



Stanford Cat Network

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GUIDE TO CARING FOR YOUR ADOPTED CAT OR KITTEN

CONTENTS

1. Getting Ready for Your New Friend
 - a. Cat-proofing your home
 - b. Shopping List
2. Bringing Your Cat Home
 - a. The First Day Home
 - b. The Next Few Days
 - c. The Rest of the House
3. Introducing The New Cat to Resident Pets
4. Choosing the Best Food
5. Water
6. Litter
7. Playtime and Toys
8. Scratching Posts and Cat Trees
9. Training and Behavior
10. Fleas and Parasites
11. Identification
12. Veterinary Care
13. Dental Care
14. Indoors Only
15. Grooming
16. Allergies – in Humans and in Cats
17. More Help

The Stanford Cat Network is a volunteer nonprofit organization supporting a no-kill spay/neuter, feeding, and adoption program for homeless cats at Stanford – by agreement with but not funded by Stanford University.

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1. Getting Ready For Your New Friend

Before you arrange to pick up your new companion, you should make sure your house is ready. You need to “cat proof” your home and purchase the basic equipment needed for your cat.

a) Cat-Proofing Your Home

Cats are curious by nature, and they love to climb and jump on top of high places. When your cat is getting used to her new surroundings, she will be doing a lot of investigating and exploring. You need to make sure your home is safe and secure - follow these guidelines and check off items as you proceed through your home;

1. **Check all windows and screens to make sure they are very strong.** Cats can push weak or torn screens out from the frame or tear them. Cats can escape even from second or third story (or higher!) windows and may injure themselves in the process. It is best to install new steel screens, or place metal grilles such as the ones available for screen doors over windows you wish to keep open. If in doubt, keep the window closed at night and while you are away.
2. **If you have a balcony, don't let the cat out there.** Cats often try to leap onto railings or after birds and may fall. Balconies are not safe places for cats.
3. **Remove plants that may be poisonous.** Cats love to chew plants, and some cats may use potted plants as a litter box, so try to hang all plants out of reach or move them outside. If you are not sure if your plants are poisonous to cats, ask your vet. Common plants that are poisonous include; philodendrons, ferns, all lilies, and poinsettias. One taste of a lily can kill a cat.
4. **Lock up all cleaning supplies, drain openers, medications, and other poisonous substances.** Place them in a sealable plastic container with a latched lid. Make sure antifreeze is not accessible and do not allow your cat in your garage where leaked fluids can poison her. Animals are attracted to the sweet taste of antifreeze and other toxic substances.
5. **Check for pest poisons and remove them.** Rat poison, ant and roach poison and rodent traps are all dangerous to cats. If you rent your home or recently moved in, do a thorough check for existing poisons, sometimes they are left behind by previous tenants. Check the back of all cupboards, drawers, closets, etc. Cats can become sick or die from eating the poison or from rats or insects that have ingested the poison.
6. **Remove dangling cords such as the strings from blinds and phone cords.** Cats can't resist playing with these items and can become entangled and hang or choke. Tie up cords from blinds near the top of the window, and secure loose power cords and cables with ties out of reach or behind furniture. Some cats may also chew electrical cords and could be electrocuted – make sure your cords are tucked away.

7. **Put away breakable items**, especially on bookshelves and countertops where cats may investigate. Make sure shelves and furniture are stable and won't tip over.
8. **Pick up any small, swallowable items and strings.** Rubber bands, paper clips, string, thumb tacks, broken balloons, tree tinsel and other small articles are tempting play objects for cats, but pose a choking hazard. String can cut the intestines if swallowed. *Important:* if your cat ever swallows string, NEVER pull the string out from either end – you can cause internal damage. Call your vet immediately, and if the string is very long, cut the string near the cat.
9. **Set aside a "safe room" for your new arrival.** Put her food dish, water, litter box, toys, scratching post and bed in it. Give this room a thorough going over. Once kitty is comfortable in her new surroundings, it will be time to let her explore the rest of your happily cat-proofed home.
10. **EXTRA CAUTION WITH KITTENS.** Kittens will get into very small places, always be sure to check on them before starting appliances, moving anything or sitting in a chair. Kittens have been injured or killed in clothes driers, reclining chairs, dresser drawers, and many other places you'd never imagine. So be safe – always know where your kitten is!

b) Shopping List

A collar and temporary ID tag will be provided by SCN when you pick up your cat, unless you are adopting a young kitten too small to wear a collar.

1. **Food.** We recommend Natural Balance, Wellness, Royal Canin, Nutro, Felidae, Innova, Science Diet or similar high quality wet and dry food. Feeding a more expensive food is cheaper in the long run; high quality food is made with good meat and is more digestible so less will be wasted in the litter box (another advantage – less stool!). Your cat will be healthier, less prone to disease and will shed less hair.
2. **Litter box.** The bigger the better! Cats like room to turn around and dig. Higher sides will help avoid spills. Covered boxes should be large enough for the cat to turn around in and stand up straight. Kittens may need to start with a low-sided box.
3. **Litter Scoop.** For the obvious chore.
4. **Litter.** We recommend either *clumping*: World's Best Cat Litter, Swheat Scoop or *non-clumping*: any plain non-scented litter such as Johnny Cat. Avoid clay clumping litter (Scoop Away, Tidy Cat, etc.) when possible and silica bead litters, as they may be toxic if ingested or inhaled – especially dangerous for kittens.
5. **Cat Carrier.** For picking up your new friend and trips to the vet. Never transport a cat loose. Even a calm cat may panic and jump out of your arms or the car.

