HEALTH & SAFETY

Caring for a Senior Cat: Vet Visits, Warning Signs and Comfort

When a cat counts as senior, how often to see the vet, the kidney, thyroid and dental signs to watch for, arthritis and memory changes, and simple changes that keep an older cat comfortable at home.

By Catt County Cat Nippers • Reviewed October 27, 2026 • 9 min read • 8 cited sources

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The short answer

A cat is a senior from about 11 years old, and many show the first age-related changes between 7 and 10. Senior cats should see the vet every 6 months, and cats over 15 every 4 months, as the Feline Veterinary Medical Association (FelineVMA, formerly the American Association of Feline Practitioners) advises.

At home, watch for changes in weight, appetite, thirst, litter habits, jumping and behavior. Cats hide illness well, so these small changes are often the first sign of kidney disease, an overactive thyroid, dental pain or arthritis. Treat none of them as “just old age” until your vet has checked.

AT A GLANCE

- Arthritis is very common in older cats but often goes unnoticed, because cats rarely limp: they just do less.
- Some older cats develop cognitive dysfunction syndrome, the cat version of dementia.

Senior cat care at a glance

LIFE STAGES AND VET CHECKUPS FOR OLDER CATS

Age	Life stage	Vet checkups	Good to know
7–10 years	Mature adult	Regular checkups, with screening for kidney and dental disease	Many cats begin to show age-related changes between 7 and 10 (Cornell).
10–15 years	Senior, from about 11	Every 6 months	Kidney disease affects up to 40% of cats over 10 (Cornell).
Over 15 years	Super senior	Every 4 months	Kidney disease affects up to 80% of cats over 15 (Cornell).
Any age, with a long-term illness	Any stage	As often as your vet advises	Cats with ongoing health problems may need checkups more often (Feline VMA).

From the 2021 AAHA/FelineVMA Feline Life Stage Guidelines, the Feline Veterinary Medical Association, International Cat Care and the Cornell Feline Health Center. A general guide, not medical advice: your veterinarian sets the schedule for each cat.

When is a cat a senior?

Cat-health groups draw the line at about the same age. The 2021 AAHA/FelineVMA Feline Life Stage Guidelines call cats 7 to 10 years old mature adults and cats over 10 seniors. The Feline Veterinary Medical Association says a cat becomes a senior at 11, and International Cat Care counts cats as mature from 7, senior from 11 to 14 and super senior from 15.

Cats age at their own pace. The Cornell Feline Health Center notes that many cats begin to show age-related physical changes between 7 and 10, and most do by 12.

In human years, International Cat Care counts a cat's first two years as 24 and each year after as 4, so a 16–year-old cat is about 80 in human terms.

This quick sheet is the start of the guide. Still to read: How often a senior cat should see the vet, Weight and appetite changes, Kidney, thyroid and dental warning signs and 6 more sections, plus the Senior Cat Care Planner. Read it all free when you join our pet health emails at cattcountycatnippers.org/articles/caring-for-a-senior-cat

Sources

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