

What is good healthcare for cats?



Whether an independent soul or your constant companion, your feline friend needs good care to thrive. Here's a look at what that means—in the veterinary hospital and at home.

At the hospital:

> **ANNUAL WELLNESS EXAMINATIONS.** Cats can often mask how they're feeling—especially if they're under the weather. That's why it's critical to have your cat examined by a veterinarian every year. Older cats or those with behavioral or medical conditions may need to be seen more frequently.

> **DIAGNOSTIC TESTS.** Even if your cat seems healthy on the outside, an underlying problem may be lurking on the inside. Fecal exams, blood and urine tests, and other tests that screen for infectious diseases, such as feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV), may be required, based on your cat's age and lifestyle.

> **VACCINATIONS.** Even if your cat spends most or all of its time indoors, it may still be at risk for certain preventable viral diseases. Your veterinarian will assess your cat's risk and develop a vaccine protocol tailored specifically to its needs.

> **PARASITE CONTROL.** Cats are prime targets for parasites such as fleas and ticks, not to mention the ones we can't see like heartworms and intestinal parasites. Your veterinarian will discuss the best options to keep your cat free and clear of these dangerous pests.

> **DENTAL CARE.** Dental disease isn't just for dogs—cats are susceptible, too. Your veterinarian will examine your cat's mouth and determine if further action, like a full oral health assessment and treatment under anesthesia, is needed to keep your cat's teeth and gums in good shape.

> **BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT.** Just as your cat needs to be physically healthy, it needs to be emotionally healthy, too. Your veterinarian will ask questions about your cat's environment—whether there are other pets or children in the house and how your cat interacts with them, what kind of playful activities your cat participates in, and so on—and inquire about any behavioral issues that need attention.

> **NUTRITIONAL COUNSELING.** From questions about the type of food you're feeding and the frequency of meals to assessing your cat's body condition score, your veterinarian will want as much information as possible to determine if any adjustments need to be made in your cat's feeding regimen in order to keep it in the most healthy weight range.

At home:

> **NUTRITION.** Your veterinarian can determine the right type and amount of food your cat needs to stay in a healthy weight range, but the environment you provide for meals is important, too. Putting food in a quiet area or offering it in toys like food balls or puzzles can make mealtimes more enjoyable.

> **ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT.** Cats need to be in stimulating and comfortable surroundings, so be sure to provide plenty of toys, hiding spots, scratching posts and elevated resting areas in your home. And don't forget the importance of one-on-one playtime with you. This will also give you the chance to watch for any changes in behavior.

> **LITTER BOX NEEDS.** Provide at least one litter box per cat—and in a multicat house, throw in one extra box for good measure. In general, cats prefer open litter boxes in a clean, quiet environment and unscented, clumping litter. Cats are also finicky, so it's best not to switch up the brand and type of litter you use. And be sure to scoop the box at least once a day.

> **GROOMING.** Cats are pretty good at keeping their coats in good condition, but they may need help when it comes to claw care. Your veterinarian can show you how to trim your cat's nails. Even better, provide scratching posts for a DIY option—and an enrichment activity, too.

> **TRAVEL AND CARRIER ACCEPTANCE.** It's no secret that most cats dislike carriers, but it doesn't have to be that way. Condition your cat to feel comfortable in a carrier at a young age, if possible. Leave the carrier out in the house and let your cat wander in and out of it. Also, take your cat on short rides in the car, so it won't always associate getting in the carrier with a trip to the veterinarian.