

# Give Your Cat A Heart Health Exam

Contributed by Dr. Jane Bicks

When I consider which trait I like most about cats, I'd have to say that it's their mysterious manner. I never know when they will pounce on my computer keyboard, or where they will hide on a particular day. Unfortunately, they are also masters at concealing any illnesses they might have. A cat can have a medical problem and even the most watchful owner may not know until the symptoms have become full-blown.

An unhealthy heart is all too common in cats, regardless of age. Some breeds are more prone to heart illnesses than others. Maine Coon Cats, RagaMuffins, Oriental Short Hairs and Munchkins are just some of the breeds that commonly suffer from heart conditions. Of course, any mixed-breed cat can also have heart problems. The good news is that if treated early, a cat with a heart condition can still live a relatively healthy and happy life. All we have to do is be proactive and examine our cats. Don't worry & it's easy and fun.

Place your cat where you can both be comfortable, as you'll be examining him from head to tail. As you'll soon learn, heart problems can manifest themselves in multiple ways.

Are the eyes nice and bright? Heart disease can cause respiratory issues, which can lead to a dull look. It's easy to notice if the twinkle in your kitty's eyes has diminished.

Lift the lips and inspect the gums. Most cats should have nice medium color pink gums, although dark cats may have gray gums. When you press your finger on the gums, they should lose color; as soon as you remove your finger, the original color should return. Cats with heart problems can be anemic, resulting in very pale or blue gums. Bright pink gums are generally not healthy and could be an indication of heart problems.

The whiskers should be nice and long. Broken or thick whiskers may indicate that your cat is not completely healthy. Please be aware that some breeds, like the Devon Rex or the American Wirehair, almost always have short whiskers.

Examine your cat's skin and coat. A healthy cat will usually have a silky coat. A dull and brittle coat (again, unless a Wirehair) may indicate a health problem. A cat with heart disease can have poor circulation and, as a consequence, the hair will not receive the necessary nutrients. Dandruff may be another indication that your cat is not well.

Put your right palm on your cat's right shoulder and your left on his left shoulder. Move your hands together along the spine in the direction of the tail, slightly pressing downward to feel the ribs. If there is more than an inch to pinch, then chances are that your cat is too heavy. Overweight cats are candidates for heart problems. Note that the hanging tummy is not an indication of obesity, but more often a lack of particular hormones.

Feel the pads of your cat's feet & they should be warm. Cold feet may be indicative of a blood clot and/or poor circulation.

Pay special attention to your cat's breathing pattern. It should be steady, not very deep, but not too shallow. A cat with heart problems may appear to breathe with difficulty. As a quick test, take a thick cord and throw it up on something so your cat runs to chase it. Young or old, your cat should have no problem doing this a handful of times. If your cat starts to breathe through his mouth, or begins to breathe with effort, we have a problem.

If you notice any of these negative symptoms, I suggest you consult with your veterinarian as soon as possible.

I encourage you to record the results of these exams in a dedicated notebook. This will allow you to track changes over time, and it'll be a handy resource to report changes in your cat's health to your vet during check-ups.

Read Dr. Jane's Book [Dr. Jane's 30 Days to a Healthier, Happier Cat](#)