

# Can Be Fatal, Please Don't Ever Ignore These Red Flag Behaviors

If you see any of these symptoms don't pass 'go' or don't collect your \$200. Get your pet to care as soon as possible. They definitely spell trouble. An emergency. Keep this list in a handy place for quick reference.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If your cat isn't feeling well, it can often be difficult to know whether to wait a day or two, or jump in the car with her and drive to the nearest vet clinic
- The decision is especially hard because many feline symptoms can be similar for both mild, passing illnesses and life-threatening conditions
- There are 12 symptoms you should never ignore, because a wait-and-see approach is just not worth the risk
- Some symptoms of illness in cats can be handled by simply allowing them to run their course, for example, a single refused meal or the very occasional hairball
- Other symptoms can be so sudden, severe and frightening that you know immediately you need to get your pet to the vet or an emergency animal hospital

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published December 4, 2018.***

When something seems a little "off" with your cat but you can't quite pinpoint it, it can be difficult to know whether to wait a day or two to see if things change, or coax kitty into her carrier and head to your veterinarian. It can be an especially tough call when your furry family member's symptoms are common in disorders ranging from harmless to life-threatening.

To offer you some guidance, here's a list of symptoms that fall into the category of "**Do Not Ignore**." They may or may not mean your cat is seriously sick, but should be investigated right away by your veterinarian or an emergency animal clinic.

## 12 Do-Not-Ignore Symptoms in Cats

1. **Loss of appetite and/or weight loss** — Often, loss of appetite is the very first sign of an underlying illness in kitties. There can be many reasons your cat isn't hungry or refuses to eat, but not eating can begin to negatively impact his health within 24 hours. For kittens 6 months or younger, the issue is even more serious.

Weight loss is the result of a negative caloric balance, and it can be the consequence of anorexia (loss of appetite) or when an animal's body uses or eliminates essential dietary nutrients faster than they are replenished. Weight loss exceeding 10% of your cat's normal body weight is a big red flag. There can be several underlying causes, some of which are very serious.

2. **Loud crying** — You know better than anyone what "normal" is for your cat when it comes to the sounds she makes. For example, some kitties almost never vocalize, while others "talk" nonstop to their humans. Depending on her personality, you may also know the difference between kitty's happy sounds and her vocalizations when she's annoyed.

The sounds you don't want to ignore are yowls that come out of nowhere and for no apparent reason, and especially continuous loud crying, especially if she's also pacing or seems unable or unwilling to settle down. These are **signs she's in significant pain** and needs to see a veterinarian right away.

3. **Difficulty breathing** — A cat in respiratory distress will have labored breathing or shortness of breath that can occur when he breathes in or out. Breathing difficulties can mean that not enough oxygen is reaching his tissues. Additionally, cats with heart failure may not be able to pump enough blood to their muscles and other tissues.

Respiratory distress often goes hand-in-hand with a buildup of fluid in the lungs or chest cavity that leads to shortness of breath and coughing. If your pet has sudden undiagnosed breathing problems, he should see a veterinarian immediately.

4. **Fainting, collapsing** — When a cat collapses, it means she has suffered a sudden loss of strength that causes her to fall and be unable to get back up. If she also loses consciousness, she has fainted. Either of these situations is an emergency, even if kitty recovers quickly and seems normal again within seconds or minutes of the collapse.

All the reasons for fainting or collapsing are serious and require an immediate visit to your veterinarian. They include a potential problem with the nervous system (brain, spinal cord or nerves), the musculoskeletal system (bones, joints, muscles), the circulatory system (heart, blood vessels, blood) or the respiratory system (mouth, nose, throat, lungs).

5. **Eye problems** — If you notice anything unusual about your cat's eyes, take note — especially if kitty has a chronic condition that can affect the eyes. Monitor your pet for any sort of discharge from the eyes, excess tearing or color changes, especially red eyes.

If the white area of the eye turns bright red, it's a sign of inflammation or infection that signals one of several diseases involving the external eyelids, the third eyelid, the conjunctiva, cornea or sclera of the eye. Redness can also point to inflammation of structures inside the eye, eye socket disorders and also glaucoma.