6. **Dishes.** Use some from your kitchen or get special ones for your cat. Ceramic or stainless steel is recommended because plastic dishes harbor bacteria.
7. **Scratching post.** It is best to provide your cat with a large cat tree or post, you want to start good habits from the beginning. Cats like to scratch things right away in a new home because they mark territory that way – so provide a suitable outlet for this urge. We highly recommend the Purrfect Post (www.purrfectpost.com)
8. **Toys.** Simple cat-approved toys include ping pong balls, stuffed catnip mice, and laser pointers. Interactive toys such as feather wands or cat charmers are great but should not be left with the cat, as they will destroy the toy or possibly choke on it. No items smaller than a ping pong ball should be allowed, because they are a choking hazard.
9. **Brush.** Grooming your cat not only reduces shedding and makes her look great, it is a great way to bond and also reduces hair ingestion leading to hairballs.
10. **Bed.** An old pillow may be chosen by the cat, but many cats adore nest-type beds sold in pet stores. Of course some cats insist on sleeping in your bed!
11. **Books.** Consider getting a good book on cat or kitten care. Recommended:
 - a. *Kitten Care and Training* by Amy Shojai
 - b. *Think Like a Cat: How to Raise a Well-Adjusted Cat not a Sour Puss* by Pam Johnson-Bennett
 - c. *The Well Cat Book: The Classic Comprehensive Handbook of Cat Care* by Terri McGinnis

2. Bringing Your Cat Home

a) The First Day Home

Your new cat has just spent some time living in a cage or foster home, awaiting adoption. She may not be used to large, open or strange spaces and may become scared or overwhelmed if released into large apartment or entire house on her own. Therefore, it is best to keep her confined one room or a small area to start with.

When you arrive home with your new pet:

- Bring the carrier into the *safe room* and close the door behind you
- Keep other pets out of the room for at least a few days
- Place the carrier in a private, quiet corner and leave it closed
- Set out food and water, fill the litter box with litter if you haven't already done so (you may later move them gradually to other areas of the house when your cat is given access to the rest of the house)
- Open the carrier door, and then remain nearby quietly to see if she will emerge. Don't force her to come out, let her come out on her own time. Some cats may not come out until night time.
- If she does not want to come out right away, make sure the food and water dishes are nearby, as is the litter box. You can demonstrate digging with a scoop so your new cat gets the idea.

b) The Next Few Days

Hiding

As a rule, cats are very upset by changes in their environment. Some cats will adjust more quickly, while others may take weeks or months. You must have the patience and understanding to allow your cat to adjust at her own pace. When you first bring her home, your cat is likely to hide – this is why you need to provide a safe, comfortable place for her to retreat to. Ideally, the hiding place can still be reached. Kitty cubes – the quilted cubes with 2 entrances – work great as retreats for your new pet. Try to block off places like under the bed where she can hide completely and be out of reach.

Bonding

Spend as much time in the room with her as you can, even if you are working or doing something else. The more time you spend with your new cat, the faster and stronger the bond will form. If she does not want to be picked up, try brushing her or playing with a toy. Being picked up is a very intimidating process for a cat, and many who are very friendly and cuddly still object to the process. Place a chair in the room and try sitting and inviting the cat onto your lap instead of picking her up. Or, sit on the floor on her level. Some cats may come close to you if you sit on a bed. Offer treats such as deli meats from your hand.

Other Pets

Other pets may be introduced gradually if your cat seems to be confident and not too timid. You should keep your new cat enclosed in the crate or carrier while introducing the other pets gradually. Do not leave the pets together unsupervised until they have had several weeks of SUPERVISED interaction. This is especially important with dogs – even friendly ones. A chase scene will make future interactions much more difficult. Please see the next section for advice on introducing the new cat to other pets. Do not introduce kittens under 4 months to a dog unless your dog has prior kitten experience. Even dogs used to cats may not recognize a kitten as part of the family unless introduced properly.

c) The Rest of the House

Some cats are by nature more bold and adventurous than others. Many of the Stanford Cat Network cats have been abandoned and/or neglected before they were rescued. That experience tends to make them less confident of unknown situations. When she feels at home in her own space, has explored the room thoroughly and does not hide in her “house” all the time, then you can try giving her access to the rest of the house. Continue keeping her food, water and litter where they are presently located. Later you can move them gradually to the desired location.

Even if your cat has decided she wants to explore, she may still be easily frightened by sudden noises or too much open space. Keep your cat’s own space set up exactly as it has been, so she has a refuge that is familiar to her. This feeling of familiarity is very important to cats. Try to confine her to the original room at night and when you are absent, so that she doesn’t run into any trouble – especially if you have other pets.

Now, you must be very careful to avoid letting your cat escape outdoors. Your adoption contract specified that the cat will be kept indoors at all times, unless a special exception was made. This is especially crucial during the first 6 months. If your cat escapes during this adjustment period you may never see her again! Once outside, a cat in a new home often panics and starts to run blindly, in danger of being hit by a car and getting lost. To avoid this occurrence, be vigilant about opening and closing outside doors quickly. This may be difficult if children are present, so speak to them about the importance of this matter. Also, if your house has a vestibule or double door, try to use this entrance so the inner door is closed before the outer one opens and vice versa.

3. Introducing Your New Cat to Resident Pets



Cats who live in the same house may never become the best of friends, but usually learn to at least tolerate each other with a minimum of conflict. You will need to take some time to introduce your cat to other family pets in order to prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing.

