

# You want to adopt a Maine Coon?



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The Maine Coon breed is known for many potential health problems. Many of these issues can be very expensive to treat. We want you to understand that adopting a purebred cat comes with potential medical expenses. **Cat's Cradle will not be able to offer you financial assistance for these cats.** You will need to plan to be able to cover any medical expenses that may arise.

## Your Maine Coon

### Caring for Your Feline Companion

### Maine Coons: What a Unique Breed!

Your cat is special! She senses your moods, is curious about your day, and has purred her way into your heart. Chances are that you chose her because you like Maine Coons (sometimes called "Coon Cats") and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle, like:

- Gentle-mannered and easy to get along with
- Large, strong, and athletic
- Highly intelligent and able to learn tricks
- Laid back – gets along with cat-friendly dogs and kids
- May purr when she is content

However, no cat is perfect! You may have also noticed these characteristics:

- Coat needs to be cared for frequently to prevent matting
  - Very talkative, has an opinion about everything
- Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! She is a calm and affectionate gentle giant.

The Maine Coon is known for its large size and thick double coat of long hair which is well suited for the harsh winters in Maine, the state from which they originated. Relaxed and laid-back, Maine Coons are not overly dependent, but they are people oriented. They are happy to follow their owners from room to room, coming when called and playing fetch. Some Maine Coons are attracted to water and may even enjoy an occasional swim.

## Your Maine Coon's Health

We know that because you care so much about your cat, you want to take great care of her. That is why we have summarized the health concerns for your Maine Cat. By knowing about the health concerns common among Maine Coons, we can help you tailor an individual preventive health plan and hopefully prevent some predictable risks in your pet.

The first thing you need to do is schedule an introductory visit with your vet.

Many diseases and health conditions are genetic, meaning they are related to your pet's breed. The conditions we will describe here have a significant rate of incidence or a strong impact upon this breed particularly, according to a general consensus among feline genetic researchers and veterinary practitioners. This does not mean your cat will have these problems, only that she may be more at risk than other cats. We will describe the most common issues seen in Maine Coons to give you an idea of what may come up in her future. Of course, we can't cover every possibility here, so always check with your vet if you notice any unusual signs or symptoms.

This guide contains general health information important to all felines as well as information on genetic predispositions for Maine Coons. The information here can help you and your pet's healthcare team plan for your pet's unique medical needs together.

# General Health Information for your Maine Coon

## Weight Management

Obesity is a major disease that contributes to a surprisingly large number of illnesses and deaths in cats.

This revelation is more well-known and well-understood today than in the last few decades, but too many owners are still ignoring the dangers of extra weight on their pets. Excess weight is one of the most influential factors in the development of arthritis, diabetes, and other life-threatening diseases. Everyone knows—many firsthand from personal experience—how even shedding just a few pounds can result in improved mobility and increased overall motivation to be active. And the same is true for your pet.

Research suggests that carrying excess weight may shorten a pet's life by as much as two years, and can cause the onset of arthritis two years sooner. Diabetes, an inherited disease, has a much higher chance of developing in overweight pets, and may never become a problem for a healthy-weight cat. The more obese a cat becomes, the more likely it will become diabetic. Hepatic lipidosis, or fatty liver, is another potentially fatal disease in overweight pets; hepatic lipidosis can develop in as few as 48 hours when an overweight cat stops eating for any reason.

So how can we help our pets stay trim? Understanding your cat's dietary habits is key. The average cat prefers to eat about 10-15 times a day, just a few nibbles at a time. This method, free-feeding, works well for most cats, but boredom may increase the number of trips your cat makes to the food bowl.



By keeping your cat playfully active and engaged, you'll help your pet stay healthy and have some fun at the same time! A string tied to a stick with something crinkly or fuzzy on the other end of the string, and a little imagination—you and your cat will both be entertained. Food puzzles, like kibbles put in a paper bag or under an overturned basket or box, may help to motivate cats with more food-based interests to romp and tumble.

For really tough cases of overeating, you will have to take a firm stance, and regulate your cat's food intake. Instead of filling your cat's bowl to the top, follow the feeding guide on the food package and be sure to feed a high-quality adult cat diet as recommended by your vet. Replace your cat's habits of eating when bored with extra playtime and affection. Cats typically adjust their desires for personal interaction by the amount of affection offered to them, so in other words, ignoring your cat means your cat will ignore you. By the same token, loving on and playing with your cat a lot will cause your cat to desire that time with you. A more active cat means a healthier, happier pet—and owner!

## Dental Disease

Dental disease is one of the most common chronic problems in pets who don't have their teeth brushed regularly.

Unfortunately, most cats don't take very good care of their own teeth, and this probably includes your Maine Cat. Without extra help and care from you, your cat is likely to develop potentially serious dental problems. Dental disease starts with food residue, which hardens into tartar that builds up on the visible parts of the teeth, and eventually leads to infection of the gums and tooth roots. Protecting your cat against dental disease from the start by removing food residue regularly may help prevent or delay the need for advanced treatment of dental disease.

