

CATS AND HEALTH CHECKS

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I. Introduction

In general, compared to dogs, there are fewer cats visiting veterinary clinics. Taking a cat to a vet clinic is a stressful event for the owner, for health checks is even more stressful. In order to have cats undergo regular "health checks", it is necessary to make the "health checks" as mentally and physically stress-free for the cats as possible. It is important that the owners understand the importance of health checks, and for veterinary clinics to provide "cat-friendly" health checks.

II. General Discussion

1. The Purpose, Frequency, and Examination menu of Health Checks

Purpose

1. To reflect on and improve their living environments and lifestyles.

By having a cat undergo regular health checks, we can get a lot of information about their health. In particular, whether or not they have an appropriate body condition score (BCS) (Figure 1). It has a significant impact on their health. Even if owners interact with their cats on a daily basis, there are many cases where the owner is unaware of their cat's weight and body shape are standard or not. As cats get older, they may become to dislike exercise, lose the ability to climb high places, or stop grooming their fur resulting in hairballs.



Figure 1

Body Condition Score for Cats by WSAVA Guidelines, Global Nutrition, Body condition score tools for dogs and cats (<https://wsava.org/Global-Guidelines/Global-Nutrition-Guidelines/>)

2. Early detection of diseases leads to early treatments.

Even humans tend to put off going to clinics when they don't notice any symptoms, it tends to be more so for cats. But the earlier most illnesses are detected, the better the chance of recovery. Regular health checks can lead to early detection of illness, and as a result, the stress on the cat will be reduced both physically and mentally.

3. Generate cat individual health data for comparison during healthy and sick conditions

Compared to the previous two purposes, this is more difficult for cat owners to understand.

It is difficult to accurately diagnose a patient with only a single blood test result. For example, if a cat had a PCV of 48% at its health check a year ago, and the PCV has dropped to 31% when the cat is seen for not feeling well, we can diagnose the cat as anemia, even if the PCV is within the reference range. However, without the information from a year ago, we cannot find if the anemia is progressing or if the cat always has a low PCV.

By having regular health checks from an early age, it is possible to establish a baseline for each cat. This plays an important role in the early detection of diseases.

Frequency

The recommended frequency of cat health checks is once a year for cats up to 7 years of age and once every 6 months for cats 8 years of age and older. Many cat owners feel that once every 6 months health check is "too much" for their cats. However, one year for a cat is equivalent to four to five years for a human, it is usually possible to explain to owners that once every 6 months for cats means once every two years for a human, and it is a necessary frequency, not too much. (Table 1).




Table 1 Recommended frequency of cat health checks by age

Human age	0 – 10 yrs	12 – 25 yrs	28 – 40 yrs	44 – 56 yrs	60 – 72 yrs	76 – 100 yrs
Cat age	0 – 6 mos	7 – 24 mos	3 – 6 yrs	7 – 10 yrs	11 – 14 yrs	15 – 21 yrs
	Kitten	Junior	Adult	Mature	Senior	Super senior
Frequency of health checks	Once a year			Once every 6 months		

Examination menu

The diseases to which cats are susceptible vary by age shown in the Table 2.

Table 2 Susceptible diseases by age

Age group	Kitten	Middle-aged	Older
Susceptible diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● intestinal Parasite● external Parasites● Diarrhea caused by food● Congenital deformity● Feline Immunodeficiency virus (FIV)● Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Cardiomyopathy● Inflammatory Bowel disease (IBD)● Lymphoma● Ureteral calculus● Feline Idiopathic Cystitis (FIC) etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Osteoarthritis (OA)● Chronic kidney disease (CKD)● Hypertension● Diabetes mellitus● Hyperthyroidism● Neoplasia etc. 

To diagnose these diseases, not only a blood test but also other tests like urinalysis, X-ray, ultrasound, biopsy, etc. are required. For example, necessary tests to diagnose diseases which older cats are susceptible are listed in the Table 3.