Introducing A New Cat to Other Cats

1. Confine the new cat to one room with its litter box, food, water, and a bed. Feed the present cats and the newcomer near either side of the door to this room. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until the cats can eat calmly directly on either side. Next, use two door stops to prop open the door just enough to allow the cats to see each other, and repeat the whole process.
2. A product called Feliway (www.feliway.com) - available at most pet stores - can be useful when introducing a new cat – it mimics relaxing pheromones that cats exude from their cheek glands. Spraying doorways and furniture where the cats encounter each other with Feliway can help ease introductions.
3. Switch sleeping blankets between the new cat and resident cats so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent.
4. Once the new cat is using her box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining the other cats. This switch provides another way for the cats to experience each other's scent without a face to face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by other animals.
5. Avoid any interactions between the cats which result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. If these responses are allowed to become habit, they can be difficult to change. If either cat becomes very fearful or aggressive, separate them, and continue the introduction process in a series of gradual steps, as outlined above.

You'll need to add another litter box and scoop and clean all the boxes more frequently. Make sure that none of the cats is being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the box. Expect hissing, spitting and growling. If a fight breaks out, do not interfere directly. Instead throw a blanket over each cat, wrapping the blanket around the cat before picking him up. Separate the cats until they have calmed down. It may be best to leave the cats separated when you are not home until you are sure they are getting along well.

**Successful introductions usually require time and patience,
don't expect things to be perfect overnight!**

Introducing a New Cat to a Resident Dog



Dogs and cats who have not experienced each other will require some extra time to become accustomed to each other. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats are usually afraid and defensive. You can use any of the techniques described in "Introducing a new cat to other cats." If your dog does not already know the commands "sit," "down," "come," and "stay," you should begin working on them. Little tidbits of food increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a new cat.

1. Begin as described above for introducing to a resident cat. Once the cat is comfortable in the house and has been introduced to the smells of the dog, you can attempt a face to face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on, and command him to either "sit" or "down" and "stay,". Have another family member enter the room and quietly sit down with the cat on his or her lap. At first, the cat and dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Praise both and give treats. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other without fear, aggression, or other uncontrollable behavior.
2. Next, move the animals a little closer together, with the dog still on a leash and the cat gently held in a lap. If the cat does not like to be held, you can use a wire crate or carrier instead. If the dog gets up from its "stay" position, it should be firmly repositioned, and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If the cat becomes frightened, increase the distance between the animals and progress more slowly. Providing the cat with a cat tree or high place to be above the dog will help her feel more confident.
3. Try to direct each session so the dog is likely to do the right thing and get praise. Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with the cat is unacceptable behavior, if your dog is always punished whenever the cat is around, and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may associate the cat with unpleasant reprimands.
4. You may want to keep your dog on a leash and with you when the cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route, and a place to hide. Keep the dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you are certain they will both be safe.

Precautions: Dogs like to eat cat food because it is very high in protein, and therefore very tasty, but it's not good for them. Keep cat food out of the dog's reach (in a closet, on a high shelf, etc.). Likewise, cats should not eat dog food exclusively as it may cause dietary deficiencies. Dogs like to eat cat feces, and although there are no real health hazards to the dog from this habit except possibly increased vomiting, it is usually distasteful to the owners and disruptive to the cat's use of the box. The best solution is to place the litter box where the dog cannot access it such as behind a baby gate, install an interior cat door to a laundry room, or build/purchase a litterbox bench (like a toybox with cat-sized hole) to contain the litterbox.

4. Choosing the Best Food

A good food is the best investment in your cat's health. High quality cat foods may cost more per bag, but they are more digestible and therefore your cat needs to eat less of the food, costing less money in the long run. Quality foods have higher quality protein and less filler that is present in the supermarket brands such as Friskies, Whiskas, Purina, etc. If a cat eats a food with low quality protein called "by-products" on the label (often derived from beaks, feet and heads of animals or from corn gluten) they absorb less usable nutrients. This not only causes poor health, it leads to greater volume of stool in the litter box and foul-smelling feces due to all the undigested matter. Supermarket brands also tend to contain high amounts of food colorings, which many cats are mildly or severely allergic too, and are high in fat, especially oils that have poor nutritional value.

Feeding high quality food helps avoid serious medical problems such as urinary crystals and intestinal disorders. You will notice the difference in your cats appearance, energy level and health. Look for foods with no artificial colors or preservatives, and the first ingredient should be chicken meal or another specific meat meal. "Chicken meal" is chicken meat (flesh and skin) with the moisture removed by cooking, it is a very good ingredient. Ingredients are listed by weight. Avoid foods that have non-meat ingredients as the primary source of nutrition. Cat are carnivores and require meat for health. We recommend and trust the following brands:

- Innova EVO (www.naturapet.com)
- Nature's Variety (www.naturesvariety.com)
- Wellness (www.oldmotherhubbard.com)
- Natural Balance (www.naturalbalanceinc.com)
- Royal Canin (www.felinenutrition.com)
- Felidae (www.canidae.com)

Dry food should not be fed free-choice, meaning that the food bowl is always kept full. This method works for some cats, but many will over-eat given the opportunity, and become obese. If your cat is consuming more than the recommended amount (read the bag) or if your vet says that your cat is overweight, you may need to ration the food.

Obesity is unhealthy and can lead to musculoskeletal and heart problems in later life. However, NEVER starve a cat! Cats must eat on at least a daily basis, or they will experience permanent liver damage. If you feed controlled amounts, it is best to feed in 2 or 3 meals a day, but you must feed your cat at least once each day.

