

Cat Owners' Handbook



Government
of South Australia

Dog and Cat
Management Board

2020 edition
**Updated with
new laws**

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Owning a cat can enrich your life in many ways, but it's a big commitment to your cat and the community. This is your guide to socially-responsible cat ownership.

In the book you will find:

- information on how to care for your cat
- strategies to prevent your cat causing public nuisance or injury
- information on the legal requirements for owning a cat in South Australia.

It is important to remember that your cat is dependent on you to provide its food, water, shelter and the activities necessary for its physical and mental health. This commitment to your cat could last for at least 15 years, so investing in the establishment of a great relationship from the very beginning will be rewarded by years of happiness together.

If you require any further information on any of the topics covered in this book, please refer to the list of resources on the inside back cover, or ask your vet.

Benefits of owning a cat

Cats provide companionship, affection, family fun and entertainment to people of all ages and lifestyles.

People have had a close relationship with cats for thousands of years. This has evolved from being a tool for rodent control to becoming a cherished household pet.

Cats are one of the most popular pets in Australia due to their low maintenance, playfulness and affection. They are the ideal pet for those with low mobility and smaller homes as their play and exercise requirements can be met within the home.

There are physical and mental benefits for cat owners, with studies showing improved general health, improved immunity, lower stress levels and blood pressure.

Cats provide great companionship and contrary to popular belief, cats do not need to roam from your property. Keeping your cat confined to your property is relatively easy. This not only reduces the impact on Australian native wildlife, but reassures you that your cat is safe from other animals, traffic, severe weather events or from becoming lost.



Choosing your cat

In South Australia there are laws regulating the breeding and sale of cats. Breeders and sellers must be registered in Dogs and Cats Online and include their breeder registration number in advertisements. They must also not sell a dog or cat unless it has been desexed and microchipped. More information about the laws on buying or selling dogs and cats is available from the Dog and Cat Management Board's website.

Before sourcing a kitten or cat, research your local animal welfare organisations, shelters, rescue groups and breeders.

There are a number of factors to consider before making the decision to become a cat owner. These include:

- the suitability of your living arrangements for a cat
- the amount of time you can devote to your cat
- the cost of feeding and caring for a cat
- your general lifestyle
- arrangements for your cat if you travel
- an understanding of any local council or government laws relating to cats.

There are many options when choosing a cat: kitten or adult, long-haired or short-haired, pure bred or moggie, male or female.

Kittens

Factors to consider before choosing a kitten:

- Kittens can be cute and irresistible, but they also demand a lot of attention, are full of energy, and can be very mischievous.
- Kittens do not know the difference between their toys and your furniture or belongings; they will play with both.
- Kittens need regular exercise and playtime with their human family.
- Kittens need to be trained. This includes toilet training and appropriate play training.
- Young kittens can adapt more easily to children, busy households and other pets, but also require more protection to keep them safe.
- Kittens should be at least eight weeks old and fully weaned from their mothers before separation.

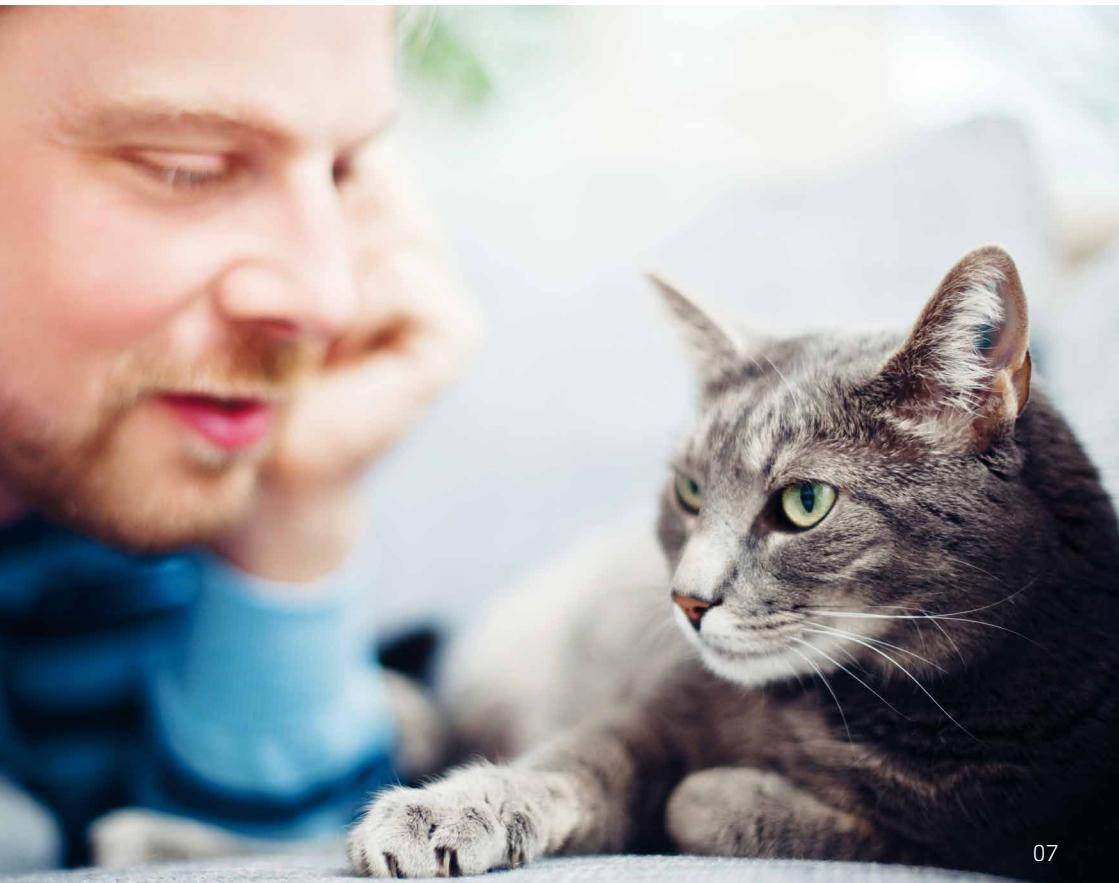
Adult cats

For some people, an adult cat is a good option. Adult cats:

- do not require constant supervision and tend not to be as destructive on household items as kittens
- are often more predictable than kittens
- are just as likely to form a bond with you as a kitten.

Adult cats may have existing behavioural or health problems. If acquired from a reputable shelter, rescue group or breeder these should be identified and fully disclosed with possible solutions for managing them.

All cats should be checked and vaccinated by a vet regularly. They should also be inspected and treated for fleas and worms. Kittens should be lively and playful with bright, clear eyes and a soft, clean coat. Older kittens and adult cats may be less active but should be alert, well nourished and agreeable to being handled.



Owning a cat

Basic responsibilities

Although cats are relatively independent, they still have basic care requirements. Cats need regular meals, clean litter trays, grooming, exercise, entertainment and veterinary care. It is important that before acquiring a cat you ensure that you are willing to provide for its needs. Some cats live into their late teens or early twenties, so it can be a long-term commitment.

Your cat and the law

There are laws affecting you and your cat which include mandatory microchipping and desexing and you are required to register these details in the statewide database, Dogs and Cats Online. Also, depending on where you live, your local council may have a cat bylaw to set limits on how many cats can be kept on a property; containment rules; curfews; and/or charge a fee for registration. It's best you check these obligations with your local council.

Microchipping

South Australian legislation requires cats to be microchipped by 12 weeks of age, or at the point of sale, and the microchip details recorded on Dogs and Cats Online.

A microchip is a small computer chip approximately the size of a grain of rice, which is placed under the skin at the back of the cat's neck by a trained practitioner. The microchip number is recorded and searchable in Dogs and Cats Online. This is useful for finding and contacting owners should a cat become 'lost'.

Identification

In addition to the required microchip your cat should be wearing a collar with an ID tag which has your contact phone number on it. Engraved ID tags are available from veterinary clinics, pet shops, engravers and the internet. Unfortunately too many cats arrive at animal shelters without identification so can't be returned to their owners. Without identification, cats are at risk of being treated as if unowned.

Any cat, regardless of whether it can be identified or not, can legally be euthanased if found in a national park, designated wildlife sanctuary or more than one kilometre from a human dwelling.

Your cat's collar should have an elastic insert or quick release mechanism to ensure that your cat can free itself if it becomes entangled. When attaching a collar, allow a flat 'two-finger' space between the collar and the cat's neck. Remember to check the collar size as your cat grows.



Desexing

All cats must be desexed by six months of age or within 28 days of taking ownership, unless you are a registered breeder.

Desexing refers to the process of surgical sterilisation which permanently renders an animal incapable of reproducing. It can also be known as spaying, castrating or neutering (depending on the gender of your cat). Desexing is a quick and humane surgical procedure performed under general anaesthetic by a veterinarian. There is generally very little post-operative discomfort and your cat is usually ready to come home within 24 hours of the surgery.

Your cat must be desexed by six months of age, however it is strongly recommended that your cat be desexed before it reaches sexual maturity. By five months of age, female cats can become pregnant and males may begin to display aggression and spray urine.

'Early-age desexing' refers to the desexing of kittens between two to three months of age, and is endorsed by RSPCA Australia. It is practised by most large Australian animal shelters and an increasing number of veterinarians. Many registered purebred cat breeders follow this practice and desex kittens before they leave their care. Early-age desexing is also associated with positive behavioural changes and health benefits.

Busting myths about desexing

Desexing will change my cat's personality.

Desexing should not change the basic components of your cat's personality. However, it does reduce anti-social and territorial behaviours. This should be viewed as a positive change for your cat.

My cat will put on weight after being desexed.

It is commonly thought that desexed cats can gain weight more easily than those that have not been desexed. While it is true that desexed cats may be less active due to a reduced desire to roam, there is no need to adjust your cat's diet after the operation. If you are concerned about your cat gaining weight after desexing speak to your vet before making any dietary changes.

Desexing is expensive.

Desexing is a one-off expense. It is important to remember that a desexed cat has a reduced risk of many health issues that can be costly to treat, saving you money in the longer term. Some SA councils offer incentives for desexing your cat.

Do not contribute to the cat overpopulation problem. Be part of the solution. Have your cat desexed.

There are many reasons why your cat should be desexed:

- There is a serious overpopulation of cats in Australia. Cats are prolific breeders and every year thousands of healthy kittens and cats are euthanased because there are simply not enough homes for them.
- Male cats that are not desexed (known as 'toms' or 'tomcats') are more likely to exhibit territorial behaviour, including urine spraying, roaming, aggression, fighting and yowling.
- Female cats that are not desexed (known as 'queens') can 'come into season' every two weeks from spring to autumn and often yowl and roam as they search for a mating partner. Queens can also exhibit territorial urine spraying in a bid to attract a mating partner.
- Desexed cats (both male and female) make better companions. They are less likely to bother your neighbours with yowling and fighting and have a reduced risk of developing certain types of cancer.



Cat behaviour

Every cat has a unique personality. However, there are some aspects of your cat's behaviour that you may wish to change. Listed below are some common undesirable behaviours and how they can be prevented.

Spraying

Cats spray urine to mark their territory and to communicate with other cats. Spraying conveys information about a cat's age, sex, health status and rank. While spraying is normal behaviour, when it happens too often it can become a problem.

There may be medical reasons for spraying, such as urinary tract infections, so you should take your cat to the vet to have it checked. This condition is treatable, but if left untreated could be potentially life-threatening.

If your cat sprays doorframes, curtains and window ledges inside, it may be responding to a perceived threat from outdoors, while spraying chair legs, beds and dressing tables can mean your cat is increasing in confidence by mixing its scent with yours.

Preventing spraying

There are a number of ways to prevent spraying:

- Desex your cat. Desexing a male cat puts a stop to spraying in around 80% of cases.
- Use tin foil to cover objects that your cat sprays. Alternatively, place litter trays or small bowls of dried cat food around the targeted rooms to divert your cat's attention.

- Decrease the size of your cat's territory by keeping certain rooms out of bounds. Introduce the new territory by placing familiar items, food and toys in it.
- Avoid punishment. You need to catch your cat in the act of spraying if it is to understand why it is being punished. If the event happened hours, minutes, or even seconds ago, punishment will only upset your cat.

If you are unable to prevent spraying, or in severe cases, talk to your vet, or a behavioural counsellor.

Cleaning after spraying

- Clean the area with a warm diluted solution of a biological washing powder to remove the protein components of the urine.
- Rinse the area with cold water and allow it to dry.
- Spray with an alcohol, such as surgical spirit, to deal with the fatty deposits and then allow the room to dry thoroughly before allowing your cat access again.

You can also buy commercially-prepared sprays from pet shops or your vet that will mask the pheromone scent.



