

Tips for a Healthy Cat

An ASPCA Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital veterinarian offers advice to prevent the most common cat complaints.

Sneezing

- If a cat has a discharge from his nose he may have trouble smelling his food and stop eating. Offer different foods, preferably ones with a strong odor, or give him chicken, sardines, tuna or room-temperature chicken soup. If there is a heavy discharge from the nose, be sure to clean the cat's face well to keep nasal passages open.
- Do not give aspirin.
- Add 1/3 capsule Echinacea, a human herbal preparation, to the food three times a day for two weeks.
- Good nursing care and chicken soup should help the animal recover in 7 to 14 days. If the discharge lasts longer or the cat won't eat, visit the veterinarian.

Dehydration

- Canned food usually has more than 75 percent moisture; dry food usually has 15 percent moisture. This is why cats eating all dry or a mix of dry and canned food tend to drink more water. In fact, older cats may develop kidney disease from being dehydrated.
- If you are feeding all dry food and change to canned, you may see your cat stop drinking as much water. This is a good sign that the cat is more hydrated.

Obesity

- Any weight loss program is best done under the supervision of a veterinarian.
- Play together actively 20 minutes a day.
- First, feed only twice a day as opposed to free-choice feeding. Then, reduce the total amount of food in increments of 10 percent a month.
- Monitor your cat's weight weekly. He shouldn't lose more than 1 percent to 2 percent of his weight in a month.
- Feed a high-quality cat food. Avoid "lite" foods; they have reduced protein and fats — the nutrients cats, especially overweight cats, need.

Elimination

- It's important to check (and clean) the litter box daily to make sure your cat is passing stool and urinating.
- If your cat does not urinate daily, he may have feline lower urinary tract disease and may be blocked. This is an emergency and you must take the cat to your veterinarian immediately for evaluation and treatment.
- Do so also if you see the cat going to the litter box more frequently than usual, see blood in his urine, or note that he does not pass stool for a few days.
- If your cat is having difficulty passing stool, apply a one-inch strip of Vaseline on his paw or give cat laxative (in the mouth) two to three times daily.

Diarrhea

- For simple diarrhea, try an herbal remedy called slippery elm. Anita Frazier's book, "The New Natural Cat" (Penguin Group, New York, NY, 1990) is an excellent sourcebook for preparing this and other home remedies.

- If the cat doesn't improve in a week, bring a fecal sample to your veterinarian to determine if the diarrhea is caused by intestinal parasites.

Strings

- Many cats are attracted to string and similar materials, but the situation becomes dire when it's swallowed, gets caught under the tongue and continues to be pulled down into the intestines. Since you risk getting bitten by looking under the tongue yourself, check for signs of the cat not wanting to eat and vomiting.
- If you suspect your cat may have swallowed a string, visit your veterinarian immediately.
- Don't let your cat play with string or string-like toys without supervision, and don't leave needles, threads, yarns or shoelaces around the house.

Hair balls

- When a cat grooms herself, the ingested hair may get stuck in her stomach, resulting in vomiting. Other times, the hair remains in the esophagus, creating irritation and coughing.
- To help decrease the amount of hair your cat swallows, brush or comb her daily. In addition, give her a hair ball medicine or put some Vaseline on the top part of her paw once or twice a week. The cat will lick it off as part of her grooming ritual.

Injuries from falls

- At The ASPCA we see an alarming number of cats who unintentionally fall from high windows. Keeping your cat inside with windows closed or blocking open windows with good-quality screens may be a lifesaver for your cat.