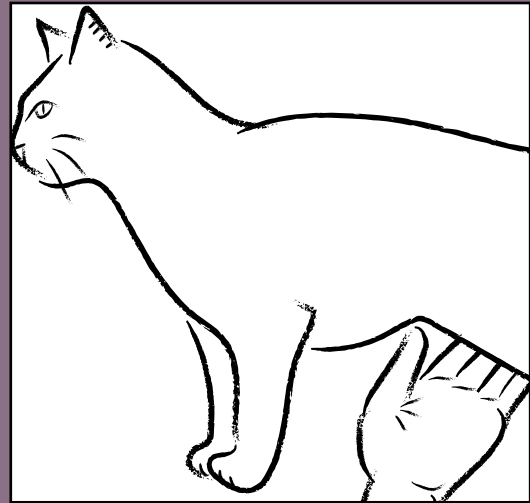
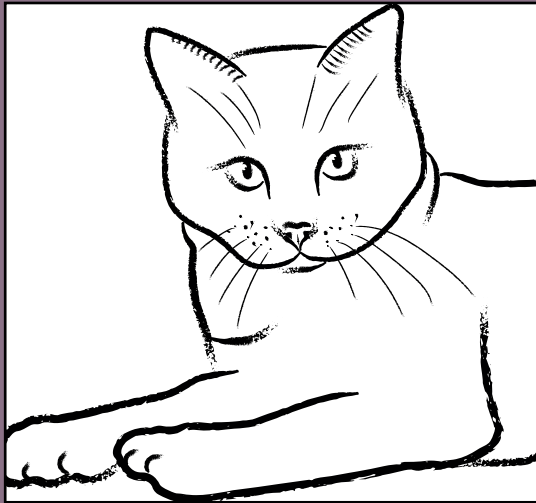


A MINI GUIDE TO **FELINE** HEALTH



Caroline Clark

About the Author

Caroline Clark is a registered veterinary nurse (RVN) with over forty years of experience working with and helping pets. Caroline is also a registered clinical animal behaviour counsellor achieving her post graduate diploma in companion animal behaviour counselling at Southampton University in 2006, where she studied under some of the world's leading authorities in the field.

In 2014 Caroline founded Pet Education and Training where she now divides her time between seeing clinical behaviour cases, mentoring budding behaviourists and providing online and in-person continuing education to students from the veterinary community and other pet professionals (www.petcourses.co.uk).

This Mini Guide to Feline Health was referenced in my book, *A Professional's Guide to Feline Behaviour*. References to chapters in this guide refer to the chapters within this book.

This book is an invaluable resource for the feline professional, yet written in such an accessible way that it would be of interest to anyone who shares their life with a cat and wants to gain a deeper understanding of their behaviour.

The book is presented in easy-to-navigate sections, each packed with practical advice and the colour illustrations, tables and graphics throughout make it approachable for every type of reader.

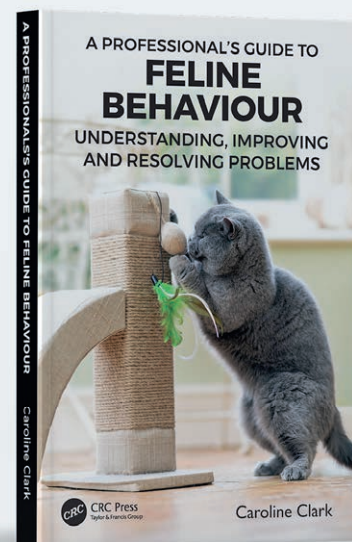
Written by Caroline Clark
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www.carolineclarkauthor.co.uk
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Measuring a Cat's Vital Signs

This guide has been designed to help you carry out some basic healthcare for your cat and **DOES NOT replace veterinary attention.**

However, having some idea of how to perform these measurements helps assess the cat's overall health by providing an insight into whether internal processes are working as they should be. Abnormalities can reflect a number of issues ranging from circulatory problems and a host of medical disorders.

Although it's only the vet who can make a diagnosis, learning these simple techniques can assist you in monitoring your cat if they

are ill or have sustained an accident, providing some extremely useful feedback to give to your vet whilst transporting them to the clinic or waiting for them to attend.

Collectively, all these observations are called vital signs.

What You Will Need:

A quiet environment, a watch with a second hand, and somewhere to record your observations.

Top tip:

Keep the normal ranges, a note book and a pen in your first aid kit. If you don't have one, I've designed a special version just for pets and it's available on my website.

Are You Equipped?