Aggressive cats

Cats are emotional creatures and can be extremely territorial. Environmental or social changes can trigger extremes in cats' behaviour. If a cat becomes fearful it can spit, hiss and scratch in order to defend itself. This response can be triggered by sights, smells, sounds or unfamiliar cats/animals.

Stopping aggression

The best way to prevent your cat from displaying aggressive behaviour is to keep it indoors.

If aggression continues, take your cat to the vet to rule out any medical conditions. If your cat is in good physical health, your vet will be able to offer you appropriate behavioural advice or refer you to a behavioural counsellor.

Destructive cats

Destructive cats can destroy your home and belongings by scratching and chewing.

Stopping destruction

If you want to stop your cat from scratching and chewing its way through your belongings, you need to offer it an alternative. Provide scratching posts which can be made from fabric, carpet, bark-covered logs, softwood remnants or sisal fibre. Put these in different locations, experimenting with both vertical and horizontal positions. Cover with smooth plastic any areas of your home or furniture that you do not want damaged.

Make sure that dangerous items that should not be chewed by your cat (ribbons, telephone cords, fabrics, sewing thread, needles etc.) are kept out of reach.

If your cat persists in scratching or chewing, or is overly destructive, contact your vet as it may be exhibiting a compulsive disorder.

Caring for your cat

Veterinary Care

A relationship with a local vet is important for the care of your cat. As soon as you get your cat, you should book them in for their first vet check up, just to be sure they're healthy and happy. Your vet can provide advice on both health and behaviour-related issues, and is there to help you look after your cat, so do not be afraid to ask questions.

Vaccination

If you buy a kitten or cat, the seller must tell you about its vaccination history. This is usually provided in the form of a vaccination certificate. If your kitten has not been vaccinated you should take it to your vet for a health check as soon as possible.

All kittens should receive the following core vaccinations:

- Feline Calicivirus (FCV)
- Feline Herpes Virus (FHV)
- Feline Parvovirus (FPV).

Cats may need to be vaccinated more often if they are entering a high-risk environment, such as a boarding cattery, or if they are not contained in your garden and could be interacting with stray or unowned cats.

Additional vaccinations might be necessary for your cat if a particular geographic location, local environment or lifestyle places them at risk of contracting specific infections. These include:

- Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV); and
- Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV).

Check with your vet regarding the best vaccination options for your cat.

Weight Control

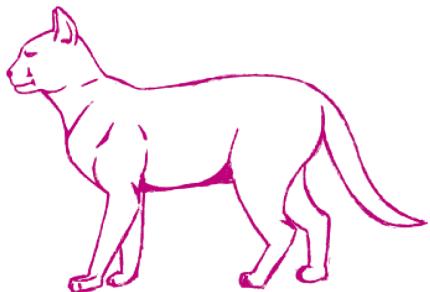
Weight control is not just a human problem; cats can also become overweight. Excess weight places a strain on your cat's joints and organs, affects its general wellbeing and can lead to life-shortening conditions, such as diabetes.

With a healthy cat you can feel its ribs and spine and its last few ribs and flank fold (under belly) may be visible from the side. Cats should have a waist when viewed from top and good muscle mass

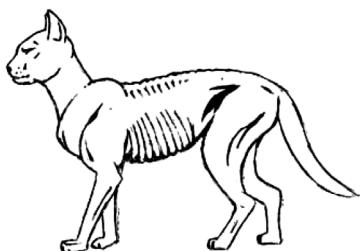
The diagrams provided will help you understand your cat's weight and manage keeping it in optimal condition.

You can monitor your cat's weight with regular weighing on household scales. Keeping your cat's weight within a healthy range is not only good for your cat, but can avoid unnecessary, preventable vet treatments.

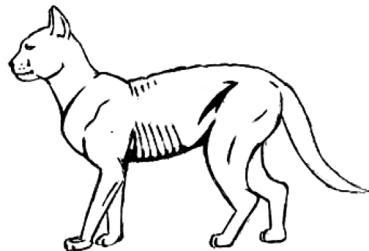
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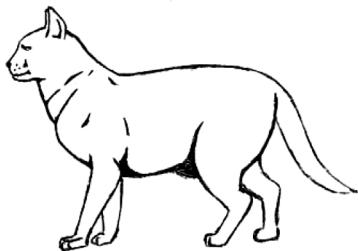
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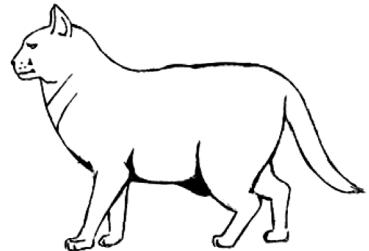
THIN



OVERWEIGHT



OBESE



Caring for your cat

Cat Flu

Cat flu is a general term used to describe a common set of symptoms of the upper respiratory tract. It can be caused by Feline Herpes Virus (FHV), Feline Calicivirus (FCV), Feline Reovirus, Bordetella Bronchiseptica or Feline Chlamydophila.

The main symptoms of cat flu include:

- sneezing
- nasal discharge
- ocular (eye) discharge
- mouth ulcers
- fever
- loss of appetite.

Cat flu is spread through direct and indirect contact. Direct contact is via eye, nose or mouth discharges. Indirect contact includes via contaminated food bowls, bedding etc.

Treatment depends on the cause of the cat flu. There are no drugs for viral infections, but supportive care is essential to ensure that your cat recovers. Seek advice from your vet about the best treatment options for your cat.

Worming

Cats can suffer from several types of worms and parasites including roundworm, hookworm, tapeworm, heartworm and toxoplasmosis. Intestinal worms in cats can cause diarrhoea, vomiting, anaemia, poor appetite, weight loss and a dull coat. If not treated promptly, worms and parasites can severely affect the health of both your cat and your family. Worms and parasites have been linked to eye damage in children and toxoplasmosis in pregnant women.

Fortunately, there are a number of excellent products available to treat and prevent worms and parasites. These include tablets, pastes and topical products that are applied to the back of the neck. Kittens should be wormed monthly from 6 to 16 weeks and every 3 months thereafter.

Ask your vet about a suitable worming program for your cat.



Toxoplasmosis

What is it?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a tiny parasite called Toxoplasma gondii.

Whom does it affect?

Toxoplasmosis can infect any warm-blooded animal, including humans, but cats are a vital link in the parasite's life cycle.

Who is likely to be infected?

Toxoplasmosis is especially common in people who eat or handle raw or undercooked meat, people in contact with infected soil (e.g. gardeners, or children playing in uncovered sandpits) and cat owners who fail to clean litter trays frequently, or do not wash their hands afterwards. Cats are commonly infected when they eat rodents, birds or infected raw meat.

What are the risks for pregnant women?

Infection during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, or health problems for the baby. A pregnant woman should consult her doctor immediately if she has any concerns about toxoplasmosis.

Should a pregnant woman re-home her cat?

No, this is unnecessary. However, it is advisable for pregnant women to wear gloves while cleaning litter trays and wash their hands thoroughly before and after cleaning the tray. If possible have someone else clean the tray.

How can I reduce the risk of toxoplasmosis?

Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling your cat.

The Toxoplasma parasite does not become infectious until cat faeces are over 24 hours old. Therefore, daily cleaning of your cat's litter tray can greatly reduce the risk of infection. It is also recommended that you wear gloves and thoroughly wash your hands before and after cleaning the tray or while gardening, in case your, or a neighbour's, cat is using your garden as a litter tray.

Caring for your cat

Flea Control

Fleas are blood-sucking parasites that can cause a number of problems for your cat. They can transmit disease, cause skin irritations, itching, and even anaemia if present in large numbers. Fleas may also cause your cat to develop a flea bite allergy that will require treatment by a veterinarian.

Be aware that fleas spend most of their life off your cat, so just because you cannot see them does not mean your cat does not have them. Fleas can also infest your home, biting people and causing irritation.

Fleas are not difficult to treat. They love to breed in warm, dirty areas where they will not be disturbed. You can prevent infestations by washing your cat's bedding and vacuuming carpets, floorboards, cracks and crevices regularly.

Talk to your vet about suitable, safe products for treating or protecting your kitten or cat from fleas. Some flea control products are combined with worm treatments that can be administered as a convenient two-in-one treatment.

Ensure that any products you use are specifically formulated for cats, as some dog parasite control products can be toxic to cats. Most flea control products cannot be used on kittens under the age of 6 weeks.

Adult stage Fully grown adult fleas can detect heat, vibrations and exhaled carbon dioxide from their cocoons. This tells them that a host is nearby so the fleas know when to leave their cocoons and jump onto the host where they'll find a mate and begin the life cycle all over again.



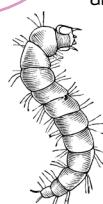
Pupal stage Immature fleas spend around 8-9 days in cocoons, growing and waiting for the right signals that it's time to emerge. Pupae are very well protected and so are virtually indestructible.



Flea cycle

Egg stage Flea eggs aren't sticky, they fall off your pet and into your home. An infected pet will spread flea eggs wherever it has access. The eggs hatch in 2-10 days.

Larval stage After hatching from eggs, larvae hide in dark places around your home. They burrow deep into your carpets, down cracks in floorboards and under furniture and feed on flea dirt (flea faeces containing partially digested blood from your pet). The larvae grow, moult twice and then spin cocoons and grow into pupae.



Diet

Cats who are fed a well-balanced diet are healthier and often more content. They hunt less and will be happy to spend more time at home.

Cats are predominantly carnivorous, meaning that they eat meat, but they cannot survive on meat alone as it does not provide an appropriate balance of vitamins and minerals.

Pre-prepared foods (canned, packaged or dry) contain a mixture of meat, grains and vegetables with the correct balance of protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and trace elements, making them a good choice for your cat. The various components of these pre-prepared foods offer an entirely balanced diet for your cat. By law, all packaged pet foods must have nutritional information printed on the label.

You can also give fresh or raw food to your cat, but you should consult your vet or an experienced cat owner first. Raw chicken necks/wings can supplement a commercial diet.

Scraps from the dinner table do not provide a balanced diet for your cat and cooked bones should never be given as they can splinter. Dog food should also not be given to your cat as it does not contain the essential elements required for a balanced cat diet.

Cats can be hesitant to try new foods, so when introducing a new food, mix a small amount of it with something you know your cat loves. This also helps to prevent stomach problems when changing your cat's diet.

You should try to feed your cat at least twice a day at regular times. Some cats like having food left out so they can graze throughout the day. If your cat is prone to weight gain, or if there are other cats around, this might not be a suitable option. Keep your cat's food bowl inside the house to avoid attracting stray cats to your garden. This also allows you to monitor how much food your cat is eating each day and make appropriate adjustments.

Always supply fresh, cool water for your cat to drink. Some cats enjoy milk but it is not an essential part of their diet and can cause diarrhoea. Vets, pet stores and some supermarkets sell milk designed specifically for cats.

Cats require a different diet at different stages of their lives. It is important that you speak to your vet to ensure that your cat is getting all the nutrients it needs.



Caring for your cat

Companionship

You can help foster a close and rewarding relationship with your cat by setting aside some time every day to interact with your companion. Daily play sessions with your cat can also fulfil their strong hunting and chasing instincts.

Toys are a great way to keep your cat entertained. There are a multitude of commercial toys available, but items such as paper bags, boxes, ping pong or foam balls, scrunched-up paper or ribbons are often just as appealing. Maintain your cat's interest in its toys by alternating or hiding them. Remember that the toy the cat wants most is you, so spend as much time as possible playing with your cat.

Toy safety

Check your cat's toys regularly for loose parts and be mindful of things they could swallow, e.g. string, wool, and fake fur. Don't let your cat play with a hanging toy unsupervised because they can become tangled.