Canned or "wet" food is beneficial because it increases your cat's water intake (see section "water") and generally contains a higher percentage of meat than dry food, which requires a higher carbohydrate level to allow the food to bake into kibble. You may have heard the old information about dry food cleaning cats' teeth and being good for them - but recent research shows that dry food does nothing at all to clean cats' teeth, it crumbles upon the slightest pressure and cats' teeth are not designed for grinding, they tear and swallow meat. In fact, dry food with its higher carbohydrate content is more likely to stick in between your cats' teeth and cause tartar and decay! You can read more about cat nutrition at this excellent website: www.catnutrition.org

Kittens require greater amounts of food per body weight than adult cats, because they are still growing muscles, organs, and bones. Feed kittens in 3-4 meals each day, for adult cats transition to 2-3 meals per day.

5. Water

Cats need constant access to fresh, clean water. Bottled or filtered water is best because cats are very sensitive to the chlorine added to most tap water, and the smell is distasteful to them so they will only drink when they are very thirsty. Cats should be encouraged to drink as much as possible. Increasing your cat's water intake helps flush the kidneys and urinary system, reducing the risk of urinary tract infections and disease. You can encourage your cat to consume more water by; feeding wet food, always keeping the water fresh, and putting out multiple water dishes – especially in a larger house. Experiment to determine what type of container your cat likes to drink out of – flat, wide dishes; cups; bowls. Also available are pet “water fountains” which circulate and filter water, and many cats love to drink from these.

6. Litter

You want a litter that is easy to keep clean and healthy for your cat, and one that your cat likes to use! Clean litter is vital to your cat's health and happiness. Cats will show their displeasure with a dirty box by defecating or urinating outside the box, and you do not want to start such behavior. If your cat delays urinating because the box is dirty, she will be more susceptible to bladder infections and urinary tract crystals. Also, dirty litter boxes breed bacteria which your cat will get on her paws, track through your house, and ingest. The box should be scooped at least once per day, more often for multiple-cat homes.

Clumping or non-clumping? Non-clumping “regular” litter must be completely changed every few days, and the feces must be removed daily. Avoid scented brands -they repel cats. Many cats prefer “clumping” litter because of its sandy texture, and their humans like the ease of cleaning. A **caution** about clumping litter: Most clumping litter –the kind that looks like grey sand - is a special clay that contains the mineral Sodium Bentonite, which forms a cement-like clump when exposed to moisture. Ingesting or inhaling sodium bentonite can be harmful or fatal to your cat according to some studies, it forms a clump in the intestines. Your cat may ingest the litter when cleaning her paws or playing in the litter box. Clumping clay litter should be avoided when possible, especially for small kittens. Wheat or corn cob based clumping litters are very good and are non-toxic, and have the advantage of natural plant enzymes that break down odors.

We also recommend *against* pine and cedar litter because the strong scent has caused many cats to avoid the litter box. Cats also seem to dislike the texture of the large pellets. Finally, we recommend *against* the silica litters such as Pearls or crystals, they are toxic if eaten and most cats dislike the large pearls. Avoid scented litters as the perfumes can irritate a cat's sensitive nose and repel them from the litterbox.

Brands we recommend and trust for performance and safety in order or preference:

Clumping litter:

1. World's Best Cat Litter (www.worldsbestcatlitter.com)
2. Swheat Scoop (www.swheatscoop.com)
3. Cat Country Elite

Non-clumping (old fashioned):

1. Johnny Cat unscented

7. Playtime and Toys

Playtime is fun for cat and human, and it's a great way to ensure that your cat gets important exercise! Safe play involves a few common sense precautions; If you notice your cat breathing heavily or panting, stop playing until her breathing returns to normal. Don't use dangerous toys or encourage your cat to play with items that you may not want them to later (eg your hands). Do not leave toys out that your cat could choke on or swallow – this includes any string or toy containing string, elastic parts, or small possibly detachable parts. Never let your cat play with rubber bands or items smaller than a ping-pong ball. Do not leave string, yarn, or thread out, if swallowed it can wrap around intestines, requiring expensive and dangerous surgery.

Safe toys for supervised play (lock away when not in use) : Feather wands, laser pointer (don't shine in eyes), Cat Dancer, fabric Cat Teaser

Safe toys for unsupervised play: Ping pong balls or other large solid plastic balls (no superballs!) stuffed catnip mice with no removable parts, (remove jingle bells from end of tails if equipped, cat may chew them off and choke), Kong toys.

Unsafe toys: Do not allow your kitten or cat to play with ribbons, string, small balls that can fit in their mouth (choking hazard), paperclips, thumbtacks, rubber bands, any toys that have unsecured parts that can be chewed off and swallowed or choked on. Costly surgery and sometimes death can be the result of not properly kitten or cat-proofing your home!

8. Scratching Posts and Cat Trees

Cats scratch surfaces as a way of marking territory and to remove old claw sheaths. It is a natural part of cat behavior, and must be accepted as such. Declawing is a cruel and unnecessary surgery, banned in the UK and other countries because it is inhumane. The adoption contract you signed specified that the cat you adopted must never be declawed. Although many vets still provide this surgery, it is becoming more and more unpopular in the USA as pet owners become educated about the procedure, which involves the amputation of the last bone and tendons in each digit of the paw.

In order to avoid the destruction of furniture or carpets, immediately provide your cat with her own scratching surface. You may need to try several types to find out which one she prefers. Some variants are; sisal rope, wood, carpet, and cardboard. Catnip can be used to attract cats to the scratching post. If you provide a few choices your cat will be less likely to go for the furniture.

