

Proper Cat Care

Basic Feline Care



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Although they are more independent creatures 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's how to provide for your happy 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/outdoors. A cat outdoors 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 be in a shelter. Less than 10% of stray cats are redeemed by their owners. A microchip is the best insurance that you will get your wandering kitty back. Your vet implants the chip between the cat's shoulder blades, and you register the number with a national registry, the microchip company or local animal control. A collar and id tag, or license if it is required in your area, means anyone who finds your cat will know how to locate you.

Feeding Cats do nicely on a diet of a high quality dry, complete cat food. All major brands of cat food are tested according to AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) standards. Extensive analysis of foods has been done to ensure your cat gets the correct balance of nutrients for his needs. You can also treat your cats to a little canned food in addition to the dry. If left out, it dries up and the cat won't eat it, so small amounts are best in a separate dish.

Cats need **fresh** water. Change water daily!

Cats love to nibble on fresh greens. If they are indoors-only cats, that means your houseplants! Provide Kitty with some live Pet Grass (PETCO offers Care Sheets regarding this topic)

Litter box The one important thing you can do to keep your cat happy is to take extra care with his 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 every day. A dirty box is the number one cause of cats refusing to use the litter box. Don't put it near his food because cats are very clean and don't want to eliminate where they eat. If your cat isn't using his box, there may be many reasons. (PETCO offers Care Sheets regarding this topic)

Equipment Needed

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food bowl | <input type="checkbox"/> Kitty litter | <input type="checkbox"/> License (if required in your area) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water bowl | <input type="checkbox"/> Litter scoop | <input type="checkbox"/> Toys |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cat food | <input type="checkbox"/> Litter box deodorizer | <input type="checkbox"/> Grooming glove or brush |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Treats | <input type="checkbox"/> Litter box liners | <input type="checkbox"/> Comb (for long-haired cats) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scratching post | <input type="checkbox"/> Collar | <input type="checkbox"/> Nail clippers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flea control product | <input type="checkbox"/> Feline toothbrush and toothpaste | <input type="checkbox"/> Cat carrier |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Litter Box | <input type="checkbox"/> ID tag | <input type="checkbox"/> Cat door (optional) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bed | <input type="checkbox"/> Microchip (from your vet) | |

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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 kitty with several things of different textures that he can scratch. Carpet, sisal rope, corrugated cardboard, and other materials made into cat furniture will lure the finicky cat. (PETCO offers Care Sheets regarding this topic)

Toys: Cats constantly sharpen their instinctive hunting skills by playing. Especially if they are indoor cats, you need to provide ways to satisfy this inborn need. He needs your time (at least ten to fifteen minutes a day) and attention to be a healthy well-adjusted pet.

Pouncing, scratching, chasing, and a variety of other activities exercise their mind 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 are not enough. Annual boosters will maintain your cat's immunity throughout his life.

Dental disease can cause other major health problems. Your vet 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 Kitty's annual visit to the vet.

It is hard to tell when a cat is sick. If he is not grooming himself and his 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 his urine or stool? Straining to eliminate? A rash? Hair loss? All indicate it's time for a visit to the vet.

Fleas and parasites: You may not realize your cat has worms because they can go undetected for a long time. All kittens should be dewormed, and your vet can test a fecal sample as part of Kitty's regular check-up. If one pet has worms, chances are they all do.

Even indoor cats can get fleas. Apply a preventative treatment monthly. Use a topical spot-on 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 to make fleas a pest of the past. Be careful not to overdose your cat with combinations of chemicals.

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, with howling and carrying on while looking for a mate. You won't be able to keep her from breeding unless you cage her and keep her 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 part of the problem be part of the solution. Spraying or neutering your cat is a necessity!

Suggested Reading *Cats for Dummies* by Gina Spadafori and Paul P. Dion, DVM, DACVM
ASPCA Complete Cat Care
The Complete Idiot's Guide to a Healthy Cat by Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, DVM
Shelter Cats by Karen Commings