This treatment can be stressful for your cat and expensive for you, so preventive care is beneficial all around. In severe cases of chronic dental infection, your pet may even lose teeth or sustain damage to internal organs. And, if nothing else, your cat will be a more pleasant companion not knocking everyone over with stinky cat breath! We'll show you how to keep your cat's pearly whites clean at home, and help you schedule regular routine dental exams.

## Genetic Predispositions for Maine

### Coons

#### Heart Disease

Cardiomyopathy is the medical term for heart muscle disease, either a primary inherited condition or secondary to other diseases that damage the heart. The most common form, called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, or HCM, is a thickening of the heart muscle often caused by an overactive thyroid gland. Another example is dilated cardiomyopathy, or DCM, which can be caused by a dietary deficiency of the amino acid taurine. While DCM was a big problem in the past, all major cat food producers now add taurine to cat food, so DCM is rarely seen in cats with high-quality diets today.

Catching signs of cardiomyopathy early is important, but a cat's normal tendency to hide illness can make symptoms difficult to spot. The first thing a pet parent usually notices is rapid breathing, lethargy, and a poor appetite. These symptoms may appear to come on suddenly, often between a few hours to a few days, but in most cases, the cat has actually been suffering quietly for weeks to months and is now in serious trouble.



For a few breeds of cats, genetic testing is available for a specific gene abnormality that causes HCM. Most cats with cardiomyopathy have a heart murmur that can be detected during a wellness physical exam, but a specific diagnosis requires more advanced medical imaging. Finding this problem early, when treatment is most effective, is another important reason to have your pet evaluated twice a year for life.

## Arterial Thromboembolism

Cats with heart disease may develop blood clots in their arteries known as FATE (feline aortic thromboembolisms). Blood clots most commonly become lodged just past the aorta, the large blood vessel that supplies blood from the heart to the body, blocking normal blood flow to the hind legs. When this happens, one or both hind legs may become paralyzed, cold, or painful. FATE is a life-threatening disease, and requires quick action and prolonged medical care. Cats who survive thromboembolisms, however, usually regain full function of their limbs. If your cat is diagnosed with heart disease, we may prescribe medications to help lower the risk of blood clots. If your cat suddenly can't walk or is dragging one or both back legs and crying, don't wait! Your pet needs immediate emergency care.

## Patellar Luxation

The stifle, or knee joint, is a remarkable structure that allows a cat to perform amazing feats of agility like crouching, jumping, and pouncing. One of the main components of the stifle is the patella, or kneecap, and the medical term luxation means "being out of place". Thus, a luxating patella is a kneecap that slips off to the side of the leg because of an improperly developed stifle.

A cat with a luxating patella may not show signs of pain or abnormality until the condition is well advanced; signs of this condition appear gradually and can progress to lameness as the cat grows older. Early detection of a luxating patella is key to effective therapy, so getting your cat an x-ray at the time of her spay or his neuter, around three to six months of age, is a good way to check. If the problem is mild and involves only one leg, your pet may not require much treatment beyond typical arthritis medication. When symptoms are more severe, surgery may be needed to realign the kneecap and prevent it from popping out of place. Although the tendency for patellar luxation seems to be inherited, developmental problems in joints have complex inheritance patterns, and genetic tests have not yet been developed for this condition. Patellar luxation occurs in many breeds, but Coon Cats are at higher risk for the condition.

## Hip Dysplasia

Most commonly seen in dogs, hip dysplasia may also occur in cats, especially in Maine Coons. Dysplasia is an inheritable condition that causes malformation of the hip joints and subsequent arthritis. Usually a cat shows very few clinical symptoms as an adolescent, but begins slowing down and acting like an older cat prematurely within the first few years. Severely affected cats, however, may show lameness by six months of age. Pelvic X-rays are needed to detect early hip dysplasia; cats should be anesthetized or sedated for this procedure, in part because the radiograph machine is a frightful and stressing situation for cats, but also because X-rays of the pelvis should be taken while the cat is perfectly still. Anesthesia allows for proper positioning of the cat to produce a clear, diagnostic radiograph, without the pain and fear most cats experience with X-rays, especially if they already have sore hips.



Hip dysplasia is best treated when detected early, so initial X-rays of the hips are recommended at your first vet visit. X-rays can also be conveniently scheduled at the time of your cat's annual dental cleaning in order to minimize the number of anesthetic events your cat undergoes. If necessary, hip dysplasia can be alleviated by surgical restructuring of the pelvis to help relieve pain and allow greater mobility for your affected cat.

## Gingivitis

Gingivitis is inflammation of the gingiva, or gums. Just like in people, it causes redness and pain in the gums and is often linked to other diseases. In mild cases, gingivitis can be treated with a mouth rinse and represents only a minor problem, but without treatment it can progress to more severe afflictions such as periodontal disease or Stomatitis. Gingivitis has also been associated with resorptive lesions and retrovirus infections such as the feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and the feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). One of the best things you can do for your friend is to have his mouth evaluated by us often. Remember, cats are superstar actors and are great at masking illnesses, so you may not realize he is having any oral problems at all without an examination. With our trained healthcare team, we can safely look in his mouth to see if he is experiencing any pain or tooth trouble. Even though your cat may look great and act normally, he may be hiding a real problem in the back of his mouth!

