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But then she happily let me put her into a cage without a fuss, so she could come along with me and her pals.

? **Body posture**

Your cat's body posture is the last piece of the puzzle to understanding how your cat is feeling. If your kitty is hunched over with his tail wrapped around himself, hunkered down low as if he's trying to disappear, he is either highly stressed or ill.

On the other hand, a cat who is sure of his surroundings and is feeling secure will sprawl out confidently, perhaps even exposing his delicate underbelly (a sure sign of love and trust) as he naps in the sun. Warning — this might not be a real invitation to touch his tummy! Another time you may see your cat expose his belly is while being attacked or bullied. Some people say this is a surrender gesture, but I disagree. Kitty is actually getting ready to use all four paws' worth of claws to protect himself from harm.

An arched back usually indicates fear or aggression, especially if accompanied by hisses and spits. However, a kitten with an arched back while happily jumping around is simply learning how to act like a cat. Who hasn't loved watching a



tiny arched-back kitten trying his best to intimidate a larger cat, or even the family dog?

Once we'd been inside our new home for a few days, my alpha cat, Boo-Boo, began reclaiming his "alpha-ness" by using his body posture to intimidate the other cats. It's fascinating to watch as he walks over to another cat, and merely by lowering his head, positioning his ears slightly to the side and blackening his eyes, I will see fear take hold in the other cat as he or she quickly scurries away. All without one noise, one claw or one hiss. My cats have a language among them that is all their own.

You see, your cat isn't as hard to understand after all. The better you can read his body language, the better you'll be able to anticipate your cat's feelings and his needs. You will be the best cat parent any kitty could ever hope to have if you can recognize what his body language is trying to tell you. 🐾



ACT YOUR AGE *Continued from page 25*

the cat likes remain with the cat."

Fit and trim

A regular feeding schedule can also help control your cat's weight, a factor that can become more of a concern as a 5-year-old cat settles into a less active lifestyle. If you've noticed that your cat seems to be gaining weight, make a few adjustments to get her back to her optimal weight (consult with your veterinarian as well).

Do not "free feed" your cat. Establish regular mealtimes — Marilyn recommends multiple small meals throughout the day — and dole out only the portion that is appropriate for her size. Your vet can guide you in this.

Make time for play. Regular exercise remains a priority throughout your cat's life, though Marilyn reminds owners to never push a cat to play beyond the limits of her age and ability.

Combine play with food. Marilyn recommends treasure hunts as one method. "Place little pieces of dry food and treats on cat trees, in boxes and in toys," she explains, adding that your cat may need to be shown the treats at first until she catches on. "Dry food tosses and rolls also will burn calories. Roll or toss the dry food for the cat to run after."

Grooming

Feed your cat a high-quality diet formulated for her adult nutritional needs (your vet can provide recommendations). Doing so can contribute to the overall good looks of your cat and make grooming tasks as minimal as possible.

Typically, a healthy adult cat does not need extra grooming attention, Marilyn says. "A 5-year-old cat's grooming needs is the same as other adult cats. The health, fur length, condition of fur and the breed dictates how much and how often individual cats need to be groomed."

Overall, your 5-year-old feline friend will continue to live a healthy, full life with regular attention to her health. You are likely already attuned to her personality and behavior, so with your continued focus on her needs, you can both enjoy these steady adult years. 🐾