

RSPCA 

for all creatures **great & small**

A guide to cat and kitten care



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For all Animal Emergencies	-	1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625)	
Pet-D-Tect	- - -	1300 363 736	
Behavioural Helpline	- -	07 3426 9928	
Adopt a Pet	- - - -	1300 364 443	www.adoptapet.com.au
General Enquiries	- -	07 3426 9999	
Volunteering	- - -	07 3426 9915	volunteering@rspcaqld.org.au
Fostering	- - - -	07 3426 9997	fostering@rspcaqld.org.au
Donations	- - - -	1300 RSPCA1 (1300 777 221)	
World for Pets	- - -	07 3340 6500	www.worldforpets.com.au

Taking your new family member home

To ensure your pet travels safely, you will need a pet carrier, attached with the seatbelt. This is essential for safety whenever you travel. RSPCA cats are provided with a temporary cardboard carrier, but investing in a sturdier model is recommended.

Never leave your cat or kitten unattended in a car, even for a few minutes as temperatures in the car can rise to levels which can cause your cat to die of heatstroke in just minutes.

Your cat or kitten's homecoming

It will take some time for your new cat or kitten to adjust to its new home – anything from a few weeks to a few months is normal, so be patient!

A kitten will feel lost and alone away from its littermates, so needs to be kept secure and safe near you. If you are happy to allow your pet to sleep with you, make sure you keep the litter nearby in case of midnight calls of nature! If there is another cat in the house, he/she may be jealous so avoid intruding on your existing cat's space and normal routine. Share your attention with both your existing cat and the newcomer.

It is advised to keep your new kitten in a quiet space to give him or her time to adjust to their new home. It will be important to maintain your existing cat's territory by ensuring the new feline (kitten or adult) is confined to just a few rooms until they get used to each other. Feline introductions can be tricky, so it's best to keep both new and existing cats indoors for at least a few days to prevent them from straying. With new cats, it is recommended to confine them indoors for a minimum of two weeks or until two weeks after their final vaccination to prevent them from wandering off and/or getting sick.

Introductions should always take place gradually, and under strictly controlled conditions. See our fact sheet on *New Environments* for more information.



Identification

The majority of cats that arrive in Animal Care Centres and pounds as a stray are never reunited with their owners because they are not identified. A cat simply needs to be off your property to be considered stray, so there is no truth to the myth that stray cats roam. You need to keep your cat safe by using both of the following forms of identification:

- A microchip is permanent identification. Remember to change your details by contacting Home Safe ID on www.homesafeid.com. All RSPCA felines are already microchipped.
- An ID tag with your cat's name and phone number is still the most efficient way to make certain your cat is returned to you.



Remember to attach external ID on special elasticised collars for safety! If uncertain, ask RSPCA staff how to fit the collar correctly to minimise any risk to your cat.

Your pet's VIP tag is instant identification, and are worn on your cat's collar. Brightly coloured for high visibility, the phone number on it is manned 24-hours a day to ensure you and your pet are reunited quickly, should the need arise. These tags are valid for your pet's lifetime, but should they become lost or damaged, they can be replaced for just \$5. Don't forget to change your details as required by contacting the RSPCA on 1300 36 37 36.

In the event that your cat should go missing, start searching immediately. Don't delay by assuming he/she will come home of his/her own accord. The longer you wait, the less likely you will be to locate your beloved friend. Please don't hesitate to contact the RSPCA Qld Pet-D-Tect service on 1300 36 37 36. For more information on our services, please visit the website, www.rspcaqld.org.au/LostandFound.



Settling in

Don't force your cat to interact before they are ready. Arriving in a new home can be an overwhelming experience for your cat. Provide your cat a quiet place to retreat to. Give them time to adjust and they will seek you out when they feel safe and secure in their new environment.

Show your cat their kitty litter, food and water and always keep these in the same spot. Put the kitty litter in a spot that is quiet, accessible and easy to clean, and well away from their food. Cats don't like to toilet near where they eat.