I've put together this high quality, first aid kit which is easy to carry round the waist or across the chest - perfect for dog walking but can also be used in the home and car.

It contains hand-picked, essential items, ensuring that you will have everything at hand to deal with some common and potentially life-threatening injuries, whilst awaiting veterinary attention.

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How to Measure the Respiratory (Breathing) Rate

The normal resting respiratory rate is anywhere between **15 to 40** breaths per minute*.

It's a good idea to begin with the respiration rate (RR) first. This is because it is the least invasive and so, can be carried out using an off-hands approach.

A Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Take the RR when cat is resting (but not soundly asleep). Watch the rise and fall of their chest as they breathe in (inspiration) and out (expiration). Count that cycle as one respiration (see Figure 1).
2. Note the character of the breathing: is it noisy, irregular or laboured? If they are open-mouth breathing and appear distressed they require immediate veterinary attention.

3. Count the number of respirations over a period of 60 seconds. If you are finding it difficult for them to stay in one place for that long, you can count over a 15 second period and multiply it by 4.

How to Locate and Measure the Pulse

The normal resting pulse rate is anywhere between **120 to 140** beats per minute*.

The pulse rate (PR) reflects what the heart and circulation are doing. We assess this by feeling how many times the blood pulsates through an pulse point – most usually an artery, (the larger blood vessels in the body) over the period of one minute. As with the RR, to get an accurate reading, you need to take the pulse when the cat is resting and calm.

A Step-by-Step Guide:

1. One of the largest, most accessible sites to use is the femoral artery. This can be felt by

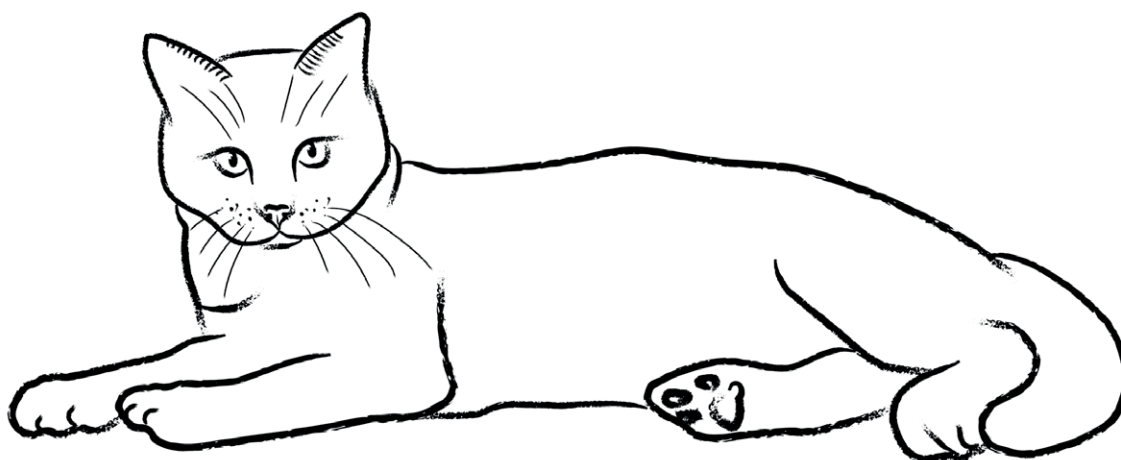


Figure 1 The best way to take a cat's RR is to allow them to relax and simply observe their breathing rate.