Certain disorders of the eye can lead to blindness, so any significant change in the appearance of your pet's eyes should be investigated.

6. **Sudden bursts of energy, especially in an older cat** — "Hyperactivity" or sudden unexpected bursts of energy in an older cat is a sign he may have an overactive thyroid, especially if his appetite has also increased, yet he's losing weight. Frequent vomiting is another sign of hyperthyroidism, a too-common disease in older kitties. If this describes your cat, be sure to make an appointment with your veterinarian as soon as possible.
7. **Blood in the litterbox** — Finding blood in the litterbox strikes fear in the hearts of even the most laidback cat parents, and with good reason. It's a big red flag (pun intended). Digested blood in your cat's gastrointestinal (GI) tract will appear as black tarry stools. Fresh blood in the stool indicates bleeding in the colon or rectum. Either situation is cause for concern and should be investigated as soon as possible.

Blood in the urine, called hematuria, can be obvious or microscopic. There are a number of serious disorders that can cause bloody urine, including a blockage in the urinary tract, a bacterial infection and even cancer.

8. **Vomiting — Chronic vomiting** in cats is unfortunately so common that many pet parents and veterinarians consider it to be "normal" behavior. However, chronic vomiting, even in kitties with hairballs, is a sign something's wrong and needs to be investigated. Recurrent hairballs in housecats are a sign that something's amiss.

Other common causes of persistent vomiting in cats include a poor diet, food intolerances, eating too fast and too much time in between meals, enzyme deficiencies, GI problems that result in hairballs, toxin ingestion and underlying medical conditions like kidney disease and GI cancer.

Vomited blood can be either bright red (fresh), or resemble coffee grounds (indicating partially digested blood). There are a variety of reasons your cat might vomit blood, some of which are relatively minor, but others are serious and even life-threatening.

9. **Excessive thirst and urination** — If you need to refill kitty's water bowl more often and you're also noticing an increase in urine clumps in the litterbox, make an appointment with your veterinarian. Excessive thirst and urination are symptoms of several feline disorders, including urinary tract problems and kidney disease.
10. **Trouble urinating** — This includes discomfort while urinating, straining to urinate and frequent attempts to urinate with little success. If your cat cries out while relieving himself, isn't leaving his normal amount of urine in the litterbox, seems preoccupied with that area of his body or is excessively licking the area, you should make an appointment with your veterinarian right away. There are several underlying causes of urinary difficulties, some of which can result in death within just a few days.
11. **Drooling** — Kitties drool for a variety of reasons; however, there are only a few truly benign causes of drooling in a cat. Some kitties drool when they're purring and feeling very content, when they "make biscuits" (knead) or while enjoying a bit of catnip. Most of the time, however, a **drooling cat** warrants a visit to the veterinarian. Serious causes of excessive salivation include dental or oral disease, chronic kidney disease, poisoning, trauma or foreign bodies, and motion sickness/nausea.
12. **Hiding more than normal** — Just as you know how your cat normally sounds, you also know where and how often she hides. Some shy kitties tend to stay hidden except at mealtime or when they need to use the litterbox, whereas a highly social cat might plop down in the middle of the living room floor and roll onto her back for a snooze.

However, virtually all cats instinctively look for places to hide when they're injured or ill. They're trying to hide their pain, because in the wild, a cat in pain is seen as weak and vulnerable by other cats and predators. If your cat's hiding habits change, or if you find her hiding or resting in an unusual place (e.g., the litterbox), it's cause for concern. This is especially true if she's also showing other signs of discomfort.

Some symptoms of illness in cats can be handled by simply allowing them to run their course, for example, a single refused meal or the very occasional hairball. Other symptoms can be so sudden, severe and frightening that you know immediately you need to get your pet to the vet or an emergency animal hospital.

The 12 symptoms listed above can fall in between those two extremes, so hopefully this article has provided you with some good info in the event your four-legged family member develops symptoms that point to a severe or life-threatening illness.

# Sources and References

[Reader's Digest \(Archived\)](#)

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