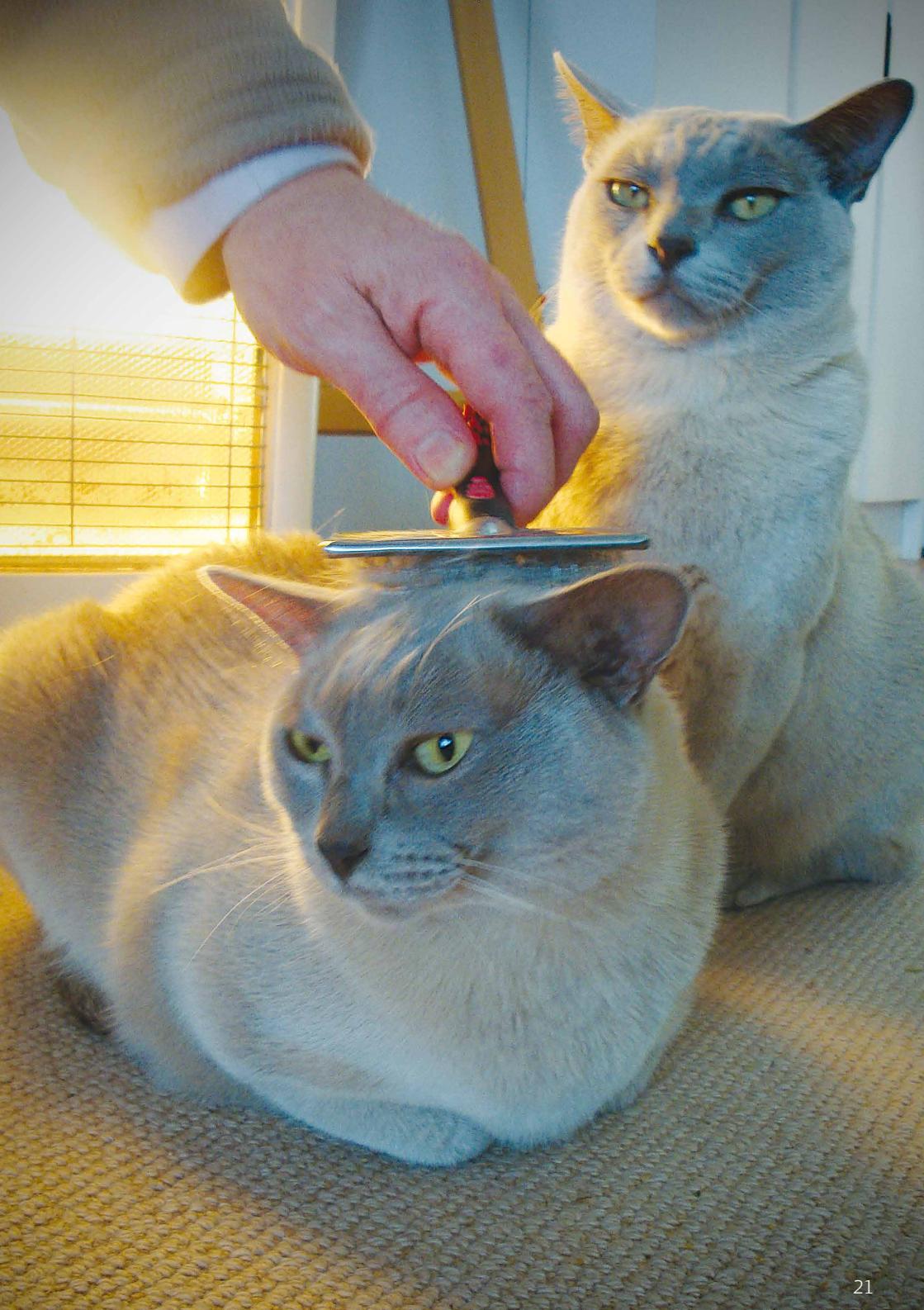
Some cats enjoy the company of others, but careful consideration and monitored introductions are vital for developing a good relationship between two cats. Ask a reputable shelter, registered breeder, or your vet for more advice before deciding to introduce another pet.

Grooming

Cats require regular grooming to keep their coats and skin healthy. Grooming is an excellent way to bond with your cat and can be very relaxing for both of you.

Grooming tips

- Start grooming sessions when your cat is young, so it gets used to them. Make the sessions brief and enjoyable.
- Long-haired cats should be groomed daily. If your cat is not cooperative you may need to consult a professional groomer and have the cat clipped.
- Gentle stroking or grooming can loosen stiff joints and muscles in older, arthritic cats.
- Include a regular health check in your grooming schedule. Look for abnormalities in your cat's coat or skin during grooming. Your cat's coat should be soft, clean and free of knots; eyes clear and bright; ears clean, with no discharge or smell; and teeth free of tartar and gum disease. Do not forget to check your cat's 'rear end' too! Check with your vet immediately if you find anything of concern.
- Some cats have sensitive areas where they do not like being touched, such as the stomach or base of the tail. Be careful, as touching these areas could trigger an instinctive aggressive response. Extended patting sessions can also produce this reaction. If your cat is sensitive about being patted, try restricting patting to the head and neck region and stop the session before your cat has had enough.



Caring for your cat

Toilet Training

Cats are surprisingly easy to toilet train. To begin you will need cat litter, a litter tray and a scoop, all of which are readily available from supermarkets and pet stores. You may need to try several brands of cat litter and types of tray until you find ones which are easy to use and suit you and your cat. Set the litter tray up in a quiet area of your house, such as the laundry. If you have dogs or other pets, you may need to restrict their access to the litter tray (you can place it on a bench), as cats tend to like their privacy!

Toilet training tips

- If your cat/kitten has just eaten, had a drink, or has been playing for a while, gently place it into its litter tray to encourage it to go to the toilet.

- Remember to reward your cat/kitten with praise and pats when it goes to the toilet in an appropriate place.
- If your cat/kitten has an accident, do not use punishment. Try to identify the signs that your cat/kitten needs to go to the toilet and take it to the litter tray immediately.
- Clean up any accidents as soon as possible. Do not use ammonia-based products, as they will encourage the cat to urinate in that spot again. Commercial products are available which are designed to completely remove the odour, but a mixture of white vinegar and water will work just as well.
- Cats/kittens generally do not like to use smelly litter trays. Remove soiled litter daily and change the tray as necessary (this will depend on the number of cats and trays you have). The general rule is one litter tray per cat, plus one extra, although you may need more or less.



If your adult cat, who was previously toilet trained, begins to toilet inappropriately, take it to your vet as it could be suffering from a urinary tract infection or other health problems. Setbacks in toilet training can also be caused by unclean litter trays, changes in routine, a new or suddenly absent member of the household (human or animal), moving house, new furniture, or the presence of a roaming cat in the neighbourhood.

Talk to your vet or a qualified behaviourist for further advice on toilet training.

Travelling

Cats prefer to remain in their own homes, although there is the occasional cat that adapts to travelling very well. If you are going away there are a number of options for your cat:

- You can take it with you, depending on your destination.
- You can book it into a reputable boarding cattery.
- You can find someone reliable who can visit your house at least once a day to feed your cat and tend to its litter tray.
- It is not recommended that you take your cat to someone else's house, as this can be stressful for your pet and it may try to escape in an attempt to return home.

Tips for travelling with your cat

- Your cat must be safely confined to a travel cage or basket when travelling. Never use a cardboard box to confine your cat as it will not be secure and your cat could escape, resulting in injury, accident or loss.
- Line the cage/basket with your cat's favourite blanket to make it more comfortable.
- Introduce your cat to the travel cage/basket well before you need to use it. Use food and toys in the cage/basket so your cat associates it with feelings of happiness and safety.
- Do not allow your cat to move around in the car whilst you are driving. Cats can panic if they become frightened and may distract you from driving, or interfere with pedals or instruments and cause an accident.

- Cats can suffer from travel sickness. You can reduce the effects of travel sickness by ensuring your cat is familiar with the travel cage, withholding food immediately before you travel, avoiding extremes of heat and cold and placing a light cover over your cat's travel cage/basket. If the problem persists consult your vet.
- It is advisable to use a lead or a harness for exercising your cat when travelling, to reduce the risk of it becoming lost.



Cat confinement

Contrary to popular belief, cats do not have to roam outdoors to be happy. Just as dogs must be confined to their owner's property, there is increasing understanding that responsible pet owners should also train their cats to remain indoors.

Cats that are allowed to roam outdoors face an increased risk of injury and infection from cat fights, poisons, traffic accidents and dog attacks. Outdoor cats (even ones who are well fed) can cause considerable injury and death to wildlife. Cats that are allowed to roam often cause disputes between neighbours as they wander onto neighbouring properties and spray, fight, defecate or kill wildlife. All these problems can be avoided by containing your cat to your property.

All cats, at the very least, should be kept indoors overnight. This helps to protect wildlife and reduce nocturnal cat fights. It is well known that cats who are allowed to roam have a shorter life expectancy than cats that are contained on their owners' properties.

Some councils have introduced cat by-laws with cat confinement or curfew regulations. Contact your local council to find out the local rules in your area.

Creating an interesting and safe environment

Build an enclosure or cat-proof your fence. There are commercial and do-it-yourself solutions for cat enclosures that can be as simple or as complex as you wish. Contact your local council for building regulations and guidelines for your area.

You can furnish the enclosure with weather-resistant scratching poles, beds, tunnels, platforms and toys. A covered area can contain a regularly-cleaned litter tray and provide protection from the weather. A bowl of fresh water and an array of logs and cat-safe pot plants will complete the area.

A fence with inward-facing overhangs may discourage your cat from leaving your property. Talk to your local council about rules and regulations regarding fence extensions.

The internet also provides useful resources for researching and creating a safe indoor/outdoor setting for your cat.

If you keep your cat busy by creating an interesting environment, fulfilling its physical, mental and social needs and providing appropriate outlets for its behaviour it will be entirely happy to stay in its home environment.

See our 'Good Cats Play at Home' booklet for more information.



Cat confinement

High resting places

Cats love to perch up high. It allows them to survey their surroundings and makes them feel secure. A safe window ledge, tall scratching post, specially-constructed non-slip shelf or free-standing cupboard with views of the street, backyard or treetops can keep your cat interested and content for hours.

Enclosed spaces

Cats love to hide. It allows them to get away from people and other animals. Give your cat an enclosed, private space in a quiet area of the house, and ask children and visitors not to disturb it there. A cardboard box lined with a soft blanket, a commercial scratching tower with an enclosed platform, or an 'igloo' bed, are all great options. You can even use the cat's travel cage. Remember to keep cats away from dangerous hiding places such as washing machines, dryers, fridges and dishwashers.

Scratching post

Scratching is normal behaviour for cats as it helps them to maintain their claws and mark their territory. It occurs most commonly after resting and during play sessions. However, it can be annoying if your cat chooses to use your favourite furniture or carpet!

In order to prevent this you need to provide an alternative for your cat. Scratching posts are ideal, but need to be tall enough for your cat to stretch full length whilst scratching and solid enough not to tip over.

If your cat will not use the scratching post try playing with or feeding your cat on it, spraying it with catnip, or placing it near a favourite sleeping area. Remember to reward your cat for appropriate scratching behaviour.

Discourage inappropriate scratching by using foil, plastic covers or commercially-available deterrent products on places or furniture that you wish to protect.

Kittens can be taught from a young age to have the tips of their claws trimmed. Like human finger nails, you should only trim the white part of the nail and avoid the pink 'quick' which will bleed if cut. Begin by gently handling your kitten's or cat's paws. When they are used to this gently try to trim their claws. Use treats and praise during trimming. Never force your cat to submit to nail trimming, as a negative experience will make the next attempt even more difficult. Ask your vet, breeder or animal behaviourist for further advice.

Bedding

Cats prefer soft, warm bedding so, even though you have provided an assortment of beds in quiet, sunny spots, your cat may still prefer your bed, chair or sofa. It is nearly impossible to train cats not to sleep on your furniture so a simple solution is to use easily-washable covers on furniture, or shut the doors to certain rooms.



Cat confinement

Food foraging

In the wild, a cat will spend up to 6 hours a day hunting, stalking and consuming prey. There are some simple, fun activities you can do to replicate this experience for your cat:

- If you only have 1 cat, or a number of cats that are not competitive about food, hide dry cat biscuits around the house.
- Try using dry food as a training reward to teach new, or reinforce appropriate, behaviour.
- Throw large dental biscuits to your cat to encourage its natural chase and capture instincts.
- Provide interactive toys, such as 'treat balls', which encourage your cat to manipulate it for food.
- Some cats enjoy the occasional raw chicken neck or wing, which has the added benefit of being good for their teeth and gums.

Vegetation

Most cats enjoy nibbling, sniffing and rubbing on a variety of plants, so it is a great idea to have plants inside that are specifically for your cat. Cats enjoy grass seedlings, cat mint (*Nepeta mussinii*), and catnip (*Nepeta cataria*).

There are a number of plants that are poisonous to cats and should be avoided. Members of the Lily family (*Lilium spp.*) are particularly toxic to cats.

Contact your vet for more information.

Additional sights and sounds

Leaving a radio on when you go out is a simple way to provide additional stimulation for your indoor cat. Try a classical music or talkback station. There is also a range of DVDs that play continuous images of birds, fish, mice and toys.



Children and cats

Under the guidance of older family members, children can develop a sense of responsibility when learning to care for their companion. Studies have shown that children with pets display improved self-esteem and social skills.

Very young children should always be supervised when around cats. Kittens in particular have sharp claws that can inadvertently cause scratches. Cats can also transmit zoonoses such as ringworm, so it is important to encourage hand washing after handling them.

It is also important to teach children how to handle cats so that the cat feels safe and relaxed. Children often do not realise how fragile kittens can be and can accidentally injure their pet.