Keep items and plants that may be harmful to your cat well out of their reach – remembering they are very good climbers and can jump quite high! Kittens in particular are curious and quite clumsy at first, so bear this in mind and "kitten proof" all the areas the kitten will have access to. Make sure that chemicals that might break and spill, anything that may be accidentally swallowed such as rubber bands, plastic wrap, pins and needles, buttons and anything a kitten may become entangled in such as string, dangling cords, and of course breakable treasures are carefully put away. Remove beanbags – some cats and kittens will use these as litter trays.

Keep toilet lids down – kittens can drown if they fall in! Avoid using strong cleaning products on floors and counters as cats will lick their paws and many cleaners are toxic. If in doubt, ask your veterinarian for advice.

Indoors or Outdoors?

The truth about indoor cats

Keeping your cat indoors is most definitely not cruel. On the contrary, it is the safest option for your pet, ensuring they cannot be injured by cars, dogs, other cats or people. They are also environmentally friendly as this prevents them from hunting our native wildlife. The average indoor cat can be expected to live for approximately 15 years, and although many outdoor cats can live nearly as long, on average an outdoor cat survives an age of just 3 years.

Cats require food, water, comfort, exercise, affection and play, all of which can be provided inside. Additionally, they also sleep 19 hours out of every day! Cats that are raised indoors are perfectly content with their world. Cats that have been exposed to outdoor living will take some time to adjust, but they too learn to relax and enjoy the comforts of home.

If you must let your cat out of doors, please allow for a minimum two week period to enable your cat to become accustomed to its new surroundings, and ensure that excursions outdoors are never done without supervision, and remember to confine your pet at night, the time that cats and our native wildlife are both most active. Consider training your cat to walk on a harness and lead, or consider an enclosure for your cat to keep him/her, and our wildlife, out of harm's way, such as a CATMAX (www.catmax.com.au).

Health care for your cat/kitten

You should have or will shortly receive a certificate of health with your new RSPCA cat or kitten, listing when they were last vaccinated, desexing details and when follow-up vaccinations are required. After taking your new family member home, you will need to:

- Ensure your cat receives follow-up vaccinations 4-6 weeks after initial vaccination, and again at 16 weeks for kittens, or annually for adult cats. Follow up vaccinations will be at your own expense. Please discuss this with your local Veterinarian.
- Discuss heartworm prevention for your cat with your local Veterinarian.
- Ensure that any changes to your cat's diet are introduced slowly. All RSPCA animals are fed on Hills Science Diet dry food, and sudden introduction of tinned or rich foods could cause illness.
- Remember to take your new pet to your own vet within the first week of adoption for any follow up health checks and advice on intestinal worms and heartworm.

Your cat's diet

Ensure that dry food is a complete and balanced diet as opposed to a "treat". A high quality dry food is available for all age ranges to meet the dietary requirements for each life-stage. Most commercially prepared foods are balanced diets, although their quality will vary.

Cats should never be fed a diet that consists of only raw or cooked meat or fish as neither food meets all of a cat's nutritional requirements.

All RSPCA cats are fed Hill's Science Diet, a premium lifecycle food. Any new foods or new brands should always be introduced gradually to avoid stomach upsets. Avoid fish-based or gravy-based foods for kittens. Food should be served at room temperature.

Dry biscuits are very economical and convenient, provide an excellent diet and help to keep your cat's teeth clean because they are so hard. However, they are concentrated, so it is important not to over feed your cat, or obesity may result.

Always ensure your cat has access to clean, fresh water. This is especially important if your cat is fed on biscuits alone. When fed on a dry diet, a cat will drink as much as 10 times more water than a cat fed solely on tinned foods.



Your cat's diet continued ...

Just like humans, there are foods that your cat will enjoy that are not necessarily good for them. These include fish, milk and dog food. Although most cats love fresh fish, it has a totally incorrect proportion of nutrients, vitamins and minerals if it is the major component of their diet.

Many young animals are lactose intolerant. With a proper balanced diet, cats do not require milk – very young kittens obviously require specially formulated milk until they are able to be weaned i.e. eat without assistance. These young animals would take milk from their Mum until they are 6-8 weeks of age but remember – the milk provided by their mother is very different from that obtained from a hooved mammal such as a cow or goat.

Cats and milk are like children and chocolate – they'll have as much of it as you will give them, but it isn't necessarily any good for them!