Table 3 Required tests for diagnosis of susceptible diseases to older cats

Susceptible diseases to older cats	Required tests for diagnosis
OA	X-ray
CKD	Blood test, Imaging diagnosis, Urinalysis
Hypertension	Blood pressure measurement
Diabetes mellitus	Blood test, Urinalysis
Hyperthyroidism	Blood test (T4, fT4)
Neoplasia	Biopsy

Some cat owners think that a health check is “just a blood test.” If the blood test shows no abnormal values, the cat is often judged to be “healthy.” However, blood tests are not a universal test, and **it is necessary for veterinarians to explain what each test item is and the diseases or physical conditions that can be diagnosed by them to owners.** More tests will detect more diseases. It is recommended that as many tests as possible be done as cats’ mental and physical burden and budget allow. As an example, a health check plan for a senior cat is shown in the Table 4.

Table 4 Example of a health check plan for senior cats

Basic plan		Options*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blood test ● Urinalysis ● X-ray : chest ● X-ray : abdomen ● US : abdomen ● US : heart 	+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● T4 ● FGF-23** ● Blood pressure ● X-ray : limbs ● UPC ● ECG

* If some symptoms like polyuria or lethargy are shown during an interview, a physical examination is performed, and options are discussed.

** FGF-23: Fibroblast growth factor 23

Here is an example of a clinic health check plan (Figure 2), which consists of five plans, and depending on the breed, age, living environment, and clinical symptoms, the veterinarians and owners consult with each other to tailor the best and most necessary examinations for the cat.

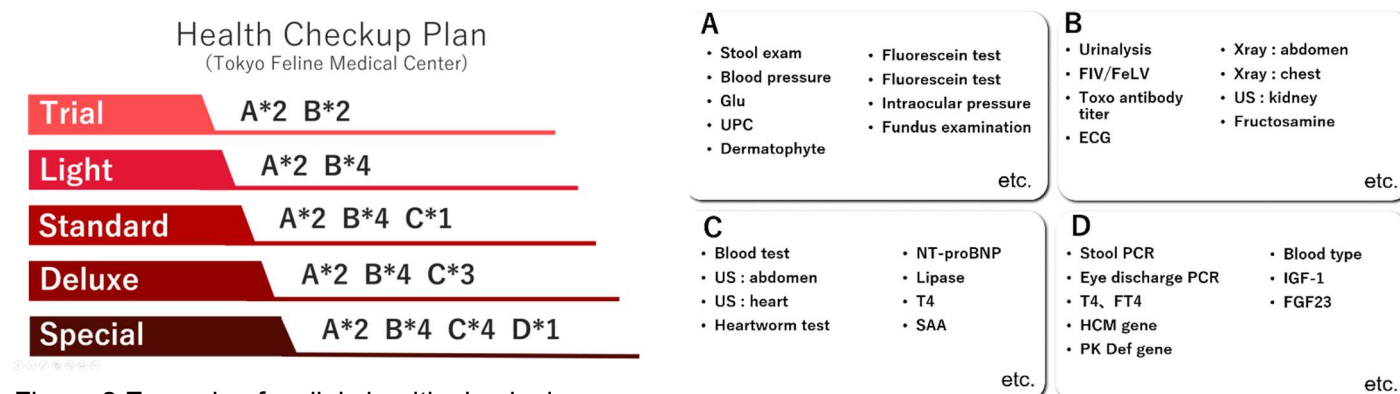


Figure 2 Example of a clinic health check plan

Many cat owners have the misconception that x-rays and ultrasounds always require general anesthesia, or that urine samples must always be collected at home. It may be one of the reasons why owners are reluctant to have their cats undergo health checks. It is necessary for veterinarians to explain each test item one by one so that owners can understand what each test item is and what the best plan for their cats is.

2. How to realize "cat-friendly" health checks?

To realize "cat-friendly" health checks, we should make our clinics cat-friendly. The most important thing for "cat-friendly" clinics is kindness, not structural changes of the clinics. The order of priority and purpose of a cat friendly clinic are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Purpose of the Cat Friendly Clinic

The order of priority is

- 01 Treat cat illnesses**
If the cat doesn't get better, it's meaningless.
- 02 Get to know the cat**
What do cats like and dislike?
- 03 Get to know the cat's family**
What does the cat family want?
- 04 Changing the structure**
Changing the structure of the hospital is the last thing we should do.