Lost and found

Councils, vets, animal welfare organisations and shelters can scan dogs and cats for microchips and search Dogs and Cats Online to reunite 'lost' pets with owners. Therefore, it's important you keep your details up-to-date in Dogs and Cats Online. You do this yourself at www.dogsandcatsonline.com.au

If your cat goes missing you need to act quickly.

- Log in to Dogs and Cats Online (dogsandcatsonline.com.au) and check your contact details are up to date. Update your cat's status to 'lost' and set a message for public display.
- Contact your council, the RSPCA, the Animal Welfare League and local vets as soon as possible – your cat may have been collected and taken to a shelter.
- Notify your neighbours.
- Place an advertisement or lost notice on community notice boards and social media sites, e.g. the Lost Pets of South Australia Facebook page.

Notices or advertisements should include:

- time and place your cat was last seen
- your cat's breed
- the sex of your cat (e.g. desexed male)
- approximate age, size, and colour of your cat
- any distinguishing features
- a clear colour photo of your cat (if possible).

Do not delay: Under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995, any cat that cannot be identified, either by collar with ID tag or contact details, or by microchip, is at risk of being euthanased.



Semi-owned and unowned cats

Domestic cats that do not have an owner, but have varying degrees of dependency on humans are referred to as 'semi-owned' or 'unowned' cats.

'Feral' cats are essentially wild cats that have no dependency on, or interaction with humans.

This distinction is important as different management strategies apply.

Semi-owned and unowned cats are a widespread problem throughout South Australia due to cats' early sexual maturity, their ongoing reproductive cycles and their ability to adapt to any environment.

Semi-owned and unowned cats not only prey on native wildlife, but also act as carriers for numerous diseases and parasites that can be transmitted to pet cats and humans. They have a low quality of life.

Signs that a cat is owned and is not a stray:

- The cat is wearing a collar and ID tag.
- The cat has a blue/green tattoo on the inside of its ear shaped like φ. This indicates that the cat has been desexed.
- The cat has an 'M' tattoo to indicate that it is microchipped (not all microchipped cats have a 'M' tattoo).
- The cat looks well groomed, clean and healthy.
- The cat has signs of recent veterinary treatment (e.g. shaved fur).
- The cat is comfortable with being handled.

If you find a cat you think is unowned:

- Ask your neighbours if they know who owns the cat
- Take it to your local vet, RSPCA, Animal Welfare League or council nominated facility to be scanned for a microchip which could identify it. (If the cat appears to be a lactating female, do not remove her as she could have dependent kittens that will die from starvation without her. Try to follow the cat back to her nest and remove the kittens as well.)
- Place 'found' advertisements around your neighbourhood, on social media (e.g. Lost Pets of South Australia Facebook page) and in local papers.
- If you've done everything you can to find an owner but been unsuccessful, you might choose to take ownership yourself. Before welcoming it into your family, have it checked by a vet. They can also desex and microchip it (a requirement of law—refer pages 8-11) if necessary.
- Please don't feed a cat you don't own as it only perpetuates and compounds problems.





Where can I get advice?

Local Council

Visit lga.sa.gov.au for contact information for all local councils.

Your Vet

To find a local vet you can check the Yellow Pages searching under 'vet' or 'veterinary surgeon' at yellowpages.com.au or Find a Vet a searchable database hosted by the Australian Veterinary Association of Australia at vetvoice.com.au/find-a-vet

RSPCA

Head Office

172 Morphett Street, Adelaide SA 5000
GPO Box 2122, Adelaide SA 5001
rspca.org.au | 1300 477 722

Shelters

Lonsdale
25 Meyer Road | 1300 477 722
Port Lincoln
22 Windsor Avenue | 8682 3016
Whyalla
7 Cook Street | 8644 0172

Animal Welfare League

1-19 Cormack Road
Wingfield SA 5013
awl.org.au | 8348 1300

Shelters

Wingfield
Cormack Road
Edinburgh North
4 Hewittson Road

Australian Veterinary Association

(South Australian Division)

PO Box 114
Walkerville SA 5081
ava.com.au | 1300 137 309

Feline Association South Australia

felineassociationsa.com

The Governing Council of the Cat Fancy of South Australia Inc.

Advice and information on all cat matters
catfancysa.asn.au | 8321 9255

Dog and Cat Management Board

GPO Box 1047, Adelaide SA 5001
dogandcatboard.com.au | 8124 4962

**Dog and Cat
Management Board**

GPO Box 1047
Adelaide SA 5001
Telephone: (08) 8124 4962
Email: dcmb@sa.gov.au
www.goodcatsa.com.au
ISBN 978 1 921800 04 7



**Government
of South Australia**

Dog and Cat
Management Board



BACKGROUND

SIZE: 8-11 pounds on average—but larger breeds & breed mixes can weigh 15+.

LIFESPAN: 13-17 years

COST PER YEAR: About \$670

GOOD WITH KIDS?: Young children may unwittingly mishandle or hurt kittens, who are particularly vulnerable to injury. Children ages 10 & up are ready for duties like feeding, grooming and litter cleaning.

WHERE TO GET A CAT: Your best option? Adoption! There are great cats (purebreds, too!) at shelters and small-animal rescue groups all across the country.

Go to: www.aspca.org/adoption/shelters/ to find a shelter near you.

Note: Make sure you have all your supplies (see checklist) *before* you bring your cat home.

FOOD

- Feed kittens 6 to 12 weeks old 4 times a day.
- Feed kittens 3 to 6 months old 3 times a day.
- Feed adult cats one main or 2-3 smaller meals a day.
- Feed your cat a commercial brand of dry food that meets nutritional requirements and provides a well-balanced diet. Kittens should be fed a commercial brand of kitten food. Fresh water should be available at all times, and be sure to wash food/water dishes daily.
- Throw away any uneaten canned food before it spoils.
- Do not give cats cow's milk, as it can cause diarrhea. Treats are yummy for cats, but should not total more than 5% of their daily intake. Most packaged treats contain lots of sugar and fat.
- If your kitten is refusing food or isn't eating enough, try soaking her kitten food in kitten milk replacer or warm water. Gradually mix with her regular food. Monitor your cat's food intake carefully, as obesity is a major health problem in cats today.

BEDDING/HOUSING

- Your cat should have her own clean, dry place in your home to sleep and rest. Line the bed with a blanket or towel. Be sure to wash the bedding often.
- Please keep your cat indoors. Cats who are allowed outdoors can contract diseases, get ticks or parasites, become lost or get hit by a car, and get into fights with other free-roaming cats and dogs.

LITTER BOX

- Place your cat's litter box in a quiet, accessible location, such as a bathroom or utility room. Avoid moving the box unless absolutely necessary. Then do so slowly, a few inches a day.
- In a multi-level home, one box per floor is recommended. In a multi-cat home, each cat should have her own box.
- Cats won't use a messy, smelly litter box, so remove solid waste at least once a day. Dump everything, wash with mild detergent and refill at least once a week. Don't use ammonia, deodorants or scents, especially lemon, when cleaning the litter box.

GROOMING

- Most cats rarely need a bath, but you should brush or comb your pet regularly. This keeps the coat clean, reduces shedding and cuts down on hairballs and matting.
- During your grooming sessions, check for wounds, hair loss and inflammation. Also, look out for ticks and flea dirt, black specks of dried blood left behind by fleas.

HANDLING

- To pick up your cat, place one hand behind her front legs and another under the hindquarters. Lift gently. Never pick up a cat by the scruff of the neck or the front legs.

ID

- If your cat occasionally escapes from the house or is routinely allowed outdoors (again, we caution against it!), she must wear a safety collar and an ID tag. A safety collar with an elastic panel or specially designed clasp will allow your cat to break loose if the collar gets caught on something.
- We recommend permanent ID, such as a microchip, to help secure your cat's return should she become lost or accidentally get out of the house.

PLAY

- Cats delight in stalking imaginary prey. The best toys are those that can be made to jump and dance around and look alive. Your cat can safely act out her role as a predator by pouncing on toys instead of people's ankles. Please don't use your hands or fingers as play objects with kittens, which could lead to biting and scratching behaviors. Avoid strings and toys with pieces that can break off and lodge in her intestines.

SCRATCHING

- Your pet needs to scratch! When she scratches, the old outer nail sheath is pulled off and the sharp, smooth claws underneath are exposed. Cutting your cat's nails every 2 to 3 weeks will keep them blunt and less likely to harm you or your furniture.
- Provide your cat with a sturdy scratching post, at least 3 feet high, which will allow her to stretch completely when scratching. It should be stable enough that it won't wobble during use, and covered with rough material such as sisal, burlap or tree bark. Many cats also like scratching pads. A sprinkle of catnip on the post or pad once or twice a month will keep your cat interested.

FOR EXPERT ADVICE ON COMMON BEHAVIOR ISSUES (FROM EXCESSIVE YOWLING TO ELIMINATING OUTSIDE THE LITTER BOX), VISIT THE ASPCA VIRTUAL PET BEHAVIORIST AT ASPCABEHAVIOR.ORG

HEALTH

- Your cat should see a veterinarian for a full physical examination and fecal check at least once a year. It can be determined at that time if additional vaccinations or diagnostic tests are necessary. If she is sick or injured, seek help immediately.

SPAYING AND NEUTERING

- Female cats should be spayed (the removal of the ovaries and uterus) and male cats neutered (removal of the testicles). Cats can be spayed and neutered as early as 6-8 weeks of age.

CONTINUED

- Neutering can prevent urine spraying, decrease the urge to escape to look for a mate, and reduce fighting between males. Spaying greatly helps prevent breast cancer, which is often fatal, and serious infection of the uterus.
- Cats can breed up to 3 times per year, so it is vital that your female cat be spayed to prevent unwanted litters.

VACCINATIONS

- Cats should be vaccinated with a vaccine that protects against panleukopenia, calicivirus and rhinotracheitis. When a kitten is around 6 to 8 weeks of age, a veterinarian can begin to administer a series of vaccines at 3- or 4-week intervals until the kitten reaches 16 weeks of age. If you have an unvaccinated cat older than 4 months, he will need a series of two vaccinations 3-4 weeks apart. Your veterinarian can tell you how often your cat will need to be revaccinated.
- Other vaccines are given depending on a cat's lifestyle and risk factors. These include vaccines for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV), two of the most common causes of disease and death in domestic cats. Your veterinarian can determine what vaccines are best for your cat.
- Because cats can be infected with either FIV or FeLV for months, even years, and show no symptoms, all cats should be tested for these viruses. Keeping your cat indoors and away from cats whose FeLV and FIV status is not known are the best ways to prevent your cat from becoming infected.
- Rabies vaccination is required by law in most areas of the country. In most cases the vaccination is given at 3 months of age, repeated a year later and every 3 years after that. Ask your veterinarian if you are unsure of the laws in your area.

EAR MITES

- This is a common problem that can be transmitted from cat to cat. If your cat is constantly scratching at his ears or shaking his head, or if you see dark-colored wax or debris in his ears, he may be infested with ear mites. Make an appointment with your veterinarian right away.

FELINE LOWER URINARY TRACT DISEASE (FLUTD)

- Both males and females can develop urinary tract disease, which is not uncommon in adult cats. Signs of FLUTD include frequent trips to the litter box, blood in the urine and crying out or straining when urinating. Please see your veterinarian immediately if you think your cat has FLUTD.
- If your male cat looks "constipated," he may have a urethral obstruction and can't urinate. Blockage, which is rare in females, can be fatal if not treated quickly.

FLEAS AND TICKS

- Flea infestation should be taken seriously. These tiny parasites feed off your pet, transmit tapeworms and irritate the skin. Check your cat regularly for fleas and ticks. If your cat is infested, you will also need to treat all pets in the household and get rid of the fleas in your home.
- Make certain that any product you use is safe for use on cats. Cats die every year from improper treatment with flea and tick control products. Your veterinarian can recommend the best flea control program for your pet and home.

MEDICINES AND POISONS

- Never give your cat medication that has not been prescribed by a veterinarian. Did you know that acetaminophen and aspirin can be FATAL to a cat?! Keep rat poison or other rodenticides away from your cat.

- For information about potentially toxic substances that can harm your cat, visit www.aspca.org/pet-care/poison-control/

IF YOU THINK THAT YOUR PET MAY HAVE INGESTED A POTENTIALLY POISONOUS SUBSTANCE, CALL THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER AT (888) 426-4435

A \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card

INTERNAL PARASITES (WORMS)

- Cats can be infected with several types of internal parasites and worms. The key to treatment is correct diagnosis, which is obtained by a microscopic examination of your cat's feces by a veterinarian. Your veterinarian can then prescribe the appropriate medication.
- To prevent your cat from getting worms, keep your pet indoors to prevent her from hunting and eating infected prey, avoid exposure to infected cats, rodents, fleas and feces, avoid feeding raw meat and practice good hygiene when cleaning the litter box.

