

# Subtle Signs of Sickness

Just as with humans, cats often experience subtle behavioral changes when they are sick. Because cats do not get sick as often as dogs or other animals, consumers do not take a pet to the veterinarian for the recommended two visits per year and often overlook signs of sickness.

For this reason, the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) has provided for Boehringer Ingelheim a list of “Subtle Signs of Sickness” to help educate consumers about these behavioral changes and emphasize the importance of twice-a-year veterinary exams for cats.

- 1. INAPPROPRIATE ELIMINATION BEHAVIOR** - Often misattributed as an attempt to “get back at the owner,” inappropriate urination and defecation many times accompany an underlying medical condition ranging from kidney disease to arthritis.
- 2. CHANGES IN INTERACTION** - Cats are social animals. Changes in their interaction could signal pain, fear or anxiety. Underlying medical conditions can also cause cats to become aggressive toward those who cause them pain, even if caregivers don’t realize they are doing so.
- 3. CHANGES IN ACTIVITY** - A decrease or increase in activity can be a sign of sickness in cats. Medical conditions such as arthritis can produce a decrease in activity while an increase can signal a condition such as hyperthyroidism.
- 4. CHANGES IN SLEEPING HABITS** - Cats sleep 16 to 18 hours a day, but most of the time in a “catnapping” state where they are quick to respond to stimuli like someone walking into a room. More or less sleep, or discomfort laying down and getting up, can be signs of illness in a cat.
- 5. CHANGES IN FOOD AND WATER CONSUMPTION** - Eating or drinking less can be signs of a range of underlying medical conditions. For an accurate picture, caregivers can measure the food or drink they give to their cats and then measure again in 24 hours to calculate their cats’ consumption.
- 6. UNEXPLAINED WEIGHT LOSS OR GAIN** - Weight changes in cats often go unnoticed because of their thick coats. You can assess body condition by feeling along the ribs; they should be easily felt but not prominent.
- 7. CHANGES IN GROOMING** - Note whether your cat’s coat is clean and free of mats. Less grooming can signal a range of medical conditions, while more grooming can be a sign of a skin problem.
- 8. SIGNS OF STRESS** - Sudden lifestyle changes can cause stress in cats, resulting in a range of symptoms from decreased grooming to eating more frequently. These are also signs of illness, so cats should be examined to rule out sickness before stress issues are addressed.
- 9. CHANGES IN VOCALIZATION** - An increase in vocalization or howling is often seen with older cats and can be caused by high blood pressure, stress or pain. Caregivers who note a change in vocalization should visit their veterinarians to rule out sickness.
- 10. BAD BREATH** - Studies show 70 percent of cats have gum disease as early as age 3. One of the early indicators of an oral problem is bad breath, so it is important to have your cat's teeth checked every six months to help prevent dental disease or begin early treatment of problems.

For more information about feline health and subtle signs of sickness, visit [www.healthycatsforlife.com](http://www.healthycatsforlife.com).

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