

Well-meaning owners sometimes forget what makes sense for their pet's health. Especially with cats who can easily live into their upper teens and early 20s, there are five things that you can either do right, or if ignored, sacrifice your pet's natural ability to live out a long life.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There's no official mathematical formula for comparing a kitty's age to a human's, probably because cats don't age in the same linear fashion we do
- Given the right care, many cats can live comfortably into their late teens or early 20s
- To give your kitty a long healthy life, make sure she's never allowed outside unsupervised, and feed a nutritionally balanced, biologically appropriate diet
- Also keep her lean and fit, protect her from over-vaccination and provide her with periodic detoxification to reduce her toxin load
- Your kitty will do best with a high moisture diet consisting of excellent-quality meat, moderate amounts of high-quality animal fat and a very low percentage of carbohydrates. This means absolutely, positively NO KIBBLE

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Have you ever wondered how old your cat is in human years? There's no official mathematical formula for comparing a kitty's age to a human's, probably because cats don't age in the same linear fashion we do. Like most animals, your kitty zips through kittenhood and the teen years much faster than a human. However, over years of observation, the veterinary community has established an age chart that shows feline ages and their approximate human equivalents:¹

Life Stage	Cat Age	Human Equivalent
Kitten (Birth to 6 months)	0 to 1 month	0 to 1 year
	2 to 3 months	2 to 4 years
	4 months	6 to 8 years
	6 months	10 years
Junior (7 months to 2 years)	7 months	12 years
	12 months	15 years
	18 months	21 years
	2 years	24 years
Prime (3 to 6 years)	3	28
	4	32
	5	36
	6	40
Mature (7 to 10 years)	7	44
	8	48
	9	52
	10	56
Senior (11 to 14 years)	11	60
	12	64
	13	68
	14	72
Geriatric 15+ years	15	76
	16	80
	17	84
	18	88
	19	92
	20	96
	21	100

It's not uncommon for well cared-for cats to live into their late teens and early 20s these days. Unlike purebred dogs, the majority of kitties haven't been selectively bred, which dilutes the inherited traits that cause genetic disease. Indeed, most diseases seen in cats today are lifestyle-related, which means that as your kitty's guardian, you have a great deal of control over how well and how long she lives.

Top Five Dos and Don'ts for a Vibrantly Healthy, Long-Lived Cat

1. **DON'T allow your cat outdoors unsupervised** — While it's true living indoors isn't an entirely natural situation for your cat, letting him run around loose outside presents much more risk to his health and longevity. Kitties with free access to the outdoors are much more likely to be exposed to disease. They can also be inadvertently poisoned, or become prey for dogs and wild predators.

Fighting among outdoor cats is common, and someone has to come out the loser. Usually it's the kitty who doesn't live outside full time and hasn't honed his street-fighting skills.

Cats with access to the outdoors in winter are apt to look for warmth in hazardous places, like the wheel well or up inside the hood of a parked vehicle. Kitties have also been known to dart out into traffic after being startled or because another animal is chasing them. It's best to keep your cat indoors except for walks outside on a harness and leash, or inside a secure enclosure like a catio (cat patio).

2. **DO feed a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet** — Cats in the wild thrive by consuming fresh, living whole foods. Their natural diet is moisture-dense because prey animals are about 70% water, plus it's high in protein and minerals, and moderate in fat.

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Feed a nutritionally balanced raw diet (homemade or commercial) designed for cats, since raw food contains the highest amounts of natural nutrients. Since an unbalanced diet can create so many health problems for pets, it's critically important that homemade diets are balanced.

If you prepare homemade meals and cook the meat, even gently, it's a good idea to supplement taurine to insure your kitty is getting an adequate amount. There are no known reports of taurine overdoses, so supplementation is relatively safe. It's not recommended to feed fish to cats for a number of reasons, with the exception of sardines packed in water and perhaps some wild caught salmon in rotation with other proteins.