CAT SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Commercial brand cat food
- ✓ Food dish
- ✓ Water bowl
- ✓ Interactive toys
- ✓ Brush, cat claw clipper
- ✓ Comb
- ✓ Safety cat collar with ID tag
- ✓ Scratching post or scratching pad
- ✓ Litter box
- ✓ Litter
- ✓ Cat carrier
- ✓ Cat bed or box with blanket or towel

THE NO-NO LIST

Do not feed your cat:

- ✓ Alcoholic beverages
- ✓ Chocolate
- ✓ Coffee
- ✓ Grapes, raisins & avocados
- ✓ Moldy or spoiled food
- ✓ Onions, garlic & chives
- ✓ Poultry bones
- ✓ Salt & salty foods, macadamia nuts
- ✓ Tomato leaves, stems & unripe fruit
- ✓ Yeast dough
- ✓ Human medications unless prescribed by your veterinarian.

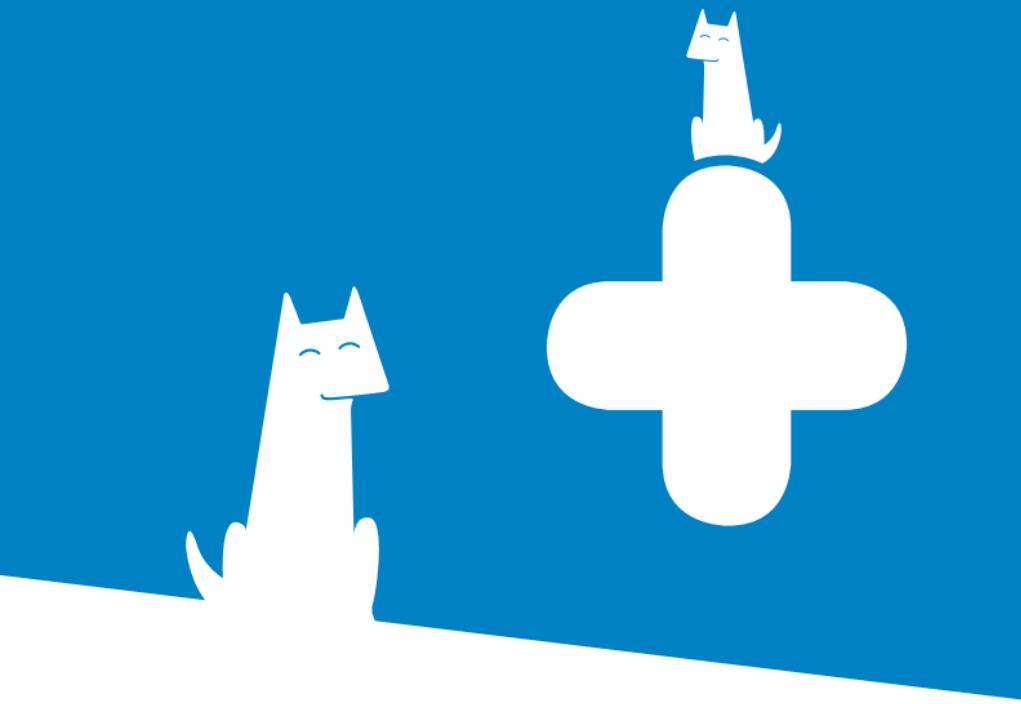


The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®

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212-876-7700 • www.aspca.org

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Caring for your cat



**CATS PROTECTION
ESSENTIAL GUIDE 1**



Cats are one of the most popular pets in the UK and rightly so – they make a wonderful addition to any household! This guide offers some of the basic principles of cat care. If you are thinking about having more than one cat, then please look at Cats Protection's *[Essential Guide: Cats living together](#)*.

Cats can be independent and are considered the ideal pet for people with busy lifestyles, but they still need to be looked after. You should be prepared to spend time playing with and grooming your cat, as well as being a companion to them. By following the advice in this leaflet, you can do your best to ensure you have a happy and healthy cat.

Food

Cats should be fed a complete, balanced, good quality meat-based food; they cannot be vegetarians. There are a multitude of different brands of cat food on the market, but there are two main types to choose from; wet and dry.

Fresh wet food should be replaced at least twice daily and dry food at least once daily. Do follow the manufacturer's instructions and recommended amounts. Once neutered, cats typically have reduced energy needs, so consider reducing their daily amount accordingly.

Food should be placed in an area where the cat feels safe and away from their water bowl and litter tray. If your cat eats dry food, using feeding balls to give some, or all, of your cat's daily food ration can help to lessen boredom and provides some exercise.

When adopting a cat, you should initially follow the diet that your cat has been fed previously. Before you take them home, find out what they have been eating and at what times. If you do wish to change your cat's food, it is important to introduce the new food very gradually over a period of a week or more to avoid an upset stomach.

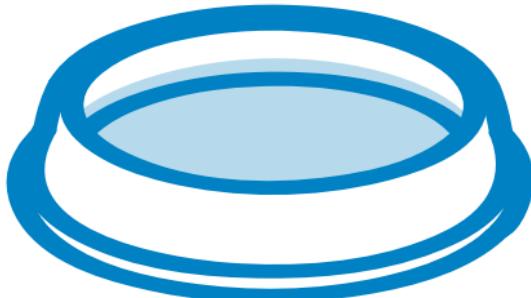
It is best not to feed your cat cow's milk as some cats can not tolerate the lactose in it – always have a supply of fresh water available.

More information about feeding cats and kittens, including what to do if your cat stops eating, is available in Cats Protection's *Essential Guides: Feeding and obesity* and *Caring for your kitten*.

Water

Cats generally don't need to drink lots every day. However, always ensure fresh, clean drinking water is available at all times. This is best placed away from their food, as cats generally prefer not to eat and drink in the same place.

More information about water and drinking is available in Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Feeding and obesity*.



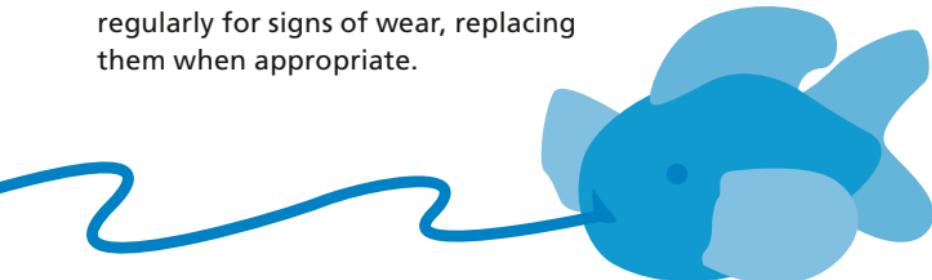
Play

Cats that have free access to the outdoors will often engage in hunting activity, including playing with fallen leaves or grass blowing in the wind if there is no access to prey. The drive to hunt is not triggered by hunger. Each part of the hunting activity – the stalk, pounce, play and kill – releases feel-good hormones called endorphins. It is important that our pet cats are given frequent opportunities to play to keep them mentally stimulated.

Keeping your cat amused with toys can help to keep them happy, provide good exercise and strengthen your bond with your cat. Toys don't have to be expensive. A cardboard box with holes cut into it provides a fun hiding place. Even a ball of tin foil makes a perfectly adequate toy, as long as the cat can't swallow it.

Play is more fun if you get involved too – you could use fishing rod toys with feathers on a string to mimic their prey! Allow them to catch and 'kill' the toy periodically to avoid frustration.

Older cats will love playing three or four times a day, while younger cats will be happy to play ten times a day or more. Very short games of one to two minutes are fine. Swap toys around regularly to keep them interesting, but don't leave your cat unattended with toys which could be shredded and eaten or cause entanglement. Check toys regularly for signs of wear, replacing them when appropriate.



Somewhere to hide

It is important to provide your cat with a place to hide which will help to make them feel safe and secure. There are many things that can cause a cat to feel anxious or fearful, such as fireworks, building work in the house, unfamiliar visitors or conflict with other cats. A hiding place can be something as simple as a cardboard box on its side, an igloo style cat bed, a space under the bed, or in a wardrobe with the door left ajar. The cat shouldn't be disturbed while they are in their hiding place.

Somewhere to get up high

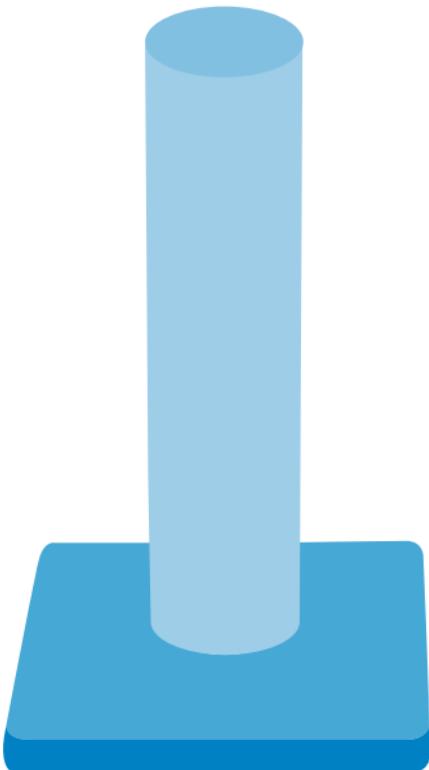
Cats feel safer if they can view their surroundings from a height. This is another important coping mechanism for cats that feel anxious or fearful. You could place a cosy blanket on top of a wardrobe and provide access by placing a stool or similar item next to it. Cats also love to sit on window sills and shelves. Extra consideration should be given to elderly cats, as they will have more difficulty reaching higher vantage points. For more information see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Elderly cats*.

Sleeping

On average, cats spend about 16 hours a day sleeping. Cats generally rest or sleep intermittently throughout the day and will prefer to sleep in a warm, comfortable and safe place. There are a range of cat beds available, such as igloo beds or hammocks for the radiator, or you could simply provide a cardboard box on its side with a soft blanket inside. Cats often rotate their preferred sleeping area and they shouldn't be disturbed when sleeping.

Scratching

A scratching post will provide exercise, claw maintenance and a focal point for your cat to express this natural behaviour – it will help protect your furniture too. Cats like to stretch and scratch after they wake up so try placing the scratch post near where they sleep. A good scratching post has the following features:



- a strong sturdy base, so the cat can lean against the post without it wobbling
- tall enough that the cat can stretch fully
- a vertical thread that allows the cat to scratch downwards

Eating grass

Many cats like to eat grass, which may help to clear furballs. A type of grass that cats particularly like is called Cocksfoot; it has long broad leaves so it is easy for them to bite. If your cat can't go outside, Cocksfoot grass can be grown indoors. Seeds are readily available from garden centres and pet shops. If no grass is provided, your cat may try to eat other household plants which may pose a risk. See Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Keeping your cat safe*.

Toileting

Cats prefer to pass their waste where they feel safe and then bury it. They should be able to access their toileting site without having to pass other cats or things that make them anxious – such as a noisy washing machine. It is a good idea to provide one litter tray per cat, plus one extra – especially if your cats are kept indoors. Don't place all the trays in a line. If possible, place them in different quiet, private areas of the home, away from the food and water bowls.

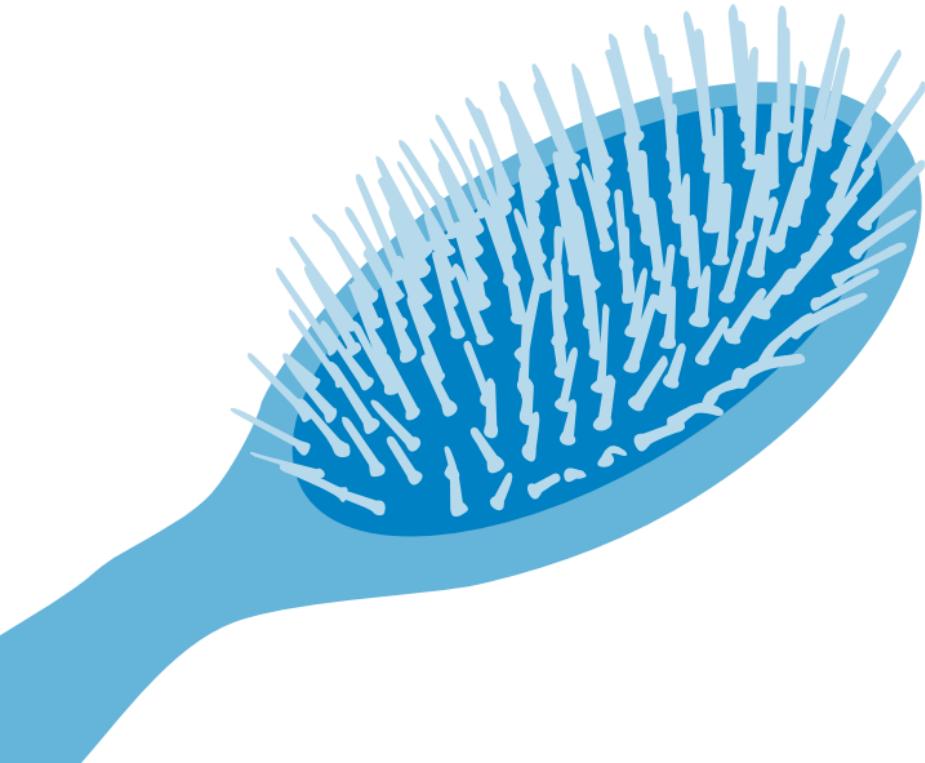
Being clean creatures, cats don't like using dirty or soiled trays, so make sure the litter tray is cleaned at least once a day. If using clumping litter you can remove solids once or twice daily. With some other types of litter, you may need to replace all the litter on a daily basis.