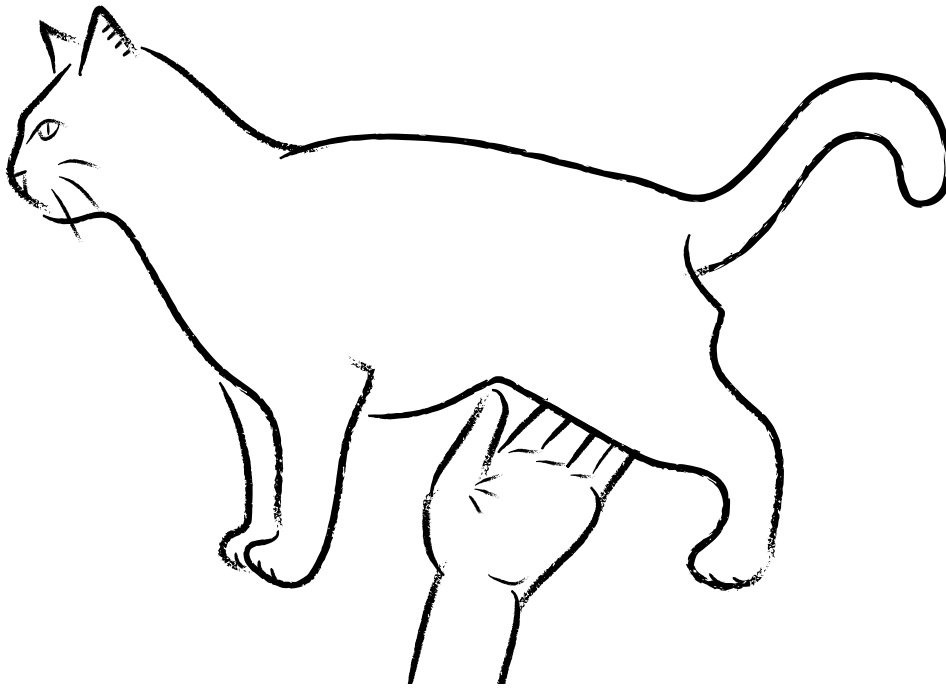


Figure 2 The femoral artery can be felt by sliding your hand (fingers) on the inside of the thigh: about half way between the knee joint and the groin.

sliding your hand on the inside of the thigh: about half way between the knee joint and the groin (see Figure 2).

2. Feel the pulse under your fingers. Don't squeeze too hard but apply sufficient pressure to feel the blood surging through the vessel. It can take some practise so don't worry if you can't feel it at first.
3. You can either measure the PR for a period of 60 seconds or for 15 seconds, as described in the details given for measuring the RR.
4. Record your measurement as beats per minute (BPM).

Assessing the Mucous Membranes (MM)

A mucous membrane is a moist, inner lining, found in certain body cavities and organs. It has

a network of blood vessels and glands within it make mucus (a thick, slippery fluid). Also called mucosa. A healthy mucous membrane should look pink, shiny and moist.

The most frequently used, and easiest to assess, are the oral mucous membranes that line the gums, observed by gently lifting the cat's lip. The conjunctiva (the inside lining of the eye) may also be used by gently pulling the bottom lid down.

Abnormalities and What They Might Indicate:

Pale MM, together with other symptoms of illness, can indicate shock, poor circulation or blood loss. Dry MM can indicate dehydration which occurs in a number of conditions including prolonged diarrhoea, vomiting and heatstroke. A blue tinge, (known as cyanosis)

or a “muddy” appearance, can indicate a lack of oxygen in the bloodstream.

Dental problems and gum disease may result in inflammation which can alter the appearance of the gums. However, this change usually develops over time and is accompanied by a bad breath. Learning how to brush your cat’s teeth is one way to prevent problems.

How to Take a Body Temperature Reading

The normal body temperature is anywhere between around **38** to **39** degrees Celsius.

Taking the body temperature can be valuable as it can indicate medical conditions such as bacterial infections, heatstroke and other feline diseases. However, it is a stressful procedure because most commonly the thermometer has to be placed in to the cat’s rectum which is fairly invasive and can be uncomfortable or cause them to startle. This reaction can exacerbate shock and may make breathing difficulties worsen. Consequently, it’s best to let the vet carry out this task.

Some of the Signs of a Raised Temperature Include:

- ▶ A raised respiration rate.
- ▶ Inappetence.
- ▶ Lethargy.
- ▶ Hiding and withdrawal.

Summary

Being able to measure a cat’s vital signs means you can assess their health, provide essential information to the vet and potentially save lives.

*Although reliable text books provide us with details of ‘normal’ ranges – just like us, cats are individuals and sometimes have readings outside the norm. It therefore makes sense to practise and observe your own cat’s vital signs when they are well. This means you will know what is normal for them and, more importantly, will know when things are not as they should be so you can seek veterinary advice.

Do also be aware that new-born kittens/neonates will have ranges that fall outside those given, as is also likely in senior, especially super-seniors.

How to Restrain a Cat for a Physical Examination

Restraining a cat for a physical examination should be approached with care and sensitivity.

It is possible to carry out a basic assessment of a cat’s health without even having to put your hands on them. Close observations of their behaviours, body posture and general demeanour can reveal a great deal about their health.

