

Signs of Health and Sickness in Your Cat

By Virginia Clemans, DVM

Cats are special creatures: finicky, yet often easy to satisfy. Aloof, but affectionate. Sometimes easy to understand, but often mysterious. Unfortunately, as their caretakers, it's up to us to read their minds! Even though they seem to be able to read our minds, reading theirs isn't so easy. So, to know whether your cat is sick or healthy, you'll need to pay attention to the following signs.



Healthy cats are generally playful even well into old age (which, by the way, is about 10 to 12 years old). They are well groomed with a soft, silky coat. Their eyes are bright, open wide, with no discharge. They should have good litter box habits, firm stool and plenty of urination. They should eat their food with gusto, and drink plenty of water. Their temperature should hover around 101 degrees. Their gums should be pink and their teeth free of tartar.

Any change in your cat's normal routine should be noted and attended to right away with a visit to your veterinarian. Some specific things to watch for are:

- Changes in appetite or water consumption (either increase or decrease)
- Behavioral problems (sudden aggression or lethargy)
- Constipation, diarrhea, or urination problems
- Coughing, wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Hair loss or itching
- Lameness
- Lumps, bumps or scabs
- Sneezing, nasal or eye discharge
- Vomiting
- Weakness
- Weight loss

If you notice any of these symptoms, then a visit with your veterinarian is in order. Any one of these signs could mean a serious medical problem. Some are more serious than others, but it's better to be safe than sorry. Remember, your cat is your loving companion and deserves the best care you can give.

Dr. Virginia Clemans was Best Friends' chief veterinarian from 2001 to 2004. She now resides in Salt Lake City, where she is chief of staff for the Utah County Fix, a low-cost, high-volume spay/neuter and vaccine clinic sponsored by No More Homeless Pets in Utah, Maddie's Fund and Best Friends Animal Society.