3. **DO keep kitty lean and fit** — Extra weight triggers harmful inflammatory processes throughout your cat's body. That's why overweight cats develop the same conditions overweight people do (e.g., diabetes, arthritis, kidney disease) — conditions that affect both quality of life and longevity.

A biologically appropriate diet and portion control at every meal is the first step in keeping your cat at a healthy weight. Step two is to make sure kitty stays physically active, not just to keep her lean, but also to keep her muscles, joints, ligaments and organ systems in excellent condition.

Make sure your cat has things to climb on, like a multi-level cat tree or tower. Invest in a laser toy, and when considering other diversions, think like a hunter and choose toys and activities that appeal to your cat's stalking instinct.

Don't overlook old standbys, either, like dragging a piece of string across the floor in view of your cat. Ping-pong balls are another oldie but goodie, along with bits of paper rolled into balls, and pretty much any light object that can be made to move fast and in unanticipated ways.

Walking your cat in nice weather using a harness is recommended. This gets him out into the fresh air, stimulates his senses and gets his paws in direct contact with the ground. As mentioned earlier, an alternative is a safe, fully enclosed porch or patio area that prevents your cat from getting out and other animals from getting in.

4. **DON'T over-vaccinate** — If you're a committed cat parent who is diligent about keeping kitty indoors and never allowing him to roam loose outside, in the vast majority of cases, the only immunization he'll ever need is a kitten vaccine against panleukopenia, calicivirus, herpes and rabies.

Once your cat is immunized against these diseases, there is no benefit to re-vaccination, but there IS a risk of adverse side effects each time a vaccine is given. Find a holistic veterinarian to care for your pet, especially when it comes to vaccinations. When considering vaccines for your cat, follow these criteria:

- Your cat is healthy. If she has allergies, endocrine issues, organ dysfunction, cancer (or is a cancer survivor) or another medical issue she is not a candidate to receive vaccines
- The vaccine is for a life-threatening disease (this eliminates most on the list immediately)

- Your cat has the opportunity to be exposed to the disease (indoor kitties have little to no exposure)
- The vaccine is considered both effective and safe (most aren't)

Under no circumstances should a cat who has had a previous vaccine reaction of any kind be vaccinated. If you do vaccinate your pet, ask your holistic veterinarian to provide a homeopathic vaccine detox.

5. **DO consider a detoxification protocol for your cat** — There are many different ways our pets are exposed to toxins and chemicals in today's world. There's radiation, environmental pesticides, lawn and home chemicals, electromagnetic fields (EMFs), flame-retardants, bisphenol A (BPA), hydrocarbons and heavy metals.

There are also synthetic hormones and antibiotic residues in the animal meat used in pet food, as well as toxic preservatives, mycotoxins in grain-based kibble and allergenic ingredients. Unfiltered drinking water containing fluoride, chlorine and heavy metals can be another source of toxins. And then there are the chemicals in flea and tick preventives, plus vaccines, dewormers and other drugs such as antibiotics and steroids that are routinely prescribed by veterinarians.

If you're wondering if your own pet is carrying a toxin load, sadly, there's no doubt she is. The truth is that virtually every pet has measurable amounts of chemicals in their body, because they walk through them, sleep on them, breathe them, drink and eat them and veterinarians prescribe and inject them.

If kitty is regularly exposed to toxins such flea and tick preventives, it's best to have a week of detoxification after those chemicals are applied. If she has seasonal exposure to toxins, say, in the warmer months of the year, offering seasonal detoxification makes sense.

If your cat has had an acute episode of a toxic exposure — perhaps she nibbled a toxic plant or has recently undergone antibiotic or steroid therapy — consider doing a focused, short-term detoxification protocol. Almost every pet can benefit from a targeted detox program, depending on his or her age, lifestyle, diet and chemical exposure. Talk with your **integrative or holistic vet** about what type of protocol, dosages and duration is best for your animal companion.

Sources and References

[PetMD, December 19, 2024.](#)

¹ [International Cat Care, How to Tell Your Cat's Age in Human Years \(Archived\)](#)