Chapters Four: Communication and Seven: Working with Cats: Challenges and Practical Solutions, in my book *A Professional's Guide to Feline Behaviour*, offer a wealth of detailed information on how to communicate, interact and handle cats safely. However, there may be times when you need to restrain your cat in

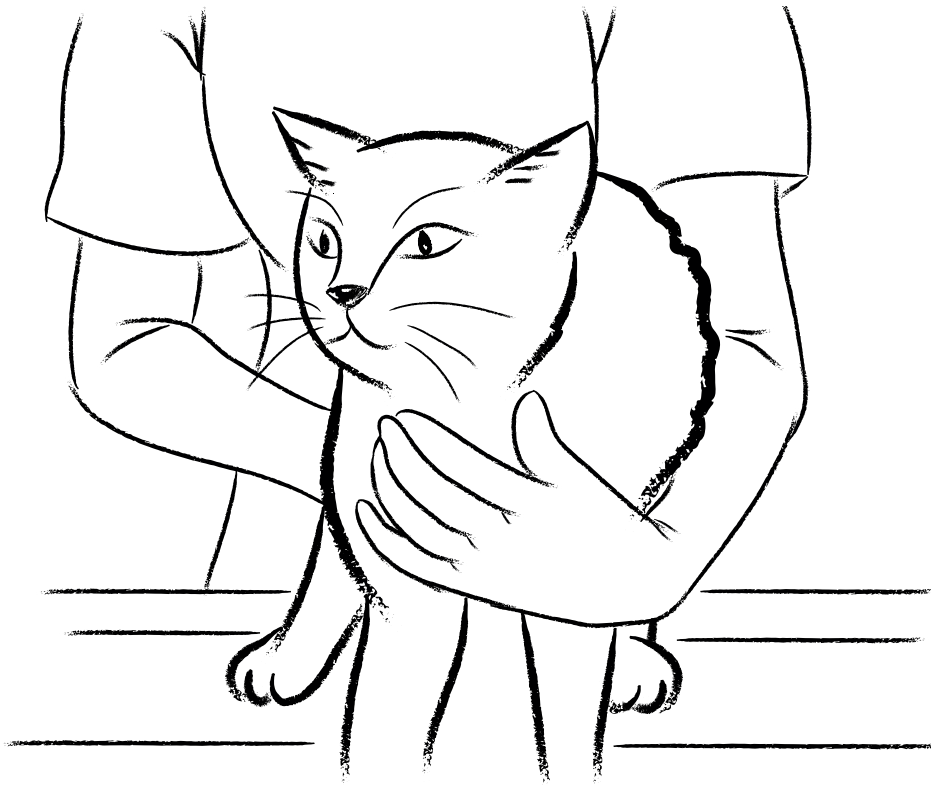


Figure 3 Allow the cat to dictate the pace and avoid any heavy handling.

order to carry out a physical examination if you are concerned about their health or when taking them to the veterinary clinic (see Figure 3). So, in addition to the information already provided in the book, here are some guiding principles that might help.

A Step-by-Step Guide:

- 1.** Make sure you carry out your examination somewhere quiet and where your cat is comfortable and they feel secure.
- 2.** Let your cat initiate and lead the interaction. Offer your hand and let them approach you.
- 3.** Avoid being heavy-handed. Light restraint is often all that is necessary.
- 4.** Make sure their feet are on a non-slip and

stable surface.

- 5.** Don't force them into position - Allow them to make the choice of standing or lying down.
- 6.** Avoid direct eye contact – even familiar cats can find this threatening especially if they are ill or in a degree of pain.
- 7.** You should be able to recognise when your cat is fearful and anxious or is getting agitated so you can back off and avoid making the situation worse.

Having someone else to help restrain the cat, whilst you carry out the examination, is often easier and safer. Make sure they are familiar with these guidelines and ideally choose someone who your cat knows and trusts.



Figure 4 Only very gentle restraint is necessary and finger toothbrushes can be accepted, provided a programme of habituation has been carried out alongside positive associations beforehand.

How to Carry Out a Cat's Oral Care

Dental problems, including tooth decay and gum inflammation, are common in cats leading to pain, discomfort and potentially more serious systemic diseases that can affect the kidneys and heart.

Signs that Indicate Dental and Gum Disease Include:

- ▶ Halitosis (bad breath).
- ▶ Drooling saliva and pawing at the mouth.
- ▶ Dropping food and having difficulty eating and chewing.
- ▶ Inflamed gums (usually just above the tooth line) and the presence of plaque and tartar on the teeth.

- ▶ Going off their food and general lethargy.

Daily brushing, as part of a cat's health care routine, is one of the most important things we can do to minimise oral disease.

It is possible to begin dental care for any age of cat - even mature adults. However, a slower, more gradual approach is required. Beginning the routine when they are kittens is best because it is easier to habituate them to having their mouth inspected and their teeth brushed.

For some really good advice on how to carry out dental home care for your cat check out the following resources:

<https://icatcare.org/advice/how-to-brush-your-cats-teeth/>