



Questions and Answers in relation to cats

CATS

BEFORE GETTING A CAT

Are you thinking of getting a cat?

Think carefully before getting a cat. A cat is a wonderful companion but can easily live 15 years or more, so this companion will be with you for a long time. Consider carefully whether you will be able to take care of it every day and provide the right environment for it. Think also about the financial implications (cats will need proper cat food and veterinary care), what you will do when you go away on holidays and what other pets are already in the house.

If you have thoughtfully considered all these questions, and other aspects of cat ownership, and if you are sure you are able to provide a good home, then go ahead and get a cat. They make great companions!

Where should you look to get a cat or kitten?

Development of personality and behaviour traits in cats, as in other species, is a complex interaction between their genetic makeup and their environment. How kittens are bred and how they are raised during the early weeks of their life can have a profound effect on them, and their later ability to integrate well in a home environment. How a cat behaves towards humans, how confident or fearful they are and other characteristics will all be affected by what happens during kittenhood. Much of



this 'personality' development has already taken place before a kitten goes to a new home, but good breeding and early life care can help ensure kittens have the best opportunity of leading happy and healthy lives. Kittens should stay with their mother at least until seven weeks old, and preferably until 12 weeks of age or older. Never be tempted to take home younger kittens.

There are a variety of ways to find a pet cat – a pedigree kitten can be bought from a breeder; a kitten or adult cat can be acquired from a homing/rescue centre, some people acquire a cat from a friend or neighbour. Always try to find out whether your cat has been well looked after. Knowing the behaviour of the mother, can give you some indication of the behaviour of your kitten.

There are many good rescue or rehoming centres, and acquiring a kitten or cat from one of these is an excellent idea. In professional, well-managed centres the staff will be able to help you in make a suitable choice for your needs and your family situation (e.g. a cat which has been used to children or dogs if you have children or dogs). Sadly, however, there are some 'rescues' or 'sanctuaries' where cats are kept in less good conditions – always make sure you are able to look around the centre and sure that it is clean, hygienic and that the kittens and cats are happy and healthy.

Buying via the internet is very risky, and would certainly need detective work to find out whether the kittens have been bred well. Best to avoid.

Should I look for a cat or a kitten?

A kitten is cute and fun, but in reality will quickly grow into an adult cat. It may also be more difficult to predict what the final personality of a kitten will be, whereas with an adult cat this may be much easier to assess (although their behaviour can change in different environments).

There are many lovely adult cats which need homes. They are often overlooked because many people will only consider getting a kitten. However, there are real benefits to choosing an adult cat – not least kittens can be a lot of hard work and are much more likely to get themselves into trouble! Adult cats are usually a lot more sensible and predictable.

Which pedigree breeds suffer from genetic defects?

Cats can suffer from inherited disorders, like other animals. These tend to be more common among



pedigree cats because of the selective breeding and in-breeding that takes place within breeds. For more information, see <http://www.icatcare.org/advice/cat-breeds/inherited-disorders-cats>

Can I have a cat if my apartment has no garden?

For a cat, being able to go outdoors brings huge advantages – it allows variety to its life and allows it to use its natural exploring and hunting behaviours if it wants to. Of course there are risks outside for cats, but you need to balance these with the very positive aspects of physical and mental stimulation and the ability to perform some of its natural behaviours that going outdoors permits.

Cats can adapt to an indoor life, as long as some minimum requirements are respected, such as sufficient place to move, quiet places to sleep and hide, enough stimulation not to get bored, a post to scratch and a litter trays that are cleaned daily. Note that indoor cats tend to gain weight more easily through lack of exercise, so you may have to adjust your cat's diet. Be careful not to leave your cat unattended around an open window or a balcony. Cats do need to be able to climb and sit or rest up high as well, and it is crucial that cats are allowed enough space indoors.

