

proper cat care

basic feline care

Although they are more independent than dogs, cats still need your love and attention. A happy cat needs at a minimum: food, water, litter box, health care, scratching posts and playtime. Here is how to properly care for your cat.

Where to get a cat:

Thousands of cats and kittens are turned into shelters throughout the year and are readily available for adoption. Cat clubs put on shows where the public can meet breeders and get acquainted with different breeds. Independent rescue groups also offer cats for adoption.

Indoor or outdoor?

Decide whether your cat will be indoors all the time or a mixture of indoors and outdoors. An outdoor cat does not live very long, especially in rural areas where cats are preyed upon by coyotes. Even in the city, an outdoor cat runs the risk of being hit by cars and other perils. To ensure a long, healthy life, plan to keep your cat indoors.

Cats that disappear may end up in a shelter. Less than 10% of stray cats are redeemed by their pet parents. A microchip is the best insurance for you to locate your cat if they become lost. Your veterinarian will implant the chip between your cat's shoulder blades and you can register the number with a national registry, the microchip company or local animal control. A collar and ID tag or license can help anyone who finds your cat to locate you.

Feeding:

Cats do nicely on a diet of high-quality dry cat food. All major brands of cat food are tested according to AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) standards. Extensive analysis of food has been done to ensure your cat gets the correct balance of



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

nutrients for their needs.

You can also treat your cat to canned food in addition to dry food. This acts as an additional hydration source, which can help prevent UTIs, kidney disease and more. If left out, canned food will dry up and your cat may not eat it, so small amounts are best kept in a separate dish.

Cats need fresh, clean water—change their water daily.

Cats love to nibble on fresh greens—if they are indoor-only cats, this could mean your houseplants. Provide your cat with live pet grass.

Litter box:

The most important thing you can do to keep your cat happy is take extra care with their litter box. Cats need a routine and sometimes react to any changes by refusing to use their box.

Place the litter box where your cat is not likely to be disturbed while using it. Scoop the litter box every day—a dirty box is the primary cause of cats refusing to use their litter box. Do not put the litter box near your cat's food because cats are very clean and don't want to eliminate where they eat. If your cat isn't using their box, there may be many reasons why.

Equipment needed:

- Food bowl
- Water bowl
- Cat furniture
- Cat food
- Treats
- Scratching post
- Flea & tick control
- Litter box
- Bed
- Litter
- Litter scoop
- Litter box deodorizer
- Litter box liners
- Collar

- Feline toothbrush and toothpaste
- ID tag
- Microchip (from your veterinarian or local vaccination clinic)
- License (if required in your area)
- Toys
- Grooming glove or brush
- Comb (for long-haired cats)
- Nail clippers and styptic powder
- Cat carrier
- Cat door (optional)

Fun for cats

Scratching:

You will never be able to teach your cat not to scratch. It is a natural behavior, like chewing is to a dog. Provide your cat with several materials of different textures they can scratch. Carpet, sisal rope, corrugated cardboard and other materials made into cat furniture will lure a finicky cat. Petco offers Care Sheets covering this topic.

Toys:

Cats constantly sharpen their instinctive hunting skills by playing. You need to provide ways to satisfy this innate need, especially for indoor cats. They need your time and attention (at least 10 to 15 minutes a day) to be a healthy, well-adjusted pet.

Pouncing, scratching, chasing and a variety of other activities exercise their minds as well as their bodies. Fishing pole toys have a feather or small piece of cloth at one end and provide chase games. A ping pong ball thrown in a bathtub or up the stairs is great fun. A laser pointer entertains you and the cat!

Health care:

Protect your cat from serious diseases—a series of kitten shots is not enough. Annual boosters will help maintain your cat's immunity throughout their life.

Dental disease can cause other major health problems. Your veterinarian can show you how to brush your cat's teeth. Never use toothpaste meant for humans; it will make your cat very sick. Make sure a dental checkup

is part of your cat's annual veterinarian visit. It can be difficult to tell when a cat is sick. If they are not grooming themselves and their coat starts to look ratty, it could be a sign of illness. Not using the litter box? There may be a physical reason. Drinking a lot? Losing weight? Bad breath? Blood in their urine or stool? Straining to eliminate? A rash? Hair loss? All of these symptoms indicate it's time for a visit to the veterinarian.

Fleas and parasites: You may not realize your cat has worms because they can go undetected for a long time. All kittens should be de-wormed, and your veterinarian can test a fecal sample as part of their regular checkup. If one of your pets has worms, chances are the others do as well.

Even indoor cats get fleas. Apply a monthly preventive treatment such as a topical product that is applied between the shoulder blades or a pill that sterilizes fleas when they bite your cat. Carpet treatments, outdoor sprays, indoor sprays, shampoos, etc. all help make fleas a pest of the past. If you have an outdoor cat or an indoor/outdoor cat, be sure to use a preventive that kills ticks as well. Be careful not to overdose your cat with a combination of chemicals and never use a flea & tick preventive for dogs on your cat.

Should you spay or neuter?

Yes. An unneutered male will spray, howl, fight and end up looking and smelling terrible. Your cat will roam for miles looking for a female in heat and could get badly hurt or killed in the process.

A female in heat can be just as bad while looking for a mate. You won't be able to keep them from breeding unless you confine them and keep them isolated. Female cats go into heat often and can have several litters a year.

There are thousands of kittens that are euthanized each year in shelters. Cats can have their first litter as young as six months. Don't be a part of the problem—spaying or neutering your cat is a necessity.