

How Old Is Old for Your Cat?

Have you ever wondered how old your pet is in human years? Cats don't mature in the same linear fashion we do. During certain times, they age faster. Here's how your vet guesses your pet's age, and 5 ways to help your pet beat the odds.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If you're wondering how old your cat is in human years, it's important to note that kitties mature very rapidly compared to us — especially from birth to around age 6
- With excellent care, many cats can live happy, healthy lives into their late teens or early 20s
- To help your kitty live to a ripe old age, feed a nutritionally balanced, biologically appropriate diet and keep her lean and physically fit with daily exercise
- It's also important to protect your cat from over-vaccination, and to keep him indoors while also providing him with safe, supervised adventures outside

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As cat guardians, it's natural for us to wonder how old our pets are in "people years." Unfortunately, there's no official feline-to-human age conversion formula — probably because cats don't mature in the same linear fashion we do. The veterinary community has established a life stage 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

As you can see from the chart, like most animals, your kitty advances through kittenhood and the teen years much faster than a human. A 6-month-old cat is the equivalent of a 10-year-old child, and a 2-year-old kitty is about 24 in human years. At around 5 or 6, the pace slows down a bit, so a 10-year-old cat is approximately 56 in human years.

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.

5 Tips to Help Your Cat Have a Long, Healthy Life

1. **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.

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.

My recommendation is to 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

ensure your kitty is getting an adequate amount. There are no known reports of taurine overdoses, so supplementation is relatively safe. I don't recommend feeding fish to cats for a number of reasons, with the exception of sardines packed in water and maybe some wild-caught salmon in rotation with other proteins.

2. **Keep your cat lean and well-conditioned** — 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.

I recommend eliminating food bowls and hiding meals in food-dispensing "mice" placed around the house, which forces your cat to go look for food, an activity that engages her brain, body and palate. It's also crucial to make sure she 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 activities, think like a hunter and choose toys that appeal to your cat's stalking instinct.

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

3. **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. When considering vaccines for your cat, follow these criteria:

- Your cat must be healthy. If she has allergies, endocrine issues, organ dysfunction, cancer (or is a cancer survivor), another medical issue or has had an adverse vaccine reaction in the past, she's 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 **integrative or holistic veterinarian** to provide a homeopathic vaccine detox.

4. **Don't allow kitty outdoors unsupervised** — While it's true living indoors isn't a 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 isn't much of a street fighter.

Cats allowed to roam outdoors in winter often look for warmth in hazardous places, like in 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. I recommend keeping your cat indoors except for walks outside on a harness and leash, or inside a **secure enclosure**.

5. **Consider a detoxification protocol** — 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 potentially 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. 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, I recommend 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 — I recommend 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 kitty.

Sources and References

[The Conversation](#)

¹ [International Cat Care](#)