We highly recommend the Purrfect Post (www.purrfectpost.com), it is a tall post covered with woven sisal (better than sisal rope) and provides both vertical and horizontal surfaces. It will last a lifetime and is an attractive piece of furniture with real wood trim. Cats go crazy over this post! Felix Post (www.felixkatnipreecompany.com) is a cheaper alternative but it doesn't have horizontal scratching surfaces and is less attractive than the Purrfect Post.

Most cats prefer a tall, vertical surface to stretch up against and scratch. You can construct a simple "cat tree" by screwing a 3' post to a 2' by 2' square heavy plywood base. The post can be left bare or covered with carpet or wrapped with woven sisal. Sisal remnants can be purchased from rug makers. If you make your own post with carpet, be sure to melt the edges of the carpet to prevent unraveling, swallowing long strings from unraveled carpet has sent more than one cat to hospital for expensive surgery. Check out the resources section of our website for links to plans for building cat trees.

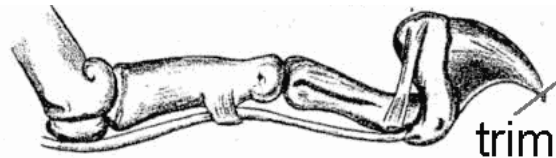
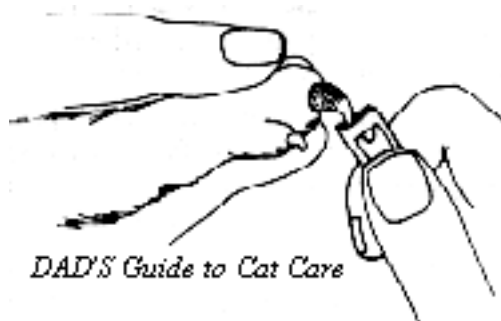
If your cat still goes for the furniture, place double-sided carpet tape (sold in pet stores as Sticky Paws, which is clear and removes easily from the surface) in the place she scratches. Cats don't like the sticky sensation. Place a suitable post right beside the place she scratches and praise her when she uses it. Never chase her or yell at her when she scratches furniture, she'll just associate the punishment with you and see it as a territory challenge, and may end up scratching more! Cat repellent sprays hardly ever work, but Feliway (www.feliway.com) has some success in stopping territorial scratching. Contact Stanford Cat Network if you need help or advice on training your cat.

Trimming Claws

Keeping your cat's claws trimmed will reduce the damage done if she does scratch things. It's easy and need only be done once a month. If you've adopted a kitten, get them used to having their paws handled while they are small.

What you need: Fingernail trimmers for humans are safe and easy to use on cat claws, just get a good sharp pair, not the old ones worn down by use on your toenails!

1. Start by holding your cat with her back end against you and front facing away, and gently examine each paw. Immediately reward with praise and/or a treat and release the cat. This ensures that she knows she will only be restrained for a short time and used to the feeling of having her paws handled, which most cats don't like.
2. Repeat this handling a few times before attempting to trim the claws. Gradually progress to extending the claw without trimming. To extend the claw, hold the paw in your hand and gently press with your thumb on the top of the toe while supporting the paw pad with a finger underneath.
3. You may want to have an assistant for the actual trimming. Start out holding the cat as you did in step #1, gently extend one claw and quickly trim just the sharp tip. Be very careful not to trim too much, cutting the quick will cause a lot of bleeding and pain and will probably make your cat fear trimming forever.
4. After trimming one claw, reward and release the cat immediately. You can do another claw a few minutes or hours later, or even the next day. This way the procedure will be over before your cat starts to get really upset about the restraint, and the positive experience will help build a foundation of trust.
5. Once your cat is more used to trimming, you can try to trim a whole paw at once. Always reward and release your cat before real trouble starts – try to be aware of the signs that the cat is getting more upset.



Soft Paws

For determined destructive scratchers, try Soft Paws (www.softpaws.com) – they are plastic covers that are glued to the claw using an adhesive similar to the one used for fake nails that humans wear. They are available in many pet food stores, or at their website. Your vet or a groomer can usually apply them if you are unable to do it.

9. Training and Behavior

It is possible to train a cat through Positive Reinforcement. Cats respond best to rewards for good behavior. Positive reinforcement is the best training aid, because it is effective and it encourages the cat to view you as a source of reward and not punishment. For example, reward your cat with treats, catnip, or praise for using her own scratching post – rather than punishing her for using something else.

Never punish your cat physically for any reason – cats do not associate such punishment with misbehavior, they only associate it with you, and will learn to fear you. The only form of negative reinforcement that works with cats are Aversion Techniques that are not associated with you. A spray bottle filled with water (a clean one bought for the purpose) or water pistol can be used to discourage behavior such as scratching furniture, jumping on surfaces, etc. The cat must not see the bottle in use, they must think the water spray is a direct result of the misbehavior. Otherwise, the cat will know she is safe as long as she does not get caught! Training by water correction is only effective if you apply it immediately and consistently. If you are gone all day, do not expect your cat to stay off countertops. Cats are mischievous and curious by nature, and do not recognize “authority” as dogs do.

The Stanford Cat Network provides ongoing support for adopters, if you are facing a training challenge please contact us for advice from experienced cat behavior experts.

10. Fleas and Parasites

Keeping your cat indoors will avoid most instances of infestation by internal and external parasites. However, there is a chance that your cat can pick these up, especially if a dog in the house brings them in. Fleas must be dealt with immediately, or they may infest the house, causing great discomfort to pets and humans.

Flea control is easy with modern treatments. Consult your vet and obtain a monthly application of a product such as Advantage or Revolution, which are applied as a drop to the skin on the back of the cat’s head, and kill all life stages of fleas for up to one month. These products are safe for mammals, because they work by disrupting an insect life cycle hormone that is specific to parasitic insects. Avoid “pet store” brands of flea control because some may not be tested for safety in all pets or children. Hartz flea control products have been implicated in the deaths of several cats. If the house is heavily infested your vet may also recommend a spray for the carpet and furniture, but it is not usually necessary.

