

Little-Known Secrets That Can Help Your Pet Live Longer

Anyone who has a dearly-loved pet knows the time we have with them passes all too quickly. However, there are factors that influence how long dogs and cats live, and things you can do starting today to help stretch out the years with your cherished pet.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many of us who love pets wonder why dogs and cats live such relatively short lives
- Everything about your pet's life is accelerated — he goes from puppy or kitten to adult to senior in just a few years
- Dogs and cats also reach sexual maturity very quickly (six months for many), and the length of time from conception to birth is only about 60 to 65 days
- Factors that influence how quickly your pet ages include breeding, diet, vaccinations, environmental toxins, and sterilization
- The good news is that despite their relatively short lifespans, dogs and cats live in the moment and know how to make the most of every day. It's our job as loving guardians to make sure they are given that opportunity

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published October 24, 2015.

Most pet parents wonder from time to time why the lifespans of dogs and cats are so much shorter than ours. Anyone who has ever dearly loved a pet knows the time we have with them passes all too quickly.

Your beloved dog or cat packs a lot of living into his relatively few years on the planet. Everything about your pet's life, from his growth rate to his ability to learn, happens at warp speed.

For example, puppies and kittens are born toothless, but by week three their baby teeth are breaking through, and they're all in by about day 45. Most puppies and kittens have a full set of adult teeth by the time they reach six months of age.

Dogs and cats also reach sexual maturity very quickly (six months for many), and the length of time from conception to birth is only about 60 to 65 days. Litter size can reach a dozen, which makes sense for the survival of a species that doesn't have many years to reproduce.

Felines and canines also run hotter than we do. The average human body temperature is 98.6 degrees F, whereas the average temp for cats and dogs is about 100.5 to 102.5 degrees F. They also have a much higher metabolism than we do, and burn calories at about twice the rate.

Life on the fast-track means your dog's or cat's body must pack an extraordinary amount of work into a handful of years, which accelerates the aging process. That's why your pet is considered a senior at such a young age.

Some cats reach their golden years by age eight, and giant breed dogs by four or five. Sadly, the average lifespan of a dog the size of a Great Dane is just six to eight years.

Experts speculate that a combination of genetics, inbreeding, metabolism, and evolution holds the answer as to why a dog or cat's life span is so much shorter than a human's. While no one knows conclusively why pets live such short lives, many people know of dogs and cats that have lived much longer than expected.

Factors That Influence How Long a Dog Lives

Best-selling author Ted Kerasote has traveled the world researching the lifestyles and lifespans of dogs, and in his wonderful book, **Pukka's Promise: The Quest for Longer-Lived Dogs**, Ted outlines key variables that he and other experts agree contribute to the longevity of pet dogs. These include:

- Breeding
- Environmental pollutants
- Nutrition
- Spaying/neutering
- Vaccinations
- Freedom

Good Breeding + Healthy Lifestyle = Long-Lived Dog

Good breeding is also critically important. Dr. Jeff Bergin, an owner and breeder of Newfoundlands, emphasizes that breeding dogs in an ethical, holistic, and responsible manner helps extend their lives.

Dr. Bergin's dogs are extraordinarily long-lived for the breed, which has an average eight to ten year lifespan. His oldest Newfie reached the age of 17. Just as amazing was that the dog, Kate, was still ambulatory and able to move freely up until the day she passed away.

Wonderful breeders like Dr. Bergin do a number of things to insure the health, longevity, and quality of life of their dogs. First and foremost, they select dogs to breed based on their health.

Part of this effort involves building genetic diversity in their animals by incorporating new blood and new lines into their breeding program. Also, Dr. Bergin's dogs are bred only once or twice in their lifetime, with at least six years between litters. Other contributing factors to the Bergin Newfies' health and longevity:

- The dogs are raw fed both homemade meals and high-quality commercially available diets
- Dr. Bergin, who is a licensed animal chiropractor, performs regular manual orthopedic manipulation on all his dogs. As soon as a puppy can stand up she gets her first adjustment, and this continues throughout her life
- To preserve and protect their immune systems, the Newfies are titered rather than automatically vaccinated. The only re-vaccination they receive is the 3-year rabies required by law

In addition, every prospective owner of a Bergin Newfie must agree to a mandatory home visit, an extensive interview, and a commitment to feeding raw.

Raising a Long-Lived Cat

Many kitties today are, thankfully, living into their late teens and early 20s. Just as with dogs, a cat's longevity is often quite clearly linked to lifestyle and environment. Tips for keeping your cat in tip-top shape include:

- Feed a balanced, antioxidant-rich, and species-appropriate diet that includes omega-3 essential fats, such as krill oil. Moisture is your cat's best friend, so encourage adequate hydration by offering a variety of water bowls around the house or a drinking fountain, in addition to minimizing dry food.

If your cat is addicted to poor quality food, add a whole body supplement such as Standard Process Feline Whole Body Support.

- Keep your pet's body and mind active with regular exercise and mental stimulation (for example, puzzles and treat-release toys). Think of creative ways to enrich your cat's indoor environment and if your kitty never touches the earth's surface directly (most housecats don't), consider a grounding pad to help reduce the buildup of EMFs.
- Refuse or strictly limit vaccinations, veterinary drugs, and chemical pest preventives.
- Provide your kitty with a SAME (S-adenosylmethionine) supplement, and offer periodic detoxification with the herbs milk thistle and dandelion, as well as supergreen foods in the form of fresh "cat grass" or sunflower sprouts to nibble on. Chlorophyll, chlorella, or spirulina can also be offered in supplement form to enhance your cat's detoxification processes.
- Medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs) have been shown to be safe for cats and can improve brain energy metabolism and decrease the amyloid protein buildup that results in brain lesions in older pets. Coconut oil is a rich source of MCTs and may also reduce hairball issues. Give 1/4 teaspoon for every 10 pounds of body weight twice daily for basic MCT support, if your cat will voluntarily eat it.
- Set aside time each day to interact with your kitty. Make sure meals are provided on a consistent schedule, along with playtime and petting/lap time. If your cat tolerates being brushed or combed, work that into the daily schedule as well.

The good news is that despite their relatively short lifespans, dogs and cats live in the moment and know how to make the most of every day. It's our job as loving guardians to make sure they are given that opportunity.

Sources and References

[PetPlace, June 23, 2015 \(Archived\)](#)
