



which way the first score falls. In Oscar's case, the second test came up positive.

Why the change? Could have been a faulty first test. Or, more likely in this case, he contracted the virus right before coming to Best Friends and had not yet produced enough antibodies for it to register on the test. After a third test revealed another positive, Oscar was an official FIV kitty.

### Life after diagnosis

Oscar is now living in a Best Friends cat apartment with non-FIV cats. Surprised? Many people, even supposed experts, will tell you that FIV and non-FIV cats should never mix. But in truth, with the right precautions, they can get along fine. The fact is that FIV is almost entirely spread through serious, penetrating bite wounds, the sort of bites two competing, un-neutered males would trade in the wild if they were fighting over territory.

Oscar's not much of a bite risk. He needed surgery for his broken jaw and, during the operation, part of his jaw was removed (necessary because his jaw was hanging by the gums alone), so he can't really bite. Plus, he's been neutered and didn't know the meaning of the word "aggression" in the first place. Caregivers supervised Oscar's transition to a non-FIV room, and he blended in like a charm. He's in good health and the FIV doesn't affect his quality of life much at all.

Oscar's life as a FIV-positive cat may not always be picture-perfect. If he develops a cold or some other bug down the road, the FIV will make it harder to shake. The virus compromises the immune system. Yet with proper care and nutrition, he has a bright future ahead of him indeed. (And if you're wondering about his ability to eat with that funky jaw, just watch him wolf down a meal sometime!)

### An uphill climb

Loverboy, however, shows how FIV can wreak havoc on a cat who's had poor care.

He came to Best Friends from the Great Kitty Rescue last summer out near Death Valley. He'd been neglected to the point where he was literally skin and bones. You could hear those bones clacking together when he walked. He was also fighting a nasty case of ringworm and had lost most of his fur.

As a Guardian Angel cat, Loverboy (*pictured opposite*) had loving sponsors rooting for him, and he was given the very best care. Even so, the FIV made it difficult for him to shake the ringworm. It would come back on his nose, his ears, somewhere. Then it was back to the topical creams, oral medications and sulfur baths. Poor guy! At least Loverboy never seemed to mind the treatments.

If Loverboy hadn't been dealing with FIV, the recovery process would have been much faster. Loverboy not only had to get over the ringworm, but he needed a lot of extra nutrition to put on weight.

"FIV does not in and of itself directly hurt the cat," says Best Friends vet Dr. Patti Iampietro. Her recommendations: Feed your FIV cat a good diet, keep her indoors, keep her up-to-date on vaccinations, and take her to the vet at the first sign of illness. If you do all that, there's no reason she can't have a high quality of life.

# High FIV

## Guardian Angels care for cats with feline immunodeficiency virus

► **By David Dickson**

Oscar and Loverboy are two cats in Guardian Angel care at Best Friends. Guardian Angel members provide for the special care of animals like Oscar and Loverboy. And these two cats are, in turn, living proof that FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus) doesn't have to spell disaster.

They also show two very different sides of living with the virus.

### Testing, testing

Oscar came to the sanctuary with a broken jaw. Somebody had shot him in the face, which broke his jaw in two places.

At first, Oscar (*pictured above*) tested negative for feline leukemia and FIV. Because he'd been an intact male stray, the most likely candidates for FIV, the vets at Best Friends decided to retest him just to be sure. Double-checking FIV tests is a good idea, no matter

Today, Loverboy looks like a million bucks. It took a lot of TLC and patience, but he doesn't remotely resemble the sickly cat he was when he first arrived. He's all but kicked ringworm for good, his fur has grown back, and he has put on over three pounds. Just like Oscar, he's walking proof that with proper nutrition, care and medical attention, FIV can't keep a good cat down. 🐾



## Quick Facts About FIV

- FIV is a cat-only disease. It cannot be spread to humans or other non-felids.
- FIV is a slow virus that affects the immune system over a period of years.
- FIV is spread almost entirely through serious, penetrating bite wounds. This type of bite wound is seen most often in feral, intact tomcats. The virus can also be spread through blood transfusions and badly infected gums, and on occasion a mother may infect her kittens while they're in the womb or through her milk after they are born.
- FIV can't be spread casually between cats, such as in water or food bowls, or in litter boxes. Cuddling, playing and other forms of casual physical contact do not spread the virus.
- Many FIV-positive cats live out their entire lives healthy and happy, never showing any symptoms at all.
- The FIV virus was discovered in 1986. Before then, FIV-positive cats and non-FIV cats lived together peacefully all the time.
- The ELISA snap test is the most common test for diagnosing FIV. The ELISA test is very reliable, but the most accurate check for FIV is the Western Blot test.
- FIV cats should be kept indoors, fed a nutritious diet, and should see a vet at the first sign of any illness.
- FIV cats are a joy to adopt. Call Best Friends for details.

Animals like Oscar and Loverboy come to Best Friends from shelters and rescue groups around the country to get the special care they need. It's all made possible by Best Friends' Guardian Angel members. You can follow the progress of special-needs pets on the Guardian Angel section of the Best Friends website at [www.bestfriends.org/guardianangel](http://www.bestfriends.org/guardianangel).

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