Trays should be cleaned once a week by rinsing with water and then using a cat safe disinfectant. You should be able to purchase a suitable product from your vet or a pet shop – please note that phenol-based disinfectants are toxic to cats. Always rinse carefully with hot water, dry and replenish litter. Rinsing the disinfectant off ensures safety, as well as removing the smell which some cats don't like. Cats prefer at least 3cm depth of litter and most prefer a litter of a sandy texture. Make any changes to the tray, the litter, or its location, very slowly to avoid toileting accidents.

If encouraging your cat to toilet outside, provide a suitable area close to the house where your cat feels safe. For more information, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Indoor and outdoor cats* and for litter training, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Understanding your cat's behaviour*.

Grooming marvellous

Cats are very clean animals and like to groom themselves, but sometimes they may need a little help. Long-haired cats should be brushed daily to stop their coat becoming tangled. If they are not regularly groomed fur can become matted and uncomfortable. These mats may need to be removed under anaesthetic by a vet. Short-haired cats will probably only need to be groomed once a week. Older cats may struggle to look after their coats and require gentle grooming to help to keep their skin healthy. Grooming also gives you some valuable bonding time with your cat. If you are struggling to groom your cat, ask your vet for advice as referral to a suitably qualified behaviourist or a competent groomer may be useful to avoid the development of problems.



Indoor or outdoor?

Indoor cats need extra consideration to keep them mentally stimulated. For cats given access outside, consider providing a microchip or magnetic cat flap to allow them the freedom to choose when to go out, while stopping other cats from the neighbourhood entering the home. Cats usually learn how to use cat flaps very readily – for some tips, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Caring for your kitten*.

It is recommended that cats are kept indoors at night, when they may be at more risk of being involved in road traffic accidents. Also, their hunting activities are likely to be greater at dawn and dusk. See the Cats Protection *Essential Guide: Indoor and outdoor cats* for more advice.

Holidays

Your cat will need to be provided for every time you go away. Either put them in a cattery or get a cat-sitter to come in to feed and play with your cat while you are away. Never leave your cat to fend for themselves.

Key veterinary care

Responsible cat owners should make sure their cat is:

- neutered
- vaccinated against disease
- microchipped
- regularly treated against parasites
- seen by a vet for regular health checks and when ill or injured

Find a vet

You'll need to register your cat with a vet as soon as possible. A recommendation from a friend or neighbour is a great place to start; otherwise you could phone around or pop in and see them before making your choice. Veterinary practices are also registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and you can find details of your local practices at www.rcvs.org.uk. It is important that you get on with your vet, are able to ask questions and have faith in the care they can offer. More information is available in Cats Protection's *Veterinary Guide: Your cat and your vet*.



Neutering

Cats Protection generally recommends that cats are neutered at around four months of age or younger. This is a simple operation which has many health benefits for your cat. It is essential to prevent unwanted kittens and reduce the spread of disease, wandering and territorial behaviour such as scratching, spraying and fighting. All adult cats from Cats Protection will have been neutered prior to being rehomed. For more information see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Neutering: family planning for felines*.

Vaccinations

Kittens and adult cats should be vaccinated to help them stay healthy and help stop the spread of disease. Vaccinations are available against:

Feline infectious enteritis (also known as feline parvovirus or panleucopenia) – a severe and potentially fatal gut infection

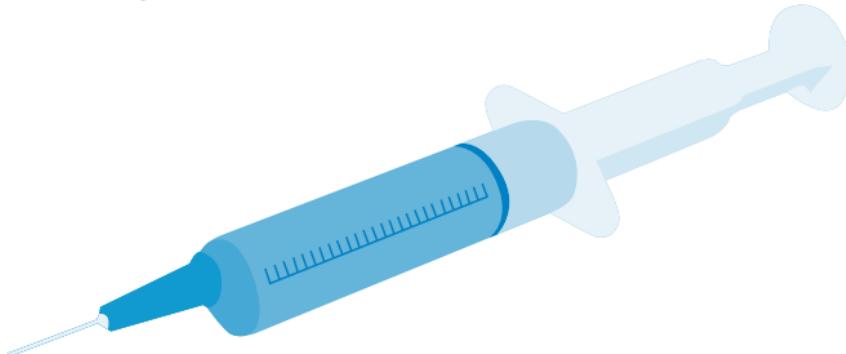
Cat flu – vaccinations are available against several of the micro-organisms which cause this common respiratory syndrome which can have severe and lasting effects

Feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) – a devastating fatal disease that damages the cat's immune system and can cause cancer

Chlamydophila – a bacteria that causes severe conjunctivitis, along with mild sneezing and nasal discharge

Kittens need their first vaccine at around eight to nine weeks old and a second dose at 12 weeks. Your cat should also receive regular booster vaccinations throughout their life to help maintain their protection against these diseases. Consult your vet for more advice.

For more information on vaccinations see Cats Protection's *Veterinary Guide: Infectious disease and vaccination*.



Microchipping

Cats Protection recommends microchipping as the safest and simplest means of permanently identifying your cat. A microchip is no bigger than a grain of rice and is inserted under the cat's skin between their shoulder blades. The microchip carries a unique ID number linked to a database holding your contact details, allowing you to be quickly traced should they stray and be scanned. So, don't forget to update your details if you move house or change phone numbers. For more information on microchipping see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Microchipping*.

If you do choose to put a collar on your cat, use a 'quick release' collar to allow your cat to free themselves should the collar get caught on something. Fit it carefully – two fingers should snugly fit between your cat's neck and the collar. Sadly, severe injuries resulting from poorly fitted collars or those with no quick release function are not uncommon.

Fleas

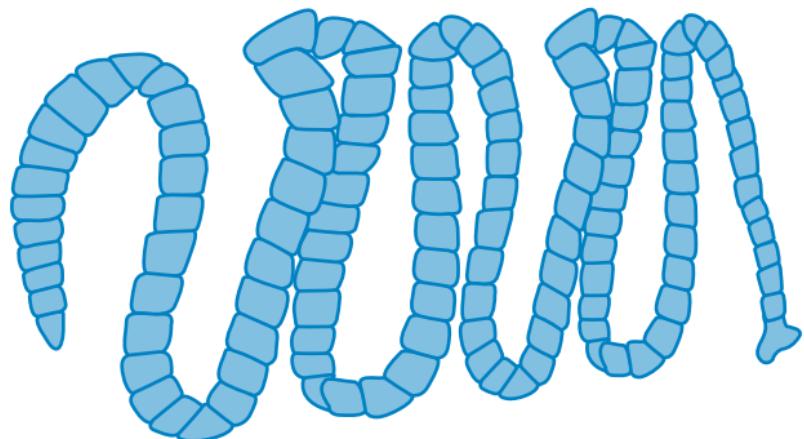
Fleas are very common in cats but can be hard to spot. It's advisable to consider treating your cat regularly for fleas, whether they have them or not, as it is far harder to deal with an infestation than to prevent one. Many different flea treatments are available and the most effective products to treat and prevent fleas are available from your vet, so seek their advice. **Never use a dog flea treatment on your cat as some can be rapidly fatal and don't let your cat come into contact with a dog that has been treated for fleas until the product has dried.**

If you do have a flea outbreak, you will need to treat all the pets in the home and de-flea your home, too. Treat carpets, the bottoms of curtains, furniture, your cat's bedding and all their favourite sleeping places.

Worms

Cats can become infected with various internal worms. There are many different treatments available and your vet will be able to advise you about how often to de-worm your cat and the most suitable, effective product to use, which may depend on your cat's lifestyle.

For more information on fleas and worms, see Cats Protection's *Veterinary Guide: Fleas and other parasites*.



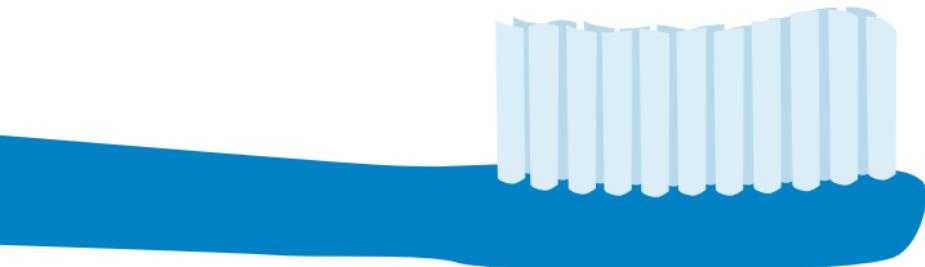
Dental care

Dental disease is quite common in cats, especially as they get older. You should get your cat's teeth regularly checked by your vet. Many cats do not show obvious discomfort, although signs of dental disease may include:

- reduced appetite
- halitosis (bad breath)
- dropping food or difficulty in eating
- blood-tinged saliva or drooling
- unusual face rubbing or pawing at the mouth
- behavioural changes, such as becoming quieter or more aggressive
- reduced grooming
- sneezing, nasal discharge or facial swelling

Dental disease can be painful and seriously affect your cat's health and welfare. Bacteria can enter the cat's bloodstream and affect its heart and kidneys. Consult your vet for more advice.

For more information on your cat's mouth, see Cats Protection's [Veterinary Guide: Teeth and oral health](#).



Insurance

Pet insurance can cover veterinary costs for illness, accidents and emergencies. There are plenty of options available. Some policies won't insure older pets over a certain age, so check the small print. Remember that preventative treatment such as vaccination is not covered and neither is treatment for conditions which have occurred prior to the policy being taken out. It is worth taking the time to ensure you get the cover you require. Your vet may be able to offer some advice.

Type, age, character and where you live

All cats are individuals. Deciding that you want a cat is just the first step and choosing the right cat for you is just as important. Here are some points to consider:

Fur length

Long-haired cats will need daily grooming and short-haired cats will benefit from weekly grooming.

Age and sex

A kitten may need more attention than an older cat as they tend to have more energy. You should also make sure that you are able to check and replace their food four times a day until they are about 12 weeks old and three times a day until they are about six months old. Older cats tend to be calmer and they are less likely to need supervision. For more information on the care of kittens and elderly cats, see the *Cats Protection Essential Guides: Caring for your kitten* and *Elderly cats*. As regards the sex of your cat, there is very little difference in behaviour once they have been neutered, so this comes down to personal preference.

Character

Cats can vary quite considerably from lap cat to feral. Their character and behaviour is influenced by both nature and nurture. Everybody's needs and wishes are different so when you come to see the cats at a Cats Protection branch or adoption centre, talk to the Cat Care Assistant or volunteer about what you are looking for so that they can match you with a suitable cat.

Do bear in mind cats behave differently in different environments. For more information, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Understanding your cat's behaviour*.



Pedigree or moggy?

While many pedigree cats are healthy, there is a misconception that, somehow, they are better or stronger than moggies, but adopting a pedigree is not a guarantee of good health. The word pedigree simply means it is from a family of cats which have been bred to meet specific criteria – usually in relation to their appearance. They have rarely been selected for specific health or temperament benefits. If selecting a pedigree cat, we strongly recommend that you take time to learn about the breed to ensure you will both enjoy a lasting and happy relationship.

Health

Make sure you get as much history as you can about a cat you are interested in. While it is impossible to give a guarantee of good health, try and find out whether a cat has any known previous conditions which are likely to recur, or ongoing medical conditions which might require special treatment. Remember the tiny runt of a litter may look cute, but there may be an underlying reason for it being small. Healthy cats are generally alert and have a good body coat condition and clear eyes, without discharges from the eyes or nose, have good appetites and do not object to being handled. For cats with ongoing conditions, make sure you are prepared for the potential veterinary costs and trips to the vet.