Cats kept indoors are at a lower risk of catching contagious diseases that are transferred between cats, and are less likely to get into fights, but on balance, in most situations allowing a cat outdoors has greater benefit, and some risks can be reduced by (for example) keeping them in at night..

For more information on indoor cats: see the Ohio Veterinary Faculty Indoor Cat Manual <http://www.vet.ohio-state.edu/assets/pdf/education/courses/vm720/topic/indoorcatmanual.pdf>

What does it cost to keep a cat?

Keeping a cat inevitably involve involves some expense. A US study¹ calculated that keeping a cat for 14 years costs between 4,521 and 18,322 dollars. A [UK study](http://www.petwebsite.co.uk/cats/the-cost-of-keeping-a-cat)² estimated the costs to be between £9 278 and £13 090 over 14 years.

These figures sound scary, but the biggest cost is food (10-20€/month) and litter (5-10€/month) for indoor cats, and keeping all pets involves expense.

¹ <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=1+2137&aid=1542>

² [UK study: http://www.petwebsite.co.uk/cats/the-cost-of-keeping-a-cat](http://www.petwebsite.co.uk/cats/the-cost-of-keeping-a-cat)



You also need to consider costs for regular veterinary care, routine, vaccinations, treatment for fleas and worms and treatment of your cat when it becomes ill or has an accident. You might consider taking insurance for this.

One-off costs will be the possible cost for obtaining the kitten/cat, neutering your cat, having it microchipped and buying equipment for your cat (scratching post, etc).

LIVING WITH A CAT

How can I get my new cat to integrate in my home and with my other animals?

Moving to a new home and integrating with a new family is a major experience for your new cat or kitten. Some cats adapt quickly, some need a bit of time to adapt. It might help to bring some bedding from the previous home with you, and keep to the same food to start with. It is important to let your cat slowly get used to its new surroundings. The first days it might be good to confine your cat/kitten to some rooms; this can help the toilet training and avoids the risk of 'accidents' elsewhere in the house. Introducing current pets to your new cat also needs to be done slowly and gradually (for more help see www.icatcare.org/advice).

If you have young children, allow them limited supervised contact initially.

What can I teach my child about our cat?

Before the arrival of a new cat in the family, it is important to take the time to explain to your child about respecting animals. You should teach them that a cat isn't a toy, but a living, sensitive being, which can experience pain and fear and that the kitten or cat deserves respect like any other member of the family. You should also explain to your child that the cat might scratch or bite and how to avoid this.

When the new cat/kitten comes for the first time to your home, allow only limited supervised contact initially. Teach them to wait until the cat initiates the contact. Moreover, as long as your child



is still young, you should never leave them alone with the cat, even if the cat has always been very gentle with your child.

What does my cat's body language mean?

Cats use a variety of signals (tail, body postures, facial expressions, and vocalizations) to convey their emotions and avoid unwelcome confrontations. However, a cat's body language is more difficult to interpret than dogs.

Some good sites to learn more about cat's body language are:

<https://www.azhumane.org/PDFs/behavior/cats/felinebodylingo.pdf>

<https://www.purina.co.uk/cats/behaviour-and-training/understanding-cat-behaviour/cat-body-language>

Here, an illustrated guide shows how the tail position and movement can reveal some aspects of your cat's emotional state. Similar charts exist for the face and for body postures, but a number of common diagrams are old and the information not always fully reliable.



FRIENDLY, CONTENT 	NON-THREATENING, UNSURE 	DERISIVE "**** YOU" 	QUIVERING, VERY PLEASSED TO SEE YOU
HOOKED TAIL 	AMICABLE, NOT AGGRESSIVE OR FEARFUL 	DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION 	THRASHING TAIL, EXCITED OR ANGRY OR IRRITABLE
FRIENDLY BUT UNSURE 	POTENTIALLY AGGRESSIVE 	SUBMISSIVE 	TWITCHING TAIL - ALERT, INTERESTED
BRISTLING WITH ANGER 			

Daily care

How much care and attention does a cat need?

