**Preventive Care**

It's your job to keep your cat healthy and safe. Get the facts about grooming, vaccinations, parasite prevention, and safety.

## Grooming

Your feline will look (and feel!) like the cat’s meow after a good [grooming](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-grooming) session.

By nature, [cats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm) are extremely fastidious. You’ve no doubt watched your kitty washing herself several times a day. For the most part she can take care of herself very well, thank you, but sometimes she’ll need a little help from you.

### Make Grooming as Enjoyable as Possible -- For the Both of You

Grooming sessions should be fun for the both of you, so be sure to schedule them when your cat’s relaxed, perhaps after exercise or eating. You want your pet to remember grooming sessions in a positive way, so you never want to risk losing your temper. If you’ve had a stressful day or are in a bad mood, it’s probably not a good time to groom your cat.

Keep your first grooming sessions short-just 5 to 10 minutes. Gradually lengthen the time until your pet is used to the routine. You should also get your pet used to being handled. Get in the habit of petting every single part of your cat-including ears, tail, belly and back-and especially the feet!

And keep in mind, a little patience can go a long way. If your cat is extremely stressed out, cut the session short and try again when she’s calmer. Unfortunately, most cats do not like baths, so you may need another person to help. And remember to pile on the praise and offer her a treat when the session is over.

### Brushing

Regular sessions with a brush or comb will help keep your pet’s hair in good condition by removing dirt, spreading natural oils throughout her coat, preventing tangles and keeping her skin clean and irritant-free.

If your cat has short hair, you only need to brush once a week:

* First, use a metal comb and work through her fur from head to tail.
* Next, use a bristle or rubber brush to remove dead and loose hair.
* Be extra-gentle near her chest and belly.

If your cat has long hair, you will need to brush every day:

* Start by combing her belly and legs; be sure to untangle any knots.
* Next, brush her fur in an upward motion with a bristle or rubber brush.
* To brush her tail, make a part down the middle and brush the fur out on either side.

## Bad Breath in Cats

[Bad breath](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/bad-breath-cats), also known as halitosis, can be caused by a variety of health problems. Don’t worry, your [cat](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm)’s breath isn’t supposed to smell minty fresh-but if there’s an extremely strong, fetid odor, there could be an underlying medical problem.

### What Could Be Causing My Cat's Bad Breath?

Most often, bad breath is caused by a build-up of odor-producing bacteria in your pet’s mouth. This can be a result of dental or gum disease; certain cats, in fact, may be especially prone to plaque and tartar. Diet and dermatological issues can also be contributing factors. However, persistent bad breath can also indicate more serious medical problems such as abnormalities in the mouth, respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, liver or kidneys. In all cases, halitosis is a red flag that should be investigated.

### How Can I Determine the Cause of My Cat's Bad Breath?

Your veterinarian is the best person to pinpoint the cause. A physical examination may reveal the cause of your cat’s problem. If not, further tests will likely be recommended. Be ready to answer questions about your cat’s diet, oral hygiene, exercise habits and general attitude and [behavior](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/aging-cat-behavior).

### When Is It Time to See the Vet?

The following symptoms will require veterinary attention:

* Excessive brownish tartar on your cat’s teeth, especially when accompanied by [drooling](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/drooling-in-cats), difficulty eating and red, inflamed gums, could indicate serious dental or gum disease.
* Unusually sweet or fruity breath could indicate [diabetes](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/feline-diabetes-symptoms-treatments-prevention-diet), particularly if your cat has been drinking and urinating more frequently than usual.
* Breath that smells like urine can be a sign of [kidney disease](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-kidney-disease).
* An unusually foul odor accompanied by vomiting, lack of appetite, and yellow-tinged corneas and/or gums could signal a liver problem.
* Pawing at the mouth

### How Is Bad Breath Treated?

Treatment depends on your vet’s diagnosis. If plaque is the culprit, your cat might require a professional cleaning. If the cause is gastrointestinal or an abnormality in your pet’s liver, kidneys or lungs, please consult your vet about steps you should take.

## Ear Care and Ear Problems in Cats

Your [cat](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm)’s ears may be able to pick up the sound of a bag of [treats](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-treats-and-snacks-whats-healthy) being opened across the house, but they could still use a little help staying clean and healthy. Monitoring your cat’s ears weekly for wax, debris, and signs of infection will help those sensitive ears stay perky and alert to your every move.

### Outer Ear Appearance

A healthy feline outer ear, or pinna, has a layer of hair on its outer surface with no bald spots, and its inner surface is clean and light pink. If you see any discharge, redness or swelling, your cat’s ears should be checked by a veterinarian.

### Outer Ear Exam

Bring your cat into a quiet room where there are no other pets. Gently fold back each outer ear and look down into the canal. Healthy outer ears will be pale pink in color, carry no debris or odor, and will have minimal or no visible earwax. If you find that your cat’s ears appear to have excessive amounts of wax, have dark colored debris, or you detect an odor, your cat should be examined by your veterinarian.

### Ear Cleaning 101

Place a little bit of liquid ear cleaner (ask your vet for a recommendation) onto a clean cotton ball or piece of gauze. Fold your cat’s ear back gently and wipe away any debris or earwax that you can see on the inside of the outer ear. Lift away the dirt and wax rather than rubbing it into the ear Do not attempt to clean the ear canal-probing inside of your cat’s ear can cause trauma or infection and is best done by a veterinary professional.