Finally, it is not advisable to feed cats on dog food, a mistake that many cat owners make. Dog foods are not balanced for cats as dogs have different dietary needs. Kittens should generally be fed three times daily until three months of age. Adult cats can be fed once or twice daily. Cats are generally "grazers" and prefer to have food and water left out for them at all times. However, watch for obesity – some cats, like dogs, will eat everything put in front of them.

If you have any further questions regarding your RSPCA cat's diet, we recommend you discuss nutrition with your local vet.

Understanding feline stress

Your new cat may have been waiting for a home for just one day, or one month, but regardless, they will still be feeling the effects of stress.

Moving into a new home with people they've only just met, and possibly having to cope with other established pets is bound to cause a few problems. Just like humans, cats find moving house a stressful experience, and will need time to feel at home with their new family.

Please have patience. It may take a few weeks or even a few months for your new cat to relax and settle in. Please phone the RSPCA if you have any questions or concerns.



Understanding your adult cat

If you are one of those rare and noble individuals who have chosen to give an adult cat a second chance at life, there are some things you need to know.

Adult cats are advantageous in that they don't have to go through the demands of kitten-hood, such as toilet training. Adult cats have established personalities, so you can choose a cat with the right personality for you. All RSPCA adult cats over one year old have been tested for FIV (feline aids) and are regularly treated with heartworm prevention.

Adult cats need more time to adjust, and you need to teach them what is expected in their new home. Give them a room to call their own. When you get your new cat home, take him or her to this room, shut the door, and release. Keep the cat in this room for the first few days, or a few weeks if it seems a nervous cat. Provide litter tray, food, water, a comfortable bed, toys and scratching posts and be patient.

When your cat becomes comfortable and familiar with its new environment, you can let it out to explore the rest of the house.

Many cats are uncomfortable being picked up, and are far more comfortable cuddling up next to you on the couch. Let your cat decide what is most comfortable. Attention and cuddles are important, but don't overwhelm your cat.



Please contact our Behavioural Helpline (07 3426 9928) if there is a problem in settling the cat into their new home. Almost all of these can be overcome with good advice and patience. Feel proud that you've given a home to one of the cats that need it most.

Making introductions

Introducing your new feline to the existing cat in the house

Cats are not generally communal creatures. If you already have a cat at home, expect a few fireworks at first! It usually takes a few weeks before a truce is called, and perhaps a few more weeks before the cats become friends, or at least tolerate each other's company.

The best way to ensure a smooth introduction is to confine the new cat to just one room at first. Allow the resident cat access to all other rooms as usual. Rubbing a warm towel over the new cat's face and then rubbing this on the resident cat, and vice versa, can help them get used to each other's scent. Alternating their time in a common room can also help them to get used to each other's scent.

After a day or two, introduce them into the same room at the same time under close supervision. Try this at feeding time so it creates a nice association, but be sure not to feed them too close together! Reward them for relaxed behaviour when the other is near. Gradually increase the time they spend in each other's company but don't restrict the existing cat's access. Don't leave them alone together until they are comfortable in each other's presence. There may be a bit of hissing and growling at first, but cats rarely have prolonged fights. The existing cat will try to set the rules over who gets to be boss about what. Make the time when the cats are together a very pleasurable experience for the cats, but give them time apart as well.



Introducing your new feline to the canine family member



Unless your dog has been raised with cats from a puppy, don't introduce the two immediately. Some breeds have instinctive drives to chase cats and individual dogs may also have a strong urge to do so.

Allow them to get used to each other's scent first, by letting one pet wander about a room for a time, then shutting that one out and letting the other in. You can also allow them to meet through the relative safety of a glass door, but be careful of dogs that may charge the glass and shatter it!

