

Health Matters: Common Maine Coon Health Issues and How to Address Them

Maine Coon cats are generally a healthy breed, but there are certain health concerns to be aware of. While some issues can be life threatening such as, heart disease, others like hair balls can easily be remedied. Always do your homework before purchasing a Maine Coon kitten. Be sure you select a reputable breeder who takes a proactive approach to breeding healthy cats. [Let's Talk About "Adopt Don't Shop" for Maine Coon Cats](#) will help guide you on finding a responsible breeder that promotes the health and well-being of the Maine Coon breed. Let's look at 8 health issues to be aware of with Maine Coon cats.

1- Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM)

Commonly called HCM, Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy is a thickening of the muscular walls that surround the heart. This has an adverse affect on the heart's efficiency. HCM is one of the most commonly diagnosed heart issues in cats. While it is unclear what causes HCM researchers suspect there is a genetic component. HCM can be life threatening so it is important to be aware of the symptoms and there are certain treatments that can be quite helpful.

Many cats with HCM may be a-symptomatic. Symptoms of HCM include: thromboembolism, blood clots in the heart, increased heart rate, acute rear limb pain or paralysis, heart arrhythmias and weak pulse. If fluid accumulates around the heart the cat may become lethargic and/or experience irregular breathing. If you suspect or notice any of these symptoms take your cat to the veterinarian right away. Routine physical exams are a proactive approach to catching heart issues before they progress extensively.

2-Hip Dysplasia

Hip dysplasia happens when the hip joints develop abnormally. The ball and socket become dislocated. While we normally see hip dysplasia in older felines, it may be evident as early as 4 months of age. Although rare for most cats, hip dysplasia is more common in larger purebred cat breeds, such as, Maine Coon cats. It is also more common in female Maine Coon cats than males. While hip dysplasia is not life-threatening it often causes arthritis and can lead to paralysis in extreme cases. This condition is known as a hereditary disease, so there is a genetic component, meaning it can be passed down from the parents to their kittens. Responsible breeders will screen for this condition and not breed cats that suffer from hip dysplasia.

Symptoms early on may include loose joints or hip joint pain. If your cat stops jumping, running or climbing these can all be signs of joint pain. If you notice a reduction in the muscle mass around the thigh muscle, hear a grating sound when your cat moves, notice lameness in the rear end, see your cat having difficulty getting up, notice your cat having a swaying movement when it walk or notice a decreased range of motion these can all be signs of hip

dysplasia. If your cat has one or more of these symptoms take your cat to the veterinarian for an evaluation. There are supplements and treatments available to improve this condition that can greatly reduce your cat's pain level while increasing its' quality of life. Treatment can help to slow down the process of further deterioration in the joint.

3-Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA)

SMA is a weakened muscle condition that causes the muscles to deteriorate in the hind limbs and a loss of motor neurons in the lower portion of the spinal cord. This is not a life-threatening condition and not thought to be painful, but requires additional care as these cats lose motor function. Cats with SMA should not be allowed outdoors due to their impaired motor function. A DNA test can screen for this genetic defect.

Signs of Spinal Muscular Atrophy may begin as early as 3-6 months of age. At first you may notice your kitten having a difficult time jumping on or off surfaces such as the couch or a favorite chair. They may seem overly clumsy when hopping down. This is a result of their pelvic limbs weakening and their muscle mass will begin decreasing through their hind end. As time progresses they may sway in their hind end as they walk, have an abnormal posture, have fine muscular tremors and fasciculations. Jumping may become laborious, and their muscles may become unstable and weak. It is important to have your kitten examined and evaluated for this condition early on if you notice any of these symptoms developing. Cats with this condition can have a very full life being kept indoors with proper stimulation and care.

4-Polycystic Kidney Disease

Polycystic Kidney Disease, often referred to as PKD, is hereditary, meaning it can be passed down genetically from the parents. It is characterized by kittens being born with cysts already growing on their kidneys. These cysts normally grow slowly and are often not detected until the cat is well into adulthood. If these cysts become too large they can impact kidney function and even lead to kidney failure. DNA testing can screen for this disease, as only one parent has to carry the gene in order for it to be passed down to the offspring.

Symptoms of PKD include: lethargy, increased thirst, weight loss, loss of appetite, increased urination and vomiting. If you suspect PKD your veterinarian can genetically test for it and may also perform an ultrasound to check for cysts growing on the kidneys. Medical intervention may be necessary if your cat suffers from large cysts.

5-Periodontal Disease

[How to Protect Your Cat's Teeth](#) provides instructive care for taking a proactive approach to periodontal disease. Known as gum disease, periodontal disease has 3 stages: halitosis, gingivitis and periodontitis. A proactive approach for prevention is the best way to keep this disease from becoming an issue. If left untreated gum disease can lead to heart valve and

kidney conditions. Although it seems very simple, brushing your cat's teeth can prevent this nasty disease from ever becoming a problem.

6-Stomatitis

Stomatitis occurs when inflammation develops in the gums and mouth. Painful mouth ulcers may also develop. This is one of the more common problems Maine Coon cats may develop. If you notice your cat stops eating see your veterinarian immediately to have them evaluated. This is normally the first noticeable symptom, as their mouth has become too painful to eat. Other symptoms include: bad breath, weight loss, dropping food, pawing at their mouth or face, yelping when they eat or having a messy hair coat. When their mouth is painful, they may not self groom as they usually do so having food in their fur or just a more disheveled appearance can be a sign of mouth pain.

7-Hair Balls

All cat breeds aside from hairless felines such as, the Sphynx cat, experience hair balls. Long haired breeds, including Maine Coon cats, are more prone to hairballs. A proactive approach through regular grooming is often the best prevention. [How to Prevent Hairballs in Maine Coon Cats: Tips and Techniques](#) will take you step by step through addressing this unsightly and often uncomfortable issue.

8-Obesity

Maine Coon cats are one of the largest domestic cat breeds. In order to reach their massive size between 3-4 years of age, these cats have a slower growth rate than most other breeds. By comparison, most cats reach their full growth around 2 years of age. Overfeeding is the most common contributor to obesity. Obesity has many other ugly side effects such as: contributing to heart disease, diabetes and arthritis to name a few. Making sure your Maine Coon receives proper stimulation and exercise are two additional ways to combat obesity. Work closely with your veterinarian to insure you are providing the proper amount of food for each life stage.

Conclusion:

Insuring your Maine Coon cat has a long and healthy life starts by choosing a healthy kitten. [How to find Maine Coon Kittens near me](#) will give you further tips in finding a responsible cat breeder and making sure to ask the right questions before you fill out an application or send a deposit. Savvy Cats is happy to answer any questions you may have. Never feel silly reaching out, as we are always glad to assist however we can. Routine health checks are a great way to keep on top of any health issue before it becomes debilitating. Always consult your veterinarian if you suspect your cat may be suffering from pain or illness.