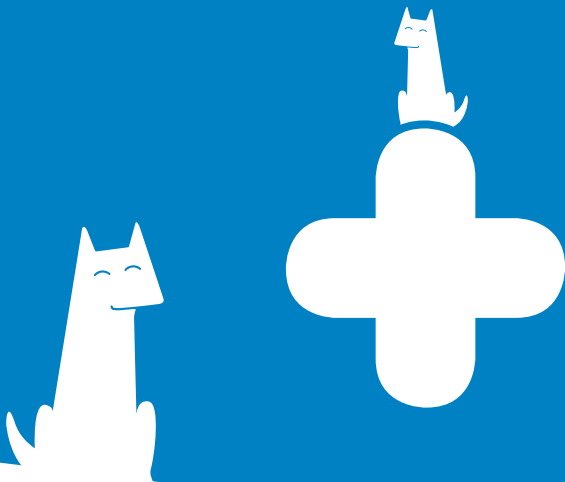


Caring for your cat



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*.



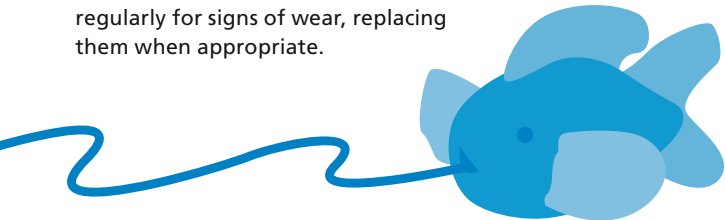
Play

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*](#).

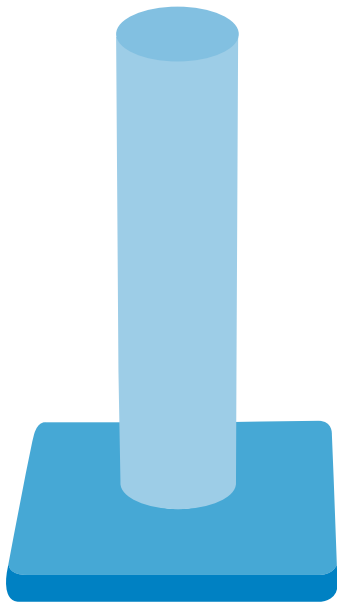
Sleeping

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.

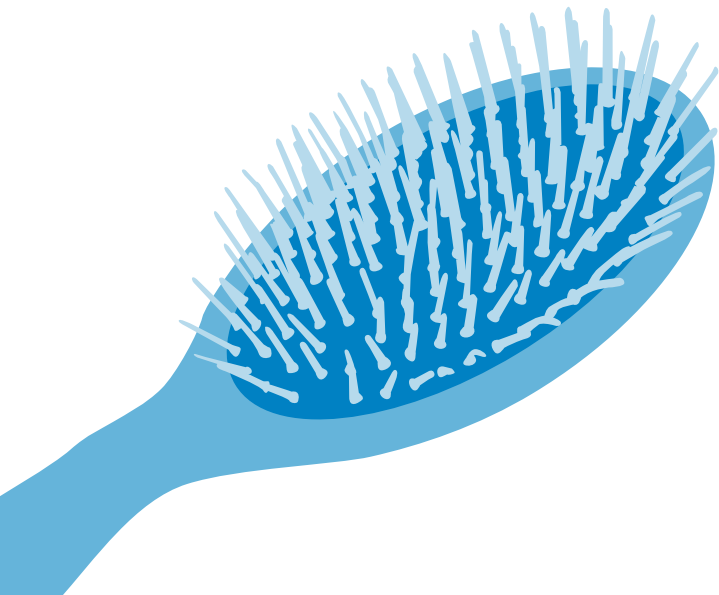
Being clean creatures, cats don't like using dirty or soiled trays, so make sure the litter tray is cleaned at least once a day. If using clumping litter you can remove solids once or twice daily. With some other types of litter, you may need to replace all the litter on a daily basis.

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

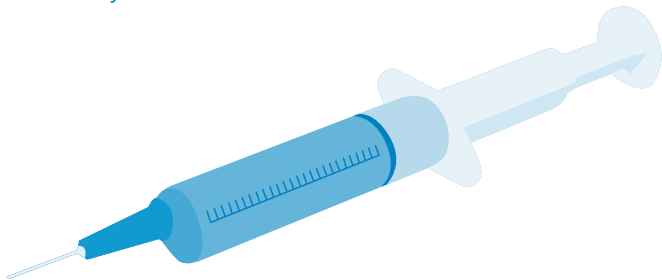
Cat flu – vaccinations are available against several of the microorganisms which cause this common respiratory syndrome which can have severe and lasting effects

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

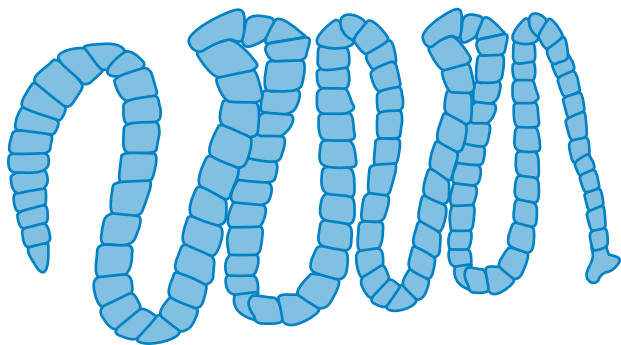
Fleas are very common in cats but can be hard to spot. It's advisable to consider treating your cat regularly for fleas, whether they have them or not, as it is far harder to deal with an infestation than to prevent one. Many different flea treatments are available and the most effective products to 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.*](#)



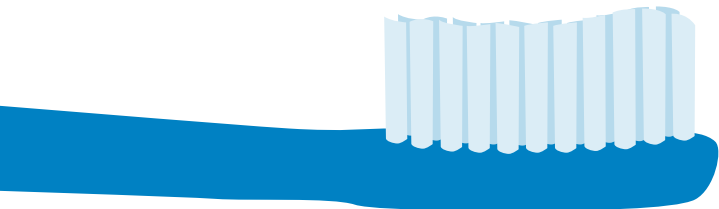
Dental care

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
- 14 Cats and people 84014
- 15 Caring for your kitten 84015
- 16 Elderly cats 84016
- 17 Feral cats 84017
- 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
- 7 Cats with disabilities 83207
- 8 Hypertension 83208
- 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)

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