Ensure their first face-to-face meeting is fully supervised and ideally, when something pleasant happens such as feeding. You should have your dog on a lead during the meeting so they are fully under

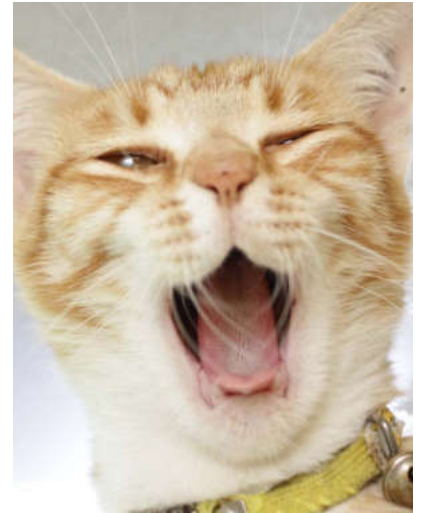
Gradually increase the amount of time they spend together and reward them when they behave appropriately. Provide places that the cat can hide in or retreat to if they want. Once they are behaving reliably your dog can be allowed off lead, but it is best to continue close supervision for some time.

Dental care

Always keep a close check on the condition of your cat's teeth and speak to your local vet about diets and products that can help ensure your cat's teeth are kept in good condition.

Gingivitis and tartar can build up easily and cause bad breath and gum problems and affect your cat's appetite and health. A good idea is to have your vet check your cat's mouth annually at vaccination time.

Feeding your cat uncooked chicken wings on a regular basis will help with your cat's dental health. Chicken wings should be introduced at a young age otherwise your cat may not accept them as part of their diet. Introduce small amounts at first until your cat gets used to eating them.



FAQs about cat care

Why does my cat need to wear an ID tag

Your cat should always wear identification, even if he or she never goes outside.

Hundreds of adult cats that have lost their way arrive at RSPCA Animal Care Centres every month. Of these, only around one per month will be returned to their original home. Only 50% of the remainder are able to find new homes. Even a cat that 'never' leaves the yard could become disorientated if they wander a little further than normal, and a cat without ID is far more likely to be assumed a stray than a cat with clearly visible ID.

If you are afraid that your cat will choke him or herself on a collar, special elasticised collars are available. These will ensure that your cat is identifiable, but will not come to harm.

Another option for identification is the microchip. A microchip is about the size of a grain of rice and contains a number, which will allow ready identification of your cat. Your new companion has been microchipped by the RSPCA.

Once implanted, the microchip number is registered with a countrywide registry along with details of your cat and your contact details. As with all identification, a microchip is only as good as the information attached to it so don't forget to notify Home Safe ID if any of your details change. Microchips are not usually detectable without a microchip scanner, so external ID remains essential as some people don't think to check for microchips if they find an animal that seems lost.

If your cat is lost, contact the RSPCA Pet-D-Tect service immediately on 1300 36 37 36. Don't delay by thinking your cat will return of its own accord – you need to check within a day of noticing your cat's absence. Notify your local council and vets, and conduct a letterbox drop around the neighbourhood. Place fliers on approved community noticeboards and keep checking! Keep identification on your cat at ALL times.

FAQs about cat care continued ...

How can I toilet train my cat?

Cats are instinctively clean and very particular about where they go to the toilet. A cat's toilet can be made from a box or tray filled with kitty litter or on occasions even sand or dry earth. Cats have preferences for different types of litter. Try different types if your cat does not use the tray. If you change the type litter, mix the new litter with a little of the original litter and change it out gradually, until the cat gets used to the new product.

Pooper scoop immediately and completely, change the litter each day or the cat might not use it. Clean the tray with plain water or 'Biozet' laundry powder mixed in warm water. Do not use any products containing ammonia or perfumes, as these may encourage the cat to go to the toilet outside the tray.

Provide one litter tray per cat, plus one extra. One cat requires two trays, and two cats will require three. Place the trays in different locations, and in quiet areas that are attractive and accessible to the cat. Contact RSPCA Behavioural Helpline on 07 3426 9928 or your Veterinarian for advice with toilet training.

Where should my cat sleep?

A cat likes a warm, dry, clean bed. A large, lidless box or basket raised off the ground to avoid draughts is quite suitable.

Bedding should be made from a washable material and be laundered regularly.



When should I let my cat outside?

After the first two weeks, you can introduce your cat to the outside but **ONLY IF THE CAT IS RELAXED AND SETTLED**. It is advised that your cat takes his or her first excursion outside on a harness and lead. Some cat owners prefer to keep their pets safely indoors or in a cat enclosure at all times. This is the best way to ensure they are safe from harm, and cannot harm anything else, either.