Internal parasites are detected by examination of a stool sample. Your cat’s annual exam should include a check of the stool, and if worms are detected your vet will treat the cat. Many parasites can be treated with a single injection. Left untreated, internal parasites can cause severe health damage and some parasites could kill your pet. Heartworms can also occur in cats, and your vet may recommend preventative medication depending on your area.

11. Identification

Your cat or kitten received a microchip, a tiny device implanted beneath the skin between her shoulder blades. The chip has a number encoded which can be read by a special scanner, and that number is registered in a national database with your name, address, and telephone number. If your cat ever becomes lost and is turned in to a shelter or brought to a vet, most facilities scan incoming animals for a microchip. The facility then calls the Homeagain 24 hour network, and finds your contact information. If you move, remember to update your pet's registration by calling 1-800-252-7894 or visit www.akccar.com.

The microchip is only useful when your pet is turned in to a facility that has a scanner. Also some shelters will still not contact owners, it's your job to look for your cat if he is lost! Your pet should wear visible identification too, even though you are keeping her indoors. There is always the chance of escape. Only use break-away collars on cats! Cats can get the collar caught and may choke in a regular collar. The collar should fit loose enough to allow 2 fingers under it, but not loose enough to come off over the head. Make sure you check the fit of the collar frequently, especially on growing kittens. Adult cats can also gain weight and outgrow a collar. A tight collar can inhibit breathing and cause great discomfort. Small tags are best for cats, or get a collar with name and phone number printed right on it.

12. Dental Care

Until recently, pets did not receive much in the way of dental care. Over the past 10 years however, more and more evidence has come to show the importance of dental care in the overall health and longevity of cats and dogs. Dental disease is increasingly recognized as the #1 health problem of modern pets, and dental care is widely neglected. Veterinarians now recommend a preventative dental care program, and the earlier you and your pet begin the better.

Just as it does in humans, tartar and plaque can lead to painful gum disease, loss of teeth, abscesses and infections of the mouth. But the damage does not stop there! The bacteria that breed under the gumline on dirty teeth cross over into the bloodstream, through the many tiny blood vessels in the gums. These bacteria circulate in the bloodstream throughout the body and the liver and kidneys – the body's natural filtration system – must remove them from the blood.

In the process of filtering the blood, the liver and kidneys can be damaged by these bacteria and the toxins they emit. The more bacteria crossing into the blood, the more damage is done to these vital organs. The liver particularly is a very resilient organ, and can take a lot of punishment. But that also means that the liver can be 90% destroyed before any symptoms are seen! And kidney disease is very common in cats. Over time, dental disease can take its toll on your cat's whole body, doing irreversible damage to vital organs and shortening her life significantly.

Preventative dental care includes home care and veterinary care. Home care includes brushing your cat's teeth, or at least using a dental rinse, and dental care food or treats. Veterinary care includes annual dental exams (normally included in an annual health exam) and regular dental

cleanings performed by your vet. It is never too late to start a dental care program for your pet – even if dental disease has occurred you can still prevent further damage.

a) Home Dental Care

Brushing Teeth

The best way of caring for your cat's teeth is to brush them. First, you need to buy a special toothpaste and brush from your vet. Never use human toothpaste because it will make your cat sick and besides, they hate the taste. Cat toothpaste comes in flavors like seafood and poultry, and it's designed for the oral chemistry of a cat instead of humans. The toothbrush can be either a very small brush or a "finger brush" that fits on your finger.

Next, you have to slowly acclimatize your cat to the idea of having her teeth brushed. Don't just grab him and force a brush in his mouth, take your time and allow him to come to you. Always quit before your cat gets mad, try to read her body language and always quit when you're ahead. If you start with a kitten it is much easier to teach them to accept brushing throughout their lives, but most adult cats will also accept it if you are patient.

Place a pea-sized amount of cat toothpaste on your finger, have a treat in your other hand, and attract your cat. See if she will lick the paste from your finger, then give her the treat. If not, put some paste on the treat and feed it to her – to get her used to the smell and taste. So this for a week or so and see if you can get her to lick the toothpaste.

To introduce the toothbrush, start off by letting your cat play with the toothbrush. Hold it in your hand and encourage her to bite or chew it. Try dipping it in tuna juice or something yummy. That way, you're getting their scent on the brush, making it familiar and part of their territory. Now, once they're used to the toothbrush, put some toothpaste on it and let them lick it off while you hold the brush. As they come to associate the brush with a treat, slowly start brushing their teeth as they try to lick the paste. Be patient, and don't rush the process.

When you first start to introduce brushing, just rub the teeth near the front on the mouth. But once you are able to actually brush your cat's teeth, you should focus on the large teeth at the back of the mouth, where lots of tartar tends to build up. Don't worry about the inner sides of the teeth, your cat's raspy tongue cleans there. And don't worry about the canine teeth they don't tend to accumulate tartar. At least if you can get the toothpaste rubbed on the rear teeth (if not actually brush them) the paste itself will help eliminate bacteria and reduce plaque by enzymatic action. Daily brushing is best, but 3 times a week should bring good results. Even once a month is better than nothing!

Oral Rinses

Some cats will simply not accept any form of brushing. If you can't brush, you can use an oral rinse which you can get from your vet. These usually come with a nozzle so you can just squirt it down the side of the cat's mouth between the teeth and cheeks. The rinse is formulated to soften plaque and kill bacteria. The oral rinses can also be used in conjunction with brushing – if the rinse is used every other day it will soften the plaque for removal with a brush.

