

The Sphynx



Overview

The Sphynx is one of the more intriguing cats of the cat fancy. Their bald and wrinkled appearance fascinates some, while others are less than interested in this breed. The Sphynx is a “hairless” breed, but it is not entirely hairless. Most Sphynxs have fine down that covers their skin. For those who do take the time to get to know these cats, they are in for a wonderful treat. Due to their soft skin, fine downy hairs, and warm body, the Sphynx feels like soft chamois leather the loves to cuddle up with you.

History

A kitten named Prune was the first recorded hairless kitten born back in 1966 in Ontario, Canada. Prune was bred to other cats to create more hairless cats. Since hairlessness is a recessive gene some of these offspring were haired, while others were hairless. This resulted in Canadian Hairless Cats, or Sphynx cats due to the striking similarity to the Egyptian Sphynx sculptures. Three other hairless kittens resulting from natural mutations were found between 1975 -1978 in Minnesota and Toronto. These kittens, Epidermis, Punkie, and Paloma, were bred to the Devon Rex breed – another “hairless” breed. It is to these offspring that the Sphynx can trace its history.



Personality

The Sphynx is extremely lovable, inquisitive, clumsy, intelligent, and mischievous. “Velcro Lap Cat” is a very good descriptive term that applies to the Sphynx’s desire to always be with you, on you, or showing off for you. They are very active cats and have an abundance of energy. They can entertain themselves for hours with the proper household environmental enrichment, and some have even been taught to play fetch. The Sphynx is intelligent enough to seek out warm places when they get cold, anything from the computer monitor, a sunny widow, the television, to cuddling up

under a blanket with their human. The Sphynx will greet every new person visiting the home, and most will get along well with other pets. However, they do prefer their human companions.

Traits

The Sphynx is one of the few “hairless” breeds. There are varying degrees of “hairless;” there can be a fine down on the body which makes the cat feel like peach fuzz. There are also some short hairs usually present on the nose, ears, and sometimes on the toes and tail. Seasonal and hormonal changes can also have an influence on hair development. The texture of the Sphynx’s skin has been described as a suede hot water bottle, a warm chamois, or a buttery feel. Their skin pigment can come in a variety of colors and patterns. Since the Sphynx is hairless, there is a potential for these cats to get cold. If it’s cold to you it’ll be cold for the Sphynx, however they are good at searching out warm places to warmup. The Sphynx’s other distinguishing feature is their large ears, which are frequently more than 2-3 inches in height. They have an open sweet expression with large lemon shaped eyes. The Sphynx is a medium-boned muscular cat, whose belly should look “Buddha round” as if it has just eaten a large meal.



Bathing is important maintenance for the Sphynx. Since it doesn’t have a hair coat to wick oils away from the body, they tend to get oily. This requires frequent bathing, ear cleaning, and nail cleaning.

Bathing should not be difficult, most have been acclimated to bathing by the breeder at an early age. Also due to the lack of hair coat, care must be taken about exposing and protecting the skin from the sun. Some people with cat allergies find that they may be able to tolerate a Sphynx. However the Sphynx is not considered to be a hypo-allergenic breed. But due to the frequent bathing, there are no airborne hairs, and the reactive chemical in their saliva is lower.

Health

The Sphynx is a robust breed when bred properly with very few serious health or genetic problems but may be affected by Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM), and a neurological disease called hereditary myopathy.

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM) is the most common form of heart disease in cats in general. HCM is a heart disease which causes the heart to progressively thicken. This thickening doesn’t allow the heart to relax normally. As a result the heart cannot completely fill with blood, thus it doesn’t circulate blood normally eventually leading to congestive heart failure. HCM is known as an “old age” disease, but the genetic form can occur in young cats typically between 6 months and 3 years of age. There is no cure for HCM. But with various heart medication options, proper management can ease the burden on the heart extending the quality of life.

Hereditary myopathy is inherited as an autosomal recessive trait. This means two copies of an abnormal gene must be present in order for the disease or trait to develop. This disease is known to affect the Devon Rex, whose lineage was used for developing the Sphynx, therefore it is possible for the Sphynx to inherit this disease. Hereditary myopathy can be seen in cats of either sex, and signs usually become apparent between 3 weeks to 6 months. The disease will progress till 6-9 months of age, then may stabilize or decrease to a slow progression. There is no treatment. The severity varies from cat to cat and case to case. Hereditary myopathy expresses itself as:



“Generalized muscle weakness. Often marked weakness of the head and neck muscles, with dorsal protrusion of the shoulder blades. A high-stepping forelimb gait. Low exercise tolerance with head bobbing, progressive protrusion of the shoulder blades, shortening of the stride, muscle tremors and eventual collapse. At rest, cats often adopt a ‘dog-begging’ position, with their forepaws resting on a convenient raised object. Megaoesophagus may be present leading to regurgitation and sometimes aspiration pneumonia. Difficulty in maintaining a normal head position may result in frequent episodes of laryngospasm after obstruction of the pharynx (throat) with food. This is the most usual cause of death in these cats.”

The Sphynx can also be prone to some skin conditions, such as urticaria pigmentosa and cutaneous mastocytosis, as well as to periodontal disease. “Cats with urticaria pigmentosa have multiple, partly symmetrical areas of redness or brown discoloration of their skin. These areas can be intensely itchy and are often located on the trunk, limbs, head and neck. Occasionally the discolored patches have crusted red papules (bumps). The patches can be darker brown in color with some crusting on the surface of the skin. These symptoms are due to an increased number of mast cells, a type of cell involved in allergic reactions. These cells release histamine, a substance that causes itchiness and inflammation in the area. Cats typically show these symptoms when they are young, with the age ranging from five to seven months old.”

Reputable breeders do breed to minimize the occurrence of many of these disorders. It may be unreasonable to genetically test every kitten. But most breeders know the genetic status of the breeding parents, helping to reduce the odds of subsequent litters developing a genetic disorder. Never be afraid to ask about the breeding parent’s health history, a reputable breeder should be willing to discuss it with you.

References

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