Cats are best kept inside between dusk and dawn. By secluding your cat indoors during the evening they will not bother neighbours or become a threat to wildlife. It will also protect them from becoming victims of prowling dogs or traffic, and will reduce the number of catfights. This will also prevent them being exposed to strays who may be carrying disease.

FAQs about cat care continued ...

Do I need to groom my cat?

Cats can spend up to one-third of their waking hours grooming themselves. Besides keeping its fur smooth and removing dead hair and skin cells, grooming can also help regulate the cat's temperature. A cat's coat will also benefit from regular brushing to help prevent the formation of fur balls, a potential source of stomach illness.

If your cat is longhaired, daily grooming with a special brush is essential. If your cat is allowed outdoors, you will need to check the coat daily for ticks, particularly in warmer weather. Paralysis ticks can be deadly.

How can I stop my cat from scratching my furniture?

Most cats love to scratch and need to be provided with an appropriate place to do this, rather than ripping the upholstery on your lounge.

Provide a scratching post or two for the cat to use, and reward the cat for using it. The best places for them are near sleeping areas, as most cats like to stretch and scratch on waking. The post has to be attractive to the cat, so find one your cat enjoys using. All cats have individual preferences in this regard. Most cats like posts that they can get their claws into, such as ones with a rattan/string or carpet cover.



How can I train my cat not to be aggressive?

Many cats and kittens like to play aggressively. Take care that you teach your cat how you would like it to play and interact with you, rather than becoming a victim of scratches, bites and attacks. Avoid playing games where your cat or kitten bites and claws at your body. Redirect that play onto a soft toy or other soft play article – fishing rod toys work very well. Reward your cat with voice praise, a pat, titbit or more play when it behaves appropriately.

Withdraw your attention and stop playing if the cat tries to bite, scratch or ambush you. By giving the cat an approved outlet for the behaviour they want to show, rewarding them when they do so, and ignoring when it does not, you can teach the cat how to play and interact with you in a positive and enjoyable manner. Because of the tendency for kittens to indulge in 'rough play' it is vital that they are never left alone with small children.

Always ensure that close supervision is maintained when small children play with ANY pet.

FAQs about cat care continued ...

How can I protect native wildlife from my cat?

Cats are natural predators, but their instinct to hunt is triggered by movement, not hunger. Thousands of small native animals are either injured or killed in this way every year, and many of those who survive the initial attack are left with permanent damage.



The only way to be 100% certain your cat isn't wreaking havoc with the local wildlife is by keeping them inside at all times, or providing them with a secure outdoor enclosure. Most cats will be perfectly happy with this lifestyle, as long as they have plenty to do, have some grass to chew on, and toys to play with. Catnip, catmint and cat grass are available to provide an indoor garden.

If you must let your cat outside, at the very least ensure that when outside, your cat wears a bell and is supervised at all times, and is safely confined indoors at night. Your RSPCA cat can even be lead trained, and then taken outside fully supervised on harness and lead. Consider an enclosure for you cat, such as a CATMAX (www.catmax.com.au).

These measures will help to keep your cat and wildlife safe, while providing fun and games in the great outdoors. The RSPCA does not promote the use of ultrasonic devices as this can lead to behavioural disorders in your cat, and they are not particularly effective. Contact your local veterinarian or behavioural consultant for more information.

Can my cat get sunburned?

Some cats and kittens are born with little or no pigment in some areas of their bodies. That is, they have areas of albinism. This is particularly important if they have pink noses and ears and they just love to sunbake.

These areas don't have the same nice thick coat to protect the skin from the damaging rays from the sun. Accordingly these areas are predisposed to sunburn and, if frequent or severe enough, can lead to skin cancer. If your cat has a lack of pigment, particularly in these areas, discuss the kitty version of the Queensland 'Slip Slop Slap' with your local Veterinarian and prevent damage to your pets' skin. RSPCA World for Pets sells pet sunscreen and 100% of the profits comes back to helping animals in need. Check out the website, www.worldforpets.com.au.