Figure 3 Order of priority of a cat friendly clinic

cat

- Stress reduction: mental & physical
- Reducing fear of coming to the hospital.

family

- Reducing the stress of taking cats to the hospital.

staff

- Reduction in injuries
- Reduction in examination time
- Reduction in the number of people required for treatment

Figure 4 Purposes of a cat friendly clinic

The first step is to make clinics less stressful for cats, and by doing so, they will be less afraid of veterinary clinics and will be more likely to visit. This will also reduce the stress of taking cats to veterinary clinics for their family. Finally, it is often overlooked though, the benefit to the staff. This is especially important for the veterinary nurses who hold the cats. By ensuring that cats are not frightened, this can help reduce the risk of injury and examination time, as well as improve the work environment by reducing the number of staff involved in treatment.

To make the clinic less stressful for cats, description of an ideal waiting room and examination room are shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

The ideal waiting room

- Keep cats away from dogs
- Keep the room temperature comfortable
- Music for cats
- Relaxed atmosphere
- Make sure no outside calls are received
- Turn off the doorbell
- Staff should speak quietly and move slowly
- Minimize noise and busyness
- Consider using pheromone-based products



Figure 5 Ideal waiting room

The ideal exam room

- Take time for the medical interview.
- Do not remove the cat from the carrier immediately.
- Be gentle and keep the holding time short.
- Place a towel on the examination table.
- Consider using pheromone-based products.



Figure 6 Ideal examination room

Of these, it is especially important to avoid face to face contact with dogs. Ideally, a cat-only waiting room should be created, but other possibilities include creating a cat-only waiting area, separated by partitions, etc., providing blankets to put over the cat's carrier, waiting in the owner's car, or having a cat-only examination time.

3. How to communicate with cats and the owners?

Communication with cats

Example of words you should use and should not use when communicating with the pet and its owner are listed in Figure 7 and Figure 8. When you say negative words, the owners nearby can hear them and may feel that this health check is something that the cat does not like and for which they owe an apology. This may cause them to stop taking the health check next year. On the other hand, positive words will make the owner feel that their cat is a good boy/girl and that he/she is doing a great job. Then I think they'll decide to get another health check next year.



Figure 7 Example of words you should use

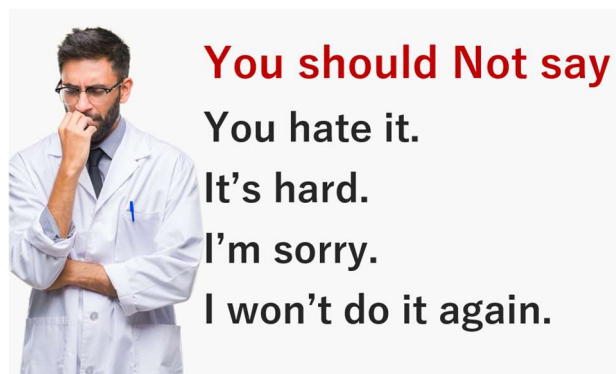


Figure 8 Example of words you should NOT use

Communication with owners

Below is an example of a statement to encourage owners to bring their cats to health checks regularly. However, it is necessary to adjust the frequency depending on the cat's personality and physical condition.

- ✓ One year of a cat is 4 years for human age. If humans have a health check every year, the cat has to have 4 health checks a year. A health check once a year for cats aged 0 to 6, and once every 6 months for cats aged 7 and over, is not too frequent.

Also, the owners need to know the details of the health check. Explain each test item, and the diseases or physical conditions that can be detected by these tests.

III. Conclusion

Cats, like humans, often have to deal with diseases as they age. Health checks can detect diseases at early and allows early treatment. Through health check, cats can remain with their families longer and maintain their quality of life. Veterinary clinics should make efforts to provide cat- friendly health checks to encourage regular health checks in cats.