



# Older cats

## A Yorkshire Cat Rescue Guide

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Although we re-home many young cats and kittens at Yorkshire Cat Rescue each year, our pens are also home to some wonderful senior kitizens that are equally deserving of loving homes. We love our golden oldies and want to do our bit to make sure they stay safe and healthy in their new homes. So here is a bit of advice to those of you with an older cat...

## Cats do not go away to die

We often get calls from owners of elderly cats that have gone missing, asking if we think they may have gone away to die. We have to tell them that it is an old wives' tale. Old cats easily get confused and may get lost even in an environment that has until recently been completely familiar to them. Older cats sleep a lot more than younger cats and may have gone for a nap in a shed, garage, greenhouse or even a rarely opened spare room or airing cupboard, then got locked in. If an old cat goes missing, go and look for it!

## Hyperthyroidism and other diseases

People with older cats should be aware of Hyperthyroidism which often kicks in at about 12 years of age. The symptoms are increased appetite and weight loss but thankfully it is fairly easy to diagnose. With the appropriate treatment the cat will be fine but if left untreated it can lead to multiple organ failure and a painful death. Putting a collar on it saying 'medical condition' along with your phone number will prevent anyone seeing the cat and thinking it might a cruelty case or a starving stray. Likewise older cats are more likely to suffer from kidney problems, heart problems, diabetes and other conditions. It's always good to get a yearly MOT with your vet so any conditions can get spotted early and treated.

## Helping with grooming

Old cats don't exercise as much as younger ones and their claws can grow long and curl into their pads. Make sure you trim them more regularly and ask your vet to show you how if you haven't done it before. Likewise, keep a close eye on their fur as they may need a hand with knots and tangles – especially on their back and flanks.

## Invest in good oral hygiene

Good oral hygiene is crucial for older cats; their teeth need regular checks and might require professional cleaning and even the odd extraction. Believe us; even extensive dental work is better for the cat than leaving rotten teeth in place as these things only get worse and more painful as time goes by. Decaying teeth can lead to disease, and toothache often stops cats grooming properly which leads to a poor coat condition. Of course, most importantly, an older cat with poor teeth will struggle to eat properly and might just swallow its food without chewing it properly which isn't healthy.



## Be aware of signs of confusion

Just like people, cats can go senile, deaf and blind. That a cat is growing a little deaf with age can sometimes be noticeable by their meow getting louder although this can also be due to confusion and a sign that they are looking for someone. Moving furniture around too often can cause problems for cats that may have started to lose their vision. Feline dementia can affect old cats such that they may forget where their litter tray is and appear confused and not know where they are so be careful about letting them out in case they wander off out of confusion. They may meow loudly too as they are looking for reassurance, a stroke and a kind word will let them know you are around and looking out for them.

## Feed little and often

A cat's digestion system is designed to cope with lots of small meals a day; ideally 17 teaspoon-size meals per 24 hours. Younger cats cope better with one or two larger meals but as they get older, try your best to reduce it to at least 5 or six per day if not quite 17!

## Get Pet insurance

Having comprehensive pet insurance in place before your cats get too old is always advisable. Many insurers don't take on new senior feline citizens but they will continue to cover existing customers into old age. Some insurance companies will still cover oldies but it will usually be just a yearly cover. Read the small print before you take out insurance to be on the safe side.

## ...and finally

Believe it or not but cats quite often mellow with old age. One that used to be a bit grumpy and independent may start to become more relaxed and willing to be cuddled. So if you think adopting an older cat isn't worth it, think again. They can offer the most rewarding company.