Remember, owners have a legal duty of care to provide for their cat's five welfare needs – see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Cats and the law*.

Adopt with confidence

Every year thousands of people put their faith and trust in Cats Protection when looking for a new addition to the family. Behind each volunteer and member of staff is a wealth of experience and expertise which means when you adopt one of our cats, you can feel safe in the knowledge that they have been given the best possible care.

Cats Protection has agreed a set of Minimum Veterinary Standards for the health and welfare of all cats in our care. This means when a cat leaves Cats Protection, it will have been treated to a top-to-tail medical, including:

- examination by a veterinary surgeon
- vaccination at least once against cat flu and enteritis
- treatment against fleas and worms
- neutering if old enough
- microchipping if old enough

We endeavour to ensure you are aware of any known health issues the cat may have had and also provide four weeks' free insurance, giving invaluable peace of mind and reassurance – terms and conditions apply.



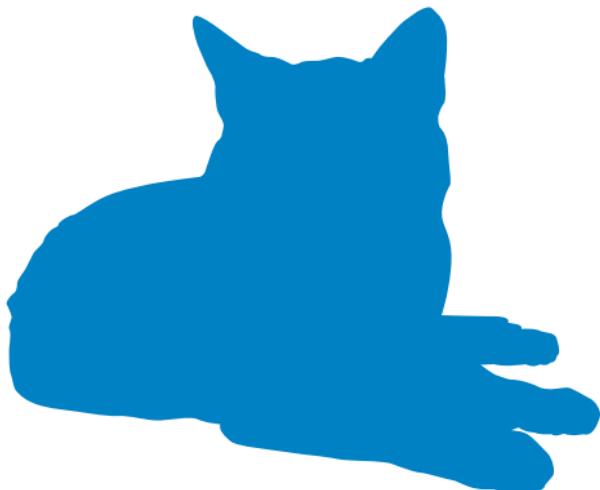
Where to get your cat from

If you decide to go ahead with getting a cat please consider one of the thousands of cats and kittens that we have in our care – we have branches and adoption centres nationwide. Find contact details for your nearest branch by phoning our Helpline 03000 12 12 12.

Before taking a new cat home, please read Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Welcome home* which provides information and tips on successfully integrating your new feline companion into your household, to ensure you both enjoy a happy and lasting relationship.

Learn more about your cat online!

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>



ESSENTIAL GUIDES

- 1 Caring for your cat 84001**
- 2 Welcome home 84002**
- 3 Moving house 84003**
- 4 Feeding and obesity 84004**
- 5 Keeping your cat safe 84005**
- 6 Neutering – family planning for felines 84006**
- 7 When to let go 84007**
- 8 Microchipping 84008**
- 9 Understanding your cat's behaviour 84009**
- 10 Managing your cat's behaviour 84010**
- 11 Cats living together 84011**
- 12 Indoor and outdoor cats 84012**
- 13 Cats and the law 84013**
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- 15 Caring for your kitten 84015**
- 16 Elderly cats 84016**
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- 18 Pregnant cats, birth and care of young kittens 84018**

VETERINARY GUIDES

- 1 Arthritis 83201**
- 2 Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD) 83202**
- 3 Diabetes 83203**
- 4 Itchy cats and skin disorders 83204**
- 5 Feline Parvovirus (FPV) 83205**
- 6 Kidney or renal disease 83206**
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- 9 Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) 83209**
- 10 Feline Coronavirus (FCoV) and Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) 83210**
- 11 Heart murmurs and heart disease 83211**
- 12 Hyperthyroidism 83212**
- 13 Feline asthma 83213**
- 14 Teeth and oral health 83214**
- 15 Fleas and other parasites 83215**
- 16 Cat flu 83216**
- 17 Infectious disease and vaccination 83217**
- 18 Digestive disorders – vomiting and diarrhoea 83218**
- 19 You and your vet 83219**
- 20 Cats and pregnant women – Toxoplasmosis 83220**



For more information about Cats Protection or to make a donation, please visit www.cats.org.uk or phone our Helpline on 03000 12 12 12.

Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)

FEB-15 CODE: 84001

Bark!

BCSPCA

kids speaking for animals
spca.bc.ca/youth Vol. 11 • No. 2



Fit for a Feline

Make your home welcoming for a cat (or two!). Here are a few of the basics to help create a space fit for a feline.

Fresh water and food

Cats need fresh water every day and food up to three times a day. Feed both dry and canned food, and follow the label for portion sizes. If you have multiple cats, you will need multiple dishes in separate locations so each cat can eat and drink undisturbed (same for litter boxes, too!).



A scratching post

A must for any cat's living space! Cats use scratching posts to help shed the outer covering on their claws, to scent mark (from special glands in their paws) and to stretch. Cats like to stretch after waking up or when entering a room, so place the post close to an entrance way or near where your cat sleeps.



Hiding places

Sometimes cats just need to get away from it all. Give your cat plenty of places to hide, like cardboard boxes, cupboards and paper bags. Make a tent out of blankets and you're sure to get a visit!



A look-out

Cats like to get up high and perch. Why? It makes them feel safe to be able to view their surroundings from above. Shelves, window ledges and tall scratching posts with resting platforms all make great perching places. At least one should be big enough to let your cat stretch out fully.



Ways to play

Just like kids, cats need toys. Choose a variety of toys that help cats mimic natural hunting behaviours such as chasing, batting, pouncing and biting – like a ball-in-circle toy, feather wand, Cat Dancer® or fake mouse. You can even help your cat “hunt” for food by hiding kibble around the house or making a puzzle feeder (go to spca.bc.ca/crafts for instructions)!



Kitty Cautions

Cats need a safe environment, so watch out for these potential dangers!

FOOD FEARS

Automated feeders may seem convenient, but they can jam, resulting in hungry kitties. Instead, a real person should always fill the food dish. Just like human food, canned cat food can spoil, so make sure it doesn't sit out too long. As for beverages, stick to fresh water. Some cats love to lap up milk, but they can't digest it properly.



WINDOW WORRIES

Cats love to perch on window ledges, but if you want your cat to stay in, be sure the window isn't left open! If your windows have blinds, keep the cords out of reach. Cats may like to bat at them, but can easily become caught and strangled.

HIDING HAZARDS

Cats feel safe when they have places to hide, but they need to be able to escape, too. Keep tabs on your cat so she doesn't end up trapped in a drawer or cupboard. And, while paper bags can be fun places to hide, keep plastic grocery bags away from Fluffy – she could get tangled in the bag.



TOY TROUBLES

Not all cat toys are created equal. Avoid toys with string or small pieces your cat could swallow. Check toys frequently and replace worn-out ones. Some toys contain catnip, which can make some cats aggressive or hyperactive.



PLANT PROBLEMS

House plants often look tasty to cats, but they can be poisonous. Check the Animal Poison Control website (aspca.org/apcc) before bringing a plant into your home. While munching on cat grass isn't poisonous, eating too much can upset tummies and should be monitored.



Your adoption option?

The BC SPCA!

This cat care guide has information on everything you need to take care of a cat. But where should you get your cat? A pet store? A “free” kitten from a friend? Make the SPCA your first adoption option. Here’s why.

Thousands of abandoned cats and kittens are brought to the SPCA every year. At the SPCA, cats wait in the shelter until they are adopted. Many wait months. In places where there are more cats than homes, the SPCA moves cats to larger cities so they get adopted sooner.

Very young kittens are placed in foster homes. For kittens without moms, caregivers bottle feed kittens every few hours until they are ready to be adopted. All SPCA cats



Did you know cats are the most popular pets in Canada?
36% of all households have cats! Dogs are second at 32%.



get vaccinations, flea control medicine, a spay or neuter (so we don’t get even more kittens) and lots more care (see below).

Adopting is easy. Bring your parents to any of the SPCA’s 36 shelters. Staff and volunteers will help pick out the cat of your dreams. There is an adoption fee between \$75 and \$179. That may seem like a lot but the SPCA provides cats with all the care items you would need to spend on a “free” cat.

Check out everything included with your adoption in the table below. Add up the total cost to see what a great deal it is when you make the BC SPCA your first adoption option!

List of expenses*	Free Cat	BC SPCA Cat
Neuter / spay (\$100 - \$150)	\$150	Free
Vaccinations	\$45	Free
Flea control	\$55	Free
De-worming	\$35	Free
ID (microchip or tattoo)	\$50	Free
Health check exam	\$50	Free
Vet insurance (first month)	\$45	Free
Hide, Perch & Go cat carrier	\$20	Free
Adoption fee	Free	\$75 - \$179
What does a “free cat” really cost?	???	\$75 - \$179

*Average cost for fees



Only 17% of people adopt their cats from an animal shelter! Help us change this. Tell your friends to adopt from the SPCA!



ANSWER:
\$450 for a
“free cat.”

Of the people with cats, most have two or more!

NO MORE KITTEN AROUND!

Caring for cats as they age



Compared to most other pets, **cats live a long time** – about 15 years on average. Some live into their twenties. That's more than 100 years old in human years!

Whether young or old, all cats eat, sleep, play and socialize – just in different ways. Below are some tips to help you care for your cat through the years.

EAT. Kittens should be fed **high quality kitten food** three to four times a day. Introduce them to foods with different flavours and textures so they get used to variety.

Switch to **high quality adult food** at six to eight months of age. Adult cats should be fed at least twice a day. Leaving food out all the time can lead to **overweight cats**. Seniors – cats aged 11 and up – should be given three to four **small meals** daily.

SLEEP. Cats sleep about **16 hours** a day. Kittens and seniors sleep more than adult cats. Cats at any age, though, need to be able to **rest undisturbed**.



VSTOCK LLC / GETTY

PLAY. Kittens love to **play**. Use **toys**, not hands and feet, to play with them. Otherwise, they might learn to play bite. Ouch!

Cats spend less time playing as they age. Use **food** to encourage adult cats to play. Give them **puzzle feeders** and toss kibble down the hall for them to chase. Hide kibble around the house for them to find. Playing keeps older cats **active and fit**.

SOCIALIZE. Introduce kittens to **new people, pets and experiences** like nail trims, teeth brushing, grooming, car trips and visits to the veterinarian. Reward them with **praise and treats** so they grow up **friendly and curious** rather than shy and afraid. Cats at any age can be **taught tricks** such as sit and come, just like dogs. Teach new tricks as they get older to keep them active.



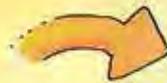
SAFETY FIRST! Curious kittens can easily get into **dangerous situations**. Keep kittens from **chewing on electrical cords**, **jumping onto hot stovetops**, **falling into toilets** and **climbing** into warm dryers.

Senior cats are also **vulnerable**. Make sure food and water dishes and beds are **lower to the floor**. Check that litter boxes are not too tall for older cats with stiff joints. Senior cats might also need **mats** to keep them from slipping as they walk, as well as **steps** or **ramps** to help them reach favourite resting spots.

What's my cat trying to tell me?



How can you tell if the cat you are petting is content or about to scratch you? How do you know when the cat in your arms wants to be let down? Observing a cat's body language and studying her face provide clues on how she is feeling.



Really, Fin? Can't you tell a friendly cat? Her tail is up and pointing at you.

Whoa! Why has your cat gone all Halloween?

When she arches her back and gets all puffy she is super angry.



Meet and greet: Friendly, relaxed dogs sway their tails from side-to-side. Cats do the opposite. A friendly, outgoing cat carries her tail stiff and high, often with the tip pointing toward the person or other cat she's greeting.



Hey Kat, why is your cat's tail swishing while I hold her? Does she want to do the dusting?



Very funny, Fin. I think you should put her down. Any second she is going to scratch and leap out of your arms.



Annoyed kitty: The first sign that a cat is getting agitated (it doesn't take much with some cats) is the swishing or flicking tail. This often occurs when a cat is being held against his will. If you don't put him down he will struggle, twist and scratch you in an attempt to escape your grasp. You may also see a resting cat start to "tail-swish" when another cat approaches. The relaxed cat is signaling he wants to be left alone.



Puffy cat: When a cat is feeling threatened she will puff her fur and arch her back. Think Halloween cat. Usually she will hiss and growl, show her teeth and extend her claws. Her tail will be puffed up and stick straight up. The cat is looking as big as possible, warning you to back away or she will attack.



Match Kitty's mood...