## Renal Failure

Renal failure refers to the inability of the kidneys to properly perform their functions of cleansing waste from the blood and regulating hydration. Kidney disease is extremely common in older cats, but is usually due to exposure to toxins or genetic causes in young cats.

Even very young kittens can have renal failure if they have inherited kidney defects, so we recommend screening for kidney problems early, before any anesthesia or surgery, and then regularly throughout life. Severe renal failure is a progressive, fatal disease, but special diets and medications can help cats with kidney disease live longer, fuller lives.

### Neonatal Isoerythrolysis (NI)/Hemolytic Icterus

Neonatal isoerythrolysis, or NI, is a rare immune-mediated disease that is caused when a newborn kitten with type A blood suckles colostrum (first milk) from a mother with type B blood or vice-versa. The mother's immunity against type A blood is contained in her colostrum, so when the kitten nurses, the antigen is absorbed into the kitten's bloodstream through ingestion. The resulting immune reaction develops antibodies that attack and destroy the kitten's own red blood cells. Consequently, affected kittens usually die within a few days of birth. NI can occur in many cat breeds, but is more often seen in breeds with a higher likelihood of having type B blood like your Maine Coon. If you plan to breed your cat, you will need to learn more about this problem beforehand from your veterinarian.

### Deafness

Cats of any breed that are completely white, especially if they have blue eyes, are at high risk for congenital deafness, and are likely to be born with reduced or absent hearing. Heritable or genetic deafness has also been noted in some Coon Cat bloodlines, so if you suspect your cat's hearing is not as keen as it should be, schedule an appointment with us right away.

The problem could be caused by a treatable issue like ear polyps or an ear infection, but if your pet's ears are healthy and he's still ignoring you, a more thorough hearing workup might be in order, including brainwave analysis, if indicated. There is no treatment for genetic nerve deafness, but most deaf cats get along fine in an indoor environment. For deaf or hearing-deficient cats, going outside can be very dangerous, as cats rely largely on hearing to detect sneaking predators and other perils like oncoming cars, so an indoor life is the best way to keep your hard-of-hearing pet safe.

## Taking Care of Your Maine Coon at Home

Much of what you can do at home to keep your cat happy and healthy is common sense, just like it is for people. Watch her diet, make sure she gets plenty of exercise, regularly brush her teeth and coat, and your vet or emergency hospital when something seems unusual (see "What to Watch For" below). Be sure to adhere to the schedule of examinations and vaccinations that we recommend for your pet. During your cat's exams, your vet will perform her necessary "check-ups" and test for diseases and conditions that are common in Maine Cats. Another very important step in caring for your pet is signing her up for pet health insurance. There will certainly be medical tests and procedures she will need throughout her life and pet health insurance will help you cover those costs. Pet insurance will be available to you during checkout of your adoption.

## Routine Care, Diet, and Exercise

Build your pet's routine care into your schedule to help your Coon Cat live longer, stay healthier, and be happier during her lifetime. We cannot overemphasize the importance of a proper diet and exercise routine for your pet.

- Supervise your pet as you would a young child. Keep doors closed, pick up after yourself, and block off rooms as necessary. This will help keep her out of trouble, off of inappropriate surfaces for jumping, and away from objects she shouldn't put in her mouth.
- She has long hair that will need brushing daily.
- Maine Coons have generally good teeth, and you can keep them perfect by brushing them at least twice a week!
- Check her ears weekly for wax, debris, or signs of infection and clean when necessary. Don't worry—we'll show you how!
- She needs daily play sessions that stimulate her natural desire to hunt and explore. Keep her mind and body active or she may develop behavior issues.
- Cats are meticulously clean and demand a clean litter box. Be sure to provide at least one box for each cat and scoop waste daily.
- It is important that your cat drinks adequate amounts of water. If she won't drink water from her bowl try adding ice cubes or a flowing fountain.
- Feed a high-quality feline diet appropriate for her age. Exercise your cat regularly by engaging her with high-activity toys

## When to call the vet:

Call your vet for an appointment if you notice any of these types of symptoms:

- Change in appetite or water consumption
- Tartar build-up, bad breath, red gums, or broken teeth
- Itchy skin (scratching, chewing, or licking), hair loss, or areas of shortened fur
- Lethargy, mental dullness, or excessive sleeping
- Fearfulness, aggression, or other behavioral changes
- Limping, reluctance to jump when playing
- Lameness, abnormal hind limb gait, “bunny hopping”
- Poor appetite, weight loss, lethargy, increased thirst and urination
- Lack of response to noises

## Emergencies

Seek medical care immediately if you notice any of these signs:

- Scratching or shaking the head, tender ears, or ear discharge
- Cloudiness, redness, itching, or any other abnormality involving the eyes
- Inability or straining to urinate; discolored urine
- Weakness or exercise intolerance; rapid, labored, or open-mouth breathing; sudden-onset of weakness

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