Dental Treats and Foods

Some cat foods are specially constructed to help scrub the teeth during chewing. *Nutro Natural Choice Complete Care* and *Science Diet Oral Care* (or *Prescription Diet T/D* available at vet clinics) are examples. These foods can be fed as “treats” to your cat – also healthier than most kitty junk food! Some cats will simply swallow these large kibbles whole without chewing at all, and if so the teeth-cleaning action can’t work. Some dental treats are available which may help clean teeth, such as C.ET. Chews and Petrodex Dental Treats.

Don’t rely on “tartar control” varieties of kitty junk food like Pounce. “Tartar control” just means the treats are crunchy instead of soft, and currently studies show that crunchy treats or foods don’t clean the teeth at all – unless there is a special coating that is designed to hold the kibble together and scrub the tooth. Ordinary hard kibble or treats simply crumbles when crunched.

b) Veterinary Dental Care

Your home care program will help slow the formation of tartar and plaque, but brushing and dental foods cannot remove plaque from below the gumline. A veterinary dental cleaning under general anesthetic is the only way to do that. In the past, dental cleaning was only done by vets when a problem was already detected, and teeth had to be extracted or an abscess was present. Due to the safety of modern anesthetics, dental cleaning under general anesthetic is no longer considered a risky procedure except for cats with pre-existing disease conditions such as heart failure or liver disease. Many vets now recommend an annual dental cleaning, and most vets recommend at least every 2-4 years. The frequency will depend on your cat’s natural mouth chemistry and the effectiveness of your home dental care program. Your vet will help you determine when a veterinary cleaning is needed. Remember dental cleaning is not a “frill” or an “extra” in pet care, this is a must!

13. Veterinary Care

Included in this package is a series of articles on cat health written by veterinarians. It is a good idea to read these over at your leisure, so you know some of the most common health problems in cats and what symptoms to watch for. Practice preventative health while your cat is young, to avoid problems as she gets older. Preventative health includes the following important areas:

- **Annual Veterinary Exam.** A routine exam should be done yearly, to spot any potential problems early. Cats over 7 years of age should have an annual “blood panel” – a lab analysis of a blood sample to check for early signs of kidney disease or other major problems.
- **Weekly health evaluation.** Check your cat for signs of health problems, to catch them early. Grooming and petting are ideal times to look for bumps and lumps. Ask your vet to show you what to check for.
- **Dental care.** Tartar and plaque not only leads to gingivitis and tooth loss, but the bacteria present can cause damage to organs such as kidneys, liver and heart, shortening your pet’s life. Many vets now recommend a veterinary dental cleaning every 2 years.
- **Feeding a premium food.** Your cat is what she eats. If you ate McDonald’s every day would you expect to live a long healthy life? Friskies, Meow Mix etc are junk food for cats.
- **Maintaining a healthy weight.** Obesity is as dangerous for cats as it is for humans – make sure your cat gets plenty of exercise and does not overeat.
- **Vaccinations.** We recommend that your adult, indoor-only cat is vaccinated with the FVRCP booster every 1-2 years, and rabies every 3 years. Most studies have shown that the protection from these vaccines lasts much longer than one year, and other studies have shown that in some cats too-frequent vaccinations can cause allergic reactions or injection site tumors. We **do not** recommend any other vaccinations except for cats at high risk for other diseases.

Preventative care will minimize your cat’s chances of developing disease or illness, but nothing can guarantee her safety. Being alert to changes in her behavior and body will help you identify potential problems early, and bring her to the vet. With any illness, your cat stands a much better chance if the problem is diagnosed and treated immediately.

Emergency vet care can be an unexpected expense. It is a good idea to set aside some saving for such emergencies. Or, keep a special credit card empty for an emergency. Veterinary health insurance is also available, ask your veterinarian for information about a recommended policy.

13. Indoors Only

Although cats are smart, alert, and adroit, they are no match for the many perils that await them outside. That's why the average lifespan for an outdoor cat is **5 years**, as compared to an average life span of **15 years** for an indoor cat! Some people argue that it is not “natural” to keep cats inside. But domestic cats are not wild animals. They were domesticated and bred by humans, and made dependent on us. It is our responsibility now to protect them from danger.

Dangers to Outdoor Cats

- **Cars:** Cats are incapable of understanding something that moves as quickly as a car. Cars are the #1 danger to cats allowed outdoors.
- **Animal Attacks:** Dogs, coyotes, raccoons, and other animals may attack and wound or kill cats. Other cats may fight with yours, and cause injuries that could lead to infections, disease, and abscesses.
- **Disease:** Outdoor cats encounter other cats, and can pick up life-threatening diseases. Many of these communicable diseases have no effective vaccine and no cure.
- **Accidents:** Besides car accidents, outdoor cats are in danger of being poisoned, getting caught in traps set for other animals, getting closed into buildings and starving, and countless other accidents which can easily befall a cat.
- **Human Malice:** Not everyone loves cats. There are those people who may torture and/or kill any they find. There are people who intentionally poison cats because they “dig up their garden”, and there are sadistic people who torture and kill animals for amusement. Keep your cat safe from these sick people, keep her indoors!
- **Animal Experiments:** Research labs purchase cats for experiments, and some unscrupulous people will pick up pets and sell them to these companies. They will remove collars and lie about where they found the cat.