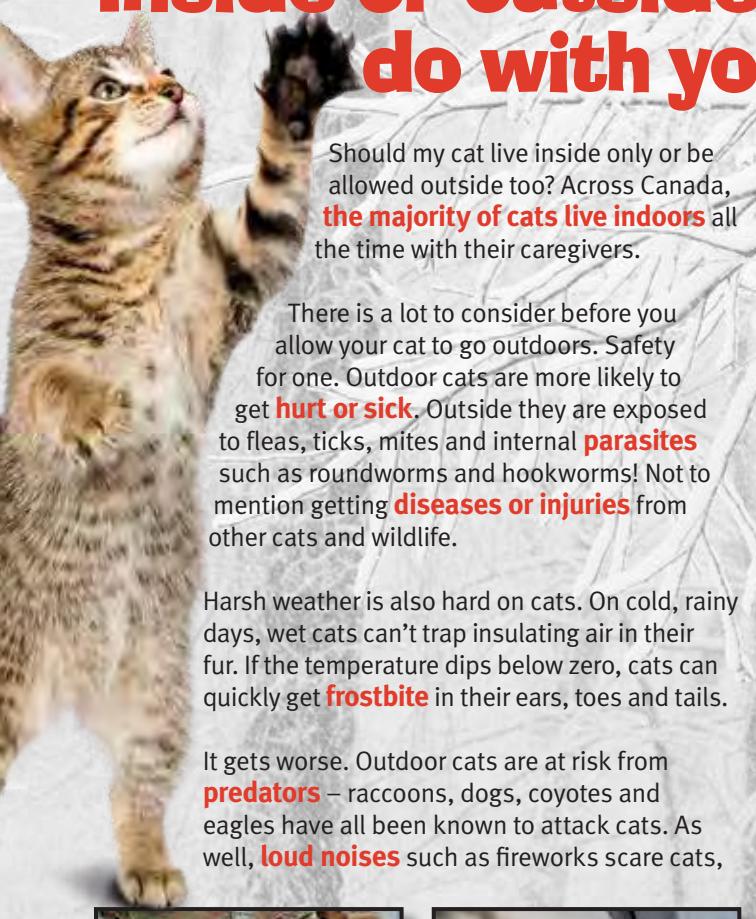
You can tell when people are happy by the smiles on their faces. Cats also communicate their feelings with facial expressions. The position of their whiskers, ears and even the size of their pupils (the black centre part of the eye) are used to express their mood. A larger pupil generally means the cat is stressed or scared. See if you can match the face to the cat's mood.

Purrrfectly relaxed: Cats purr for several reasons. Most cats purr when they are happy and content. Some purr when eating – especially nursing kittens. Cats also purr when they are sick or injured. Scientists think they do this because the vibration actually helps to stimulate healing and makes cats feel better.

1.  A. **Anxious**: Uneasy, anxious cats flatten their ears. Their eyes are "wide-eyed" with enlarged black pupils. Whiskers are pulled flat against their faces.
 2.  B. **Happy**: Cat has perky, forward-facing ears. Whiskers are relaxed – not pulled back or fanned forward. Eye pupils are oval.
 3.  C. **Pleasure**: Relaxed cats who are feeling content while being petted have half-closed eyes. Their ears and whiskers are relaxed. They may slowly blink their eyes at you.
 4.  D. **Frightened**: Cats who are scared and feel threatened show their teeth and often hiss as a warning. Their ears pull back and flatten. Their whiskers fan out and extend forward. Eye pupils are large. These cats are telling you to back off or face an attack with teeth and claws.
 5.  E. **Annoyed**: Ears are upright and stiff. Cat has direct stare with eye pupils constricted to slits. Whiskers are fanned forward.



Inside or outside - what to do with you?



Should my cat live inside only or be allowed outside too? Across Canada, **the majority of cats live indoors** all the time with their caregivers.

There is a lot to consider before you allow your cat to go outdoors. Safety for one. Outdoor cats are more likely to get **hurt or sick**. Outside they are exposed to fleas, ticks, mites and internal **parasites** such as roundworms and hookworms! Not to mention getting **diseases or injuries** from other cats and wildlife.

Harsh weather is also hard on cats. On cold, rainy days, wet cats can't trap insulating air in their fur. If the temperature dips below zero, cats can quickly get **frostbite** in their ears, toes and tails.

It gets worse. Outdoor cats are at risk from **predators** – raccoons, dogs, coyotes and eagles have all been known to attack cats. As well, **loud noises** such as fireworks scare cats,

causing them to run into traffic or become **lost**.

Indoor-only cats have issues too. Some cats don't get enough exercise or become bored or frustrated. **Indoor cats need to run, play and explore.** To keep them active you must commit to playing with your cats daily. Also, provide toys and places for cats to climb, perch and investigate.



If a cat grew up going outside she may well scratch and meow to be let outside. To solve this, many caregivers create a secure screened outdoor area. **Outdoor enclosures keep your cats safe.** They also help prevent your cats from preying on songbirds and other wild animals such as tree frogs, rabbits, salamanders and butterflies. Even a small screened porch can satisfy cats who crave the outdoors. Making an outdoor cat enclosure can be a great family project.

These are just a few things to consider before deciding on an indoor or outdoor life for your cat.



My family is bringing our new cat home. Will she know to use the litter box?

Unlike dogs, cats don't need much housetraining. Even as kittens, instinct tells them to use a litter box! Just keep your cat in one room with her litter box (and places to sleep, eat and drink) to help her settle in. Then, after a few days, let her have the run of the house. She should return to the litter box when she has to go to the bathroom.

There are so many litter boxes to choose from! Which type is best?

Most cats prefer open litter boxes. Pick a litter box longer than your cat and wide enough for her to turn around easily. Boxes with lids not only trap in the smell, they can make cats feel trapped too.

My cat only needs one litter box, right?

Having one litter box per cat plus one extra is best. In multi-cat households, some cats refuse to share litter boxes.

Does it matter where the litter box goes?

Yes! Cats like privacy. Choose a quiet area away from household traffic – and her food and water dishes. Cats don't like to go to the bathroom near where they eat and drink. They also like to have an escape plan. The litter box location shouldn't make your cat feel cornered.

Wood, recycled paper, wheat, corn, clay, orange peels, peanut shells... which type of litter will my cat prefer?

Some cats are pickier about litter than others. In general, though, cats prefer litters with no scent and small grains rather than large pellets.



Most cats prefer an open litter box.

Most cats like litter with small grains (left) rather than large pellets (right).



Isn't more always better when it comes to litter?

Actually, most cats prefer shallow litter. Provide your cat with one to two inches of litter.

How often should the litter box be cleaned?

Cats have very sensitive noses. So, when you notice a smell coming from the litter box, just think how much worse it smells to your cat! Scoop the litter box once or twice a day.

Completely change the litter every week or two. Avoid using any strong-smelling cleaning products that may irritate your cat. Instead, just wash the box out with warm, soapy water.

Scoop the litter box once or twice a day.



Healthy, happy kitties

Spending time with your cat will show you how she normally looks and behaves. When you notice something unusual – like a change in appetite or an accident outside the litter box – you'll know to take her to the vet right away! Here are some other important tips to help your cat live a long, healthy life.



My, what big teeth you have!

Your cat's teeth should be white and shiny. Her gums should be bright pink and moist to the touch. Bad breath, bleeding gums and brownish teeth could all be signs of painful gum disease.

Take your cat to the vet at least once a year to have her mouth checked as part of an overall health exam. Your vet may recommend she have her teeth cleaned under general anaesthetic (while asleep). Your vet may also suggest feeding her a special teeth-cleaning diet.



I spy with my little eye

Normally, cats have bright, clear eyes. Watch for redness, swelling or goopy discharge. Your cat could have an eye infection. Eye infections require treatment with medication from the vet.

Great groomers

Your cat's fur should be smooth, thick and shiny. Cats keep their coats in such great condition by grooming themselves every day with their bristly tongues. Lack of grooming is a sign your cat might not be feeling well. She may need to see the vet.

Brushing up

Brush your cat to help her remove loose hair. The less hair she ingests while licking herself, the fewer hairballs (balls of hair that collect in her stomach) she might throw up. Short-haired cats can be brushed a few times a week. Brush long-haired cats daily to help prevent mats.

Got shots?

Vaccines help protect cats against diseases that can make them very sick. Outdoor cats are more at risk of catching these diseases. Cats are usually vaccinated three times as kittens, then once every one to three years as adults. Your vet can recommend what vaccines your cat needs.

Do you hear what I hear?

Your cat's ears should be pale pink, clean and odourless. Beware ears that are red and swollen, smelly or filled with dark, waxy buildup! Take your cat to the vet to have them checked for infection.

Itchy ears could mean your cat has ear mites. Ear mites are tiny, eight-legged parasites that feed on the wax and oils in a cat's ear canal. Visit your vet for medication to treat the mite problem.



Kittens can have kittens!

Have your cat spayed or neutered before six months of age. Spaying and neutering are surgical operations performed by a vet to prevent animals from reproducing (having babies). That way, you can help prevent unwanted litters.

Bonus! Cats who are spayed or neutered are usually calmer, more content to stay home and less likely to get certain cancers.

Paw spa

To help keep your furniture – and you! – from getting scratched, have your cat's nails trimmed by an adult or your vet. Cutting them too short can be painful and cause them to bleed. Never have cats declawed.



Accidents happen?

Cats normally have excellent litter box habits. Should your cat urinate outside the litter box, take her to the vet for a health exam right away. Serious medical problems such as diabetes, kidney stones and bladder infections can all cause cats to have accidents in the house.

Flea free

Is your cat scratching and chewing at her fur? She could have fleas! Fleas are small, wingless insects that feed on blood. The best flea control medications are available at your vet clinic.

Hookworms, roundworms and tapeworms, oh my!

Cats can carry worms that live, feed and reproduce inside them. Yikes! Common types include hookworms, roundworms and tapeworms. Worms can cause a variety of symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea and weight loss. Luckily, medication for worms is easy to get from your vet.



ID is key

In case she gets lost, your cat needs at least two forms of identification: a tag on her collar and an ear tattoo or a microchip. Use "quick-release" or "break-away" collars with built-in elastic to prevent your cat from getting tangled up.



Ring around the rosy
look for flaky, bald patches on her head, ears and front legs. Treat ringworm with medication from the vet.

Ringworm is a common skin infection - caused by a fungus, not a worm! To check your cat for ringworm, look for flaky, bald patches on her head, ears and front legs. Treat ringworm with medication from the vet.

Celebrate Cats!

Cats make wonderful companions. They are smart, affectionate, curious and entertaining. They keep us warm at night and always seem to know how to make us laugh.

Why not celebrate your friendship by taking time to read or play with your cat? You'll find some purrfect suggestions below!

Pick of the litter-ature

There are many great cat books available online and at book stores, pet supply stores and public libraries. Here are just a few titles to get you started:

Cat Champions: Caring for our Feline Friends

By Rob Laidlaw

Think you're not old enough to make a difference? Read stories about kids your age who are helping homeless cats. Discover what it takes to rescue, foster, socialize and adopt cats and kittens.



Bark!



Cats: 80 Fascinating Facts for Kids

By Anne Walker

Did you know that cats can locate the faintest sounds without even moving their heads? Enjoy learning all about cat senses and abilities, and then quiz your friends!



Choosing a Cat: How to Choose and Care for a Cat

By Laura S. Jeffrey

Should you get a kitten or an older cat? Should you adopt more than one cat? Bringing a cat (or two!) into your family is a big decision. Find out what you need to know to make them happy and healthy.

Paw-some playtime

Cats of all ages love to play! Here are some toys that are a hit with most cats:



Cat Dancer® Complete

Cats love to bat at this dangly toy! You can play with your cat or mount the toy to a wall so she can play while you're away.



Cat Dancer® Cat Charmer

Wave this wand toy around and watch your cat become an acrobat!

PetSafe® SlimCat™ Interactive Feeder

Challenge your cat's hunting instincts with this food ball that drops kibble as it rolls.

Quality time on a dime

Luckily, you don't need a lot of money to have fun with your cat! You can make your own toys such as wands and puzzle feeders, too. Visit spca.bc.ca/crafts for ideas and instructions.

While spending some quality time together, grab a camera and capture your cat's silly side to share with friends and family. After all, who doesn't love a funny cat video?

The 5 Freedoms for Felines

Cats are often said to have nine lives. But we know, in reality, cats have only one life – and our job as guardians is to make sure they enjoy it!

We can give our cats the best life possible by providing them with the Five Freedoms. The Five Freedoms are a set of animal welfare guidelines used around the world. Each freedom describes a different part of the care required to meet an animal's needs. Taken together, the Five Freedoms show us how to be great cat guardians.

① Freedom from hunger and thirst by giving cats the correct food and fresh water.

② Freedom from pain, injury and disease by providing cats with regular veterinary care and a safe environment.

③ Freedom from distress by making sure cats are never neglected or abused, and do not feel scared, anxious, frustrated or depressed.

④ Freedom from discomfort by providing cats with a comfortable home that is warm, dry, clean and quiet.

⑤ Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being by giving cats the chance to play, explore, groom, eat, drink and rest as they choose.