

Updated feline life stage guidelines released to the veterinary community

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Two of the world's leading veterinary organizations are proud to announce updated recommendations in the 2021 AAHA/AAFP Feline Life Stage Guidelines. The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) convened a Task Force of experts in feline medicine to define distinct feline life stages and provide a framework for individualized healthcare plans.

Understanding a cat's life stage and lifestyle greatly impacts healthcare strategies. Veterinary professionals have a responsibility to stress the need for ongoing care for feline patients at every stage of their lives. The updated Guidelines detail the evolution of feline biology and lifestyle over time, requiring different approaches to healthcare for [kittens](#) and senior [cats](#).

The Guidelines outline four age-related life stages, with the fifth, end-of-life stage, occurring at any age.

Feline Life Stages

- Kitten: Birth up to 1 year
- Young adult: 1 to 6 years
- Mature adult: 7 to 10 years
- Senior: 10 years and older
- End-of-life: Any age

The Guidelines combine feline-friendly care approaches with a lifelong

healthcare plan to improve health and wellbeing. "A cat-friendly approach tailored to the individual patient creates a more positive experience for the patient, client, and care provider, and promotes more frequent visits and improved compliance," stated Task Force Co-Chair, Jessica Quimby, DVM, Ph.D., DACVIM.

Quick reference tables are included in the Guidelines to aid veterinary professionals in developing evolving care plans that grow with cats as they age. "All cats of every life stage need full, thorough physical examinations at least annually for the best lifelong care; and we recommend checkups at a minimum of every six months for senior cats," said AAHA Chief Medical Officer Heather Loenser, DVM. "The Guidelines provide discussion items and medical history questions for all life stages, as well as life stage-specific focal points for physical examinations, claw care, litter box management, nutrition, behavior, oral health, enrichment, and vaccinations."

Additionally, for veterinary teams, the Feline Lifestyle Assessment Form helps gather a deeper history for each cat. This form makes it easier to tailor the physical examination and to identify specific questions and discussions based on the client's feedback.

More information: Jessica Quimby et al, 2021 AAHA/AAFP Feline Life Stage Guidelines, *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* (2021).
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