Keeping your Cat Happy Indoors

- Grow “cat grass” (barley or wheatgrass) in a pot for your cat to chew. You can buy sprouted cat grass at most pet food stores, or you can grow seeds of barley, wheat, and/or oats.
- Build or buy a “cat tree” for climbing and watching the world. Cat trees provide fun and a lot of climbing exercise. They can compensate for a small apartment by providing vertical space. Ideally these can be placed near a window for a great view.
- Provide lots of toys – both interactive (such as feather wands or cat charmers) and toys that the cat can play with safely herself, such as catnip mice or balls. It is best to “ration” toys or rotate them, if the cat loses interest you can hide the toy away for a while and use another one.

- Provide companionship – human or animal. Playtime and petting are very important. If your cats get along well with others, consider getting a friend – cats are social animal contrary to popular belief.
- Bird feeders can be placed in an area outside a window, to serve as a “kitty TV”. Just be sure the screen and window are very secure (as they should be in any case), to avoid cats going through the screen! Fish tanks (sturdily covered) also provide great entertainment.
- Leave windows open (with very secure screens) for fresh air, sounds, and smells from outside. If possible leave a window partly open while you are away, too. But make sure the cats can’t claw out the screen!

Cat Enclosures offer a safe way for your cat to enjoy fresh air and sun. For more information on building an enclosure please see our online article:

<http://catnet.stanford.edu/articles/enclosures.html>

14. Grooming

Although cats clean themselves thoroughly, brushing her coat will reduce shedding on furniture and increase the health of the hair. Brushing will also reduce the amount of hair ingested by the cat, and help reduce hairballs as a result. Medium or long-haired cats need more grooming care than short haired cats, because they may form tangles and mats which they cannot remove in their own. It is important to keep your cat’s hair free of tangles and mats, because these will pull on the hair, causing restriction of blood flow, and can eventually lead to serious skin problems.

Experiment with types of brushes, from slicker wire brushed to soft-bristled brushes, and rubber curries to see what your cat prefers. Brush gently but firmly in the direction of the hair growth. At first, stick to the back, since many cats have ticklish tummies and may not enjoy brushing in sensitive areas.

If your medium or long-haired cat develops mats or tangles in a sensitive area, it is still necessary to remove them. You will have to catch her in a relaxed mood, and do it as gently as possible. Special tools are sold for removing mats that minimize pulling. If you are not able to remove the mats you can bring the cat to your vet or groomer to have it done.

15. Allergies – in Humans and in Cats

Allergies in Humans

People who are allergic to cats are actually allergic to a protein called Fel d1 found in cats' saliva, urine and feces. Cats lick their fur and the saliva dries and flakes off, and is present in the air. Unfortunately, allergies are one of the main reasons people give for giving up their pet. Most of these people do not realize that there are ways of reducing or eliminating their allergy problems. Following are several simple strategies you can use to minimize your chances of developing allergies and ways of coping with them if you have them.

- Use Allerpet/C – a natural enzyme product clinically proven to reduce allergy problems for cat owners. You simply wipe the cat with this liquid once a week (www.allerpet.com)
- Circulate fresh air in your home as much as possible. Open windows, change air filters on furnaces and air conditioners often.
- Feed your cat a premium food, the proper balance of essential fatty acids and nutrients will keep skin and hair in optimal condition, reducing shedding and dander.
- Clean litter boxes daily, if you are allergic have someone else do it or get an automatic litter box. Keep the litter box away from the areas you spend time in, Fel d1 is present in feces and urine.
- Get a HEPA air filter and use it in your bedroom.
- Wash cat beds, cover slips and blankets that the cat sleeps on frequently.
- Brush your cat frequently and dispose of the dead hair. Have someone else do this for you if you yourself are allergic.
- Do not bathe your cat with soap or shampoo, because she will lick herself more and increase the saliva on her coat.
- Wash your hands after touching your pet, before eating or touching your face.
- Make sure you use allergen-filter vacuum bags to avoid distributing allergens into the air when you clean.
- Consider replacing carpets with hard flooring, new hypo-allergenic carpet, or at least getting the carpet steam-cleaned with allergen removal solutions.
- Close your cat out of your bedroom – if you breathe allergen-free air while you sleep your tolerance during the day will be better.

Allergies in Cats

Skin conditions and other symptoms may occur due to allergies in your cat. The most common type of allergies are food allergies, which can develop gradually even if your cat has been eating the same food all her life. The first thing you should try in response to possible allergies is to switch the food to a formula with few additives, try *Nutro Natural Choice* or *Felidae*.

Many animals develop allergies to corn, so switch to a formula that uses rice instead – check the label for corn, corn meal, or any products derived from corn. It can take a few days for symptoms to clear up, but you should notice a difference within a week if the food was the culprit. Consult your vet for treatment if changing the food didn't help.

Flea treatments, lawn fertilizers, dyes, and other chemicals may cause allergies and irritation of the skin or mucus membranes. Make sure your pet does not come into contact with any of these substances.

16. More Help

The Stanford Cat Network encourages you to stay in touch! We would be happy to help out with advice or assistance with caring for your new pet. In the past we have assisted new cat caregivers with nail trimming, vet visits, or finding a lost cat (which turned out to be hiding in a cupboard). We also love to hear the stories and receive your photos, the happy stories are what makes the adoption process so rewarding. Please give us a call or email if you need help or advice.

For further reading and resources, refer to the Resources section of our web site, where you can find articles and selected links to other useful sites.

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The Stanford Cat Network and the author do not profess to be medical experts, and you should consult your veterinarian whenever in doubt about behavior or medical problems. This guide is intended as advice given by experienced cat caregivers. Please feel free to contact SCN for further advice.