### Signs of Ear Problems

Watch for the following signs that may indicate your cat’s ears should be checked by a veterinarian:

* Persistent scratching and pawing of the ear or surrounding area
* Sensitivity to touch around the ears
* Head tilt
* Frequent shaking of the head
* Loss of balance and disorientation
* Redness or swelling of the outer ear or ear canal
* Unpleasant odor
* Black or yellowish discharge
* Accumulation of dark brown wax
* Hearing loss
* Bleeding from the ear

### Know Your Ear Disorders

* Ear mites are common parasites that are contagious among pets. Telltale signs include excessive itching of the ears and debris that resembles coffee grounds.
* [Ear infections](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/ear-infections-in-cats-causes-treatment-and-prevention) are usually caused by bacteria or yeasts. Treatment should be sought promptly as ear infections can cause considerable discomfort. Allergies in cats can be a predisposing factor in developing ear infections.
* An ear [hematoma](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/cats-lumps-bumps-skin) is a collection of blood and serum between the cartilage and skin of the outer ear. They’re often caused by infection, ear mites, [fleas](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/flea-prevention) or trapped debris that causes your cat to scratch her ears or shake her head excessively. They can occur in association with frequent head shaking in association with ear infections, ear mites, or allergies. But it can be seen in animals with normal ears.

### How to Administer Ear Drops

If your veterinarian has recommended ear drops or ointment for your cat, please ask for his/her advice on how to properly administer them. Below are general guidelines on administering medications in your cat's ears:

* Read the label instructions carefully for correct dosage before administering.
* If there is debris or excessive wax in the outer ear or visible ear canal gently clean the external ear with a cotton ball or gauze moistened with a veterinary recommended ear cleaning solution
* Gently pull the ear flap back, squeeze out the correct amount of solution or ointment into the outermost earl canal
* Gently massage the base of the ear to help work the medication deeper into the canal.
* Administer the medication according to the label directions given by your veterinarian. Not completing the entire course of treatment can interfere with total resolution of the issue being treated.

## Cat Eye Care and Problems

Seeing “eye to eye” with your [cat](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/default.htm) may be one of the best things you ever do for her health. A good home eye exam just before [grooming](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-grooming) can clue you into any tearing, crust, cloudiness or inflammation that may indicate a health problem. Here are few simple tips to keep your kitty’s eyes bright, healthy and on the prize-you!

### Home Inspection

Face your cat in a brightly lit area and look her in the eyes. They should be clear and bright, and the area around the eyeball should be white. Her pupils should be equal in size.

### A Closer Look

Roll down your kitty’s eyelid gently with your thumb and take a look at the lid’s lining. It should be pink, not red or white.

### What to Watch Out For

How can you tell if there is something wrong with one or both of your cat’s eyes? Look out for the following:

* Discharge
* Watering
* Red or white eyelid linings
* Crusty gunk in the corners of the eye
* Tear-stained fur
* Closed eye(s)
* Cloudiness or change in eye color
* Visible third eyelid

### Eye-Catching Behavior

Certain body language will also alert you to possible eye distress. If your cat is constantly squinting or pawing at her eye area, give her eyes a good inspection. If you find any of the above symptoms, you should immediately call your vet.

### A Little Wipe Goes A Long Way

Wipe away any crusty gunk from your cat’s eyes with a damp cotton ball. Always wipe away from the corner of the eye, and use a fresh cotton ball for each eye. Snip away any long hairs that could be blocking her vision or poking her eyes. Try not to use eye washes or eye drops unless they’ve been prescribed by your vet. If you notice unnatural discharge during your grooming session, consult your vet.

### Know Thy Eye Disorders

The following eye-related disorders are commonly seen in cats:

* [**Conjunctivitis**](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/conjunctivitis-pinkeye-cats-types-symptoms-causes-treatments)**:** One or both of your cat’s eyes will look red and swollen, and there may be discharge.
* **Third eyelid protrusion:** If the third eyelid becomes visible or crosses your cat’s eye, he may have a wound or may be suffering from [diarrhea](http://pets.webmd.com/cats/the-scoop-on-cat-poop), worms or a virus.
* **Keratitis:** If your cat’s cornea becomes inflamed, the eye will look cloudy and watery.
* **Cataracts:** This opacity on the eye is often seen in elderly and diabetic cats.
* **Glaucoma:** The cornea becomes cloudy and the eye enlarges due to an increased pressure in the eyeball.
* **Bulging eye:** Bulging can occur because of accident or trauma or an eye tumor.
* **Retinal disease:** Partial or total vision loss can happen when light-sensitive cells at the back of the eye degenerate.
* **Watery eyes:** The fur around your cat’s eyes may be stained with tears because of blocked tear ducts or an overproduction of tears.

### Treating Eye Conditions

Many feline eye disorders can be treated with vet-prescribed drops or ointments-your vet will show you how to apply eye and ear drops at home.

### Preventing Eye Problems

The best way to prevent eye conditions is to make sure your cat gets all her vaccinations and has thorough check-ups. Please examine her eyes regularly and consult a vet if you find any abnormalities. Eye conditions that are left untreated can lead to impaired sight or even blindness.