

How can you tell if your pet is happy?

Happiness can sometimes be difficult to define in people so how do we know if our pets are happy? If you are meeting your pet's everyday needs - providing a balanced diet, regular exercise, opportunities for interaction and following a good preventative health programme - you are very likely to have a happy pet on your hands, but it's important to remember that a pet's needs differ from our own.

Modern lifestyles can lead to pets becoming "couch potatoes" and it is far better to show our affection for our companions through spending more time with them in constructive activities such as engaging in play or having a grooming session.

National Pet Month 2009, celebrated healthy, happy pets. Pet Health Council looks at the tell-tail signs that indicate your pet is indeed nicely content.

'Tell tail' signs of a happy dog:

- A happy dog has a "sparkle", he'll be interested in his surroundings and is keen to interact
- He makes eye contact with you, is interested in what you are doing and may join in – even so-called 'helping in the garden'!
- He is interested in his food
- He looks well with shiny coat, bright eyes and pink gums and tongue
- He wags his tail in response to human contact, either petting or voice
- He interacts with humans and other animals by making pleased noises – noises that the owner knows is a happy sign
- He sleeps well at night without disturbance
- He may roll on his back in obvious pleasure
- He spontaneously appears to seek pleasure, like running, paddling or swimming in the surf at the sea-side or lake
- He is relaxed around other dogs and has good inter canine skills

On the other hand:

A stressed dog is anxious and can be withdrawn – although some dogs may become more animated and over active. He might not enjoy social interaction as much as he used to. If he is very anxious he may even growl or snap. Changes in your dog's demeanour or behaviour should always be reported to your vet – they may signal a health problem. Your vet and specialists in animal behaviour can work together to address stress.

'Tell tail' signs of a happy cat

- Happy cats are confident, and keen to interact with family members. They like to be stroked and often initiate contact with their owners
- They 'talk' to members of the family and we can soon learn what the sounds mean – the classic sign of happiness is the feline 'purr' and kneading with the front paws

- Happy cats look bright of eye, have a good coat, groom themselves several times daily, and have pink gums and tongue
- Happy cats roll on their backs, jump and play – pretend to be bigger than they really are
- They take exercise without human initiation – they wander around the house, the garden and generally seek entertainment chasing butterflies or moths, leaves blowing in the wind or playing hide and seek in the bushes
- Some cats have a more aloof personality – they are happy to mix with people – but are not fussed about being petted or picked up. It's important to respect our cats' wishes and not expect them to submit to being petted if that is not their way.
- Few cats are as outgoing as dogs – so do not get concerned if they vanish when visitors come to the house.
- Many experienced cat owners prefer to adopt their cats as adults from animal rescue as its difficult to predict where on this spectrum a kitten is – but with adults what you see is what you get!.

On the other hand:

A stressed cat can be quiet and subdued and may not carry out her normal routine activities such as eating, sleeping and grooming in the same manner. Speak to your vet if you are concerned about such changes in your cat.

Follow a preventative health programme to keep your pet happy and well. Here are Pet Health Council's top 5 tips:

- A good diet
- Regular exercise and interaction
- Worming
- Vaccination
- Annual veterinary check ups
- Health insurance

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For further information, please contact Nicole Harrison or Holly Hunt on 020 7379 6545 or email: enquiries@pethealthcouncil.co.uk

Notes to editor

The Pet Health Council is a body of pet and human health experts. The aim of the organisation is to promote the health and welfare of animals in the interests of both pets and people. For further information on pet care and the benefits of pet ownership, please visit: www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk