

Dear Diary:

Keep Records of Your Cat

We explain why it's important to keep track of certain details to help your cat's health and behavior.

If your cat kept a diary, it might read something like this: slept, ate, slept some more, chased a paper ball, napped, ate again, napped. While that may indeed describe a cat's typical day, it won't necessarily help you or your veterinarian if your cat develops a health or behavior problem. "Keeping a diary for your cat is a good idea in general, but particularly when your cat is ill," says Drew Weigner, DVM, who is board certified by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners.

Keep Track of the Basics

At a minimum, you should track your cat's veterinary visits, vaccinations, flea treatments and any medications your cat takes. Beyond that, record anything that is unusual. For example, if you change your cat's diet, note the date and track changes such as vomiting or diarrhea. Or, if your cat urinates more or less often than usual, record that in the diary. "If there is anything unusual, or if you start seeing something more often, you should take a trip to the veterinarian," says Dr. Weigner, whose practice is The Cat Doctor in Atlanta, Georgia.

If your cat exhibits any changes in behavior, you should note if anything unusual has happened in the house, such as human visitors or changes in the environment. Are strange cats hanging around outside? "Anything can act as a trigger," says Dr. Weigner. "Keeping a journal helps you separate the subjective from the objective. If you keep a log of it, you know for sure."

Keeping a diary for your cat need not be time-consuming, and you don't need an elaborate binder. "A lot of my clients make notes on calendars," says Dr. Weigner. A tablet in which you record the date and the occurrence in a few short sentences will suffice. Keep it handy—you might tack it to your refrigerator, for instance—especially if your cat is ill and you need to track his signs on a daily basis. For the average healthy cat, day-to-day activities aren't necessary to record. "When problems occur, record as much detail as possible," says Dr. Weigner.

When dealing with something nebulous, ask your veterinarian what to record. For example, lameness that comes on after your cat gets up from a nap might be a sign of arthritis. "A diary gives the veterinarian ideas of what to look for," says Dr. Weigner. "When something is wrong, the more information he/she has, the better." If you leave your pet in the care of a sitter, have the sitter maintain the diary in your absence. "When you come back you'll know what your cat has done and that your cat has received great care," says Dr. Weigner. If your cat becomes ill, you can fax or mail your journal to your veterinarian before you take your cat for the appointment. That way your veterinarian can

look it over and spend time thinking of what questions to ask. “Overall, it’s really valuable for cats that are sick,” says Dr. Weigner. *By Karen Commings, Cat Watch November 2004.*