Cats are relatively low maintenance compared with dogs which need walking regularly. However, like any pet, they do need care and attention, and some cats more than other. Some cats like to be independent; others want a lot of human attention. However, whatever the personality of your cat, your cat will need daily food, fresh water, cleaning of the litter tray daily (if an indoor cat) and a certain amount of attention. Long-haired cats will also need grooming on a regular (preferably daily) basis to avoid hair mats developing.



What are the legal responsibilities for a cat owner?

Owning and caring for a cat is great fun and very rewarding, but it is also a big responsibility. If you own or are responsible for a cat, in lots of countries this involves a duty to care and several legal responsibilities, such as identification and registration, care, vaccination, etc.

You can find these rules in the legal questionnaires on this website, [here](#). Please do not hesitate to contact us if you can't find the information you are looking for. Your veterinary surgeon will also be able to advise you on your duties.

What is the best diet for a cat?

Cats are obligate carnivores, meaning they must eat a meat-based diet. In the wild, a cat's main sources of protein are prey animals such as mice, rats and birds. As house pets, they should ideally be fed a high quality commercial cat diet that uses an animal-based protein formula. Adult cats normally eat around 85 gram dry food (about 200-300 kilocalories) daily, depending on the activity they have.

Many cat foods are available in a wide price range. Most are good, but some may not provide a properly balanced diet. Therefore always choose a diet specifically made for cats, which suits the age and situation of your cat (for example kittens or senior cats need a special diet), and make sure the food is from a reputable pet food manufacturer. If you have any doubts, ask the advice of your veterinarian.

Wet, semi-moist, and dry food formulas are all acceptable for cats. If you feed a dry diet, be careful to provide constant access to clean drinking water. Cow's milk is not a substitute for water, and in many cats may cause diarrhoea, so is best avoided.

Talk to a vet if your cat's eating and drinking habits change - it could be a sign your cat is ill.

Where should I keep food and water?



Store your pet food in a safe, dry place, for example in an airtight container. Feed your cat away from the litter tray and preferable not in the kitchen. If you have multiple cats, provide each of them a feeding bowl. Cats naturally eat multiple small meals daily – it can be helpful (and provide more interest for your cat) to split their daily food into several small meals and feed them in different places (and even hide some food so they have to go and find it).

Where is the best place for the cat to rest?

Most cats like a comfortable, dry, draught-free, clean and quiet place to rest. Many cats like to be able to rest and observe its surroundings from high places e.g. a tall scratching post with a high bed, a shelf, the top of a cupboard etc. If you have several cats, make sure they all have a place to rest and retreat from the others. Forcing your cat to sleep outside at night, can make them very unhappy and sick.

What are the best toys?

Cats enjoy playing with a wide variety of toys and it is important to introduce new and different toys to avoid boredom. Toys don't have to be expensive - empty cardboard boxes packaging and screwed up balls of paper are often good fun, so you do not have to spend a fortune to buy the best toy for your cat. They also like 'fishing rod' toys which feature a feather or small item on the end of a string or wire. Cats like the interaction with their owners and a toy that moves. Some 'feeding toys' are also available that slowly dispense some dry food while the cat plays with them, or you can make something yourself. Any food consumed in this way should be considered part of the daily food allowance to avoid weight gain

When choosing a toy, be careful that it will not cause potential harm your cat (e.g. contains nothing poisonous, or is something they could swallow).

Who can I leave my cat with when I go on holiday?



Unless your cat has been trained to travel and to new experiences (which very few cats are), the best option may be to have a pet sitter or a trusted family member/friend/neighbour come in and care for your cat in your own home while you are away. This is a great way for you to have the security of knowing your cat remains comfortable in its own surroundings. Never leave your cat alone for a long time with just food - cats can get lonely and anxious, and need someone to make sure they remain healthy.

An alternative to a pet sitter is to consider a boarding cattery. It is important to appreciate that there are good ones, great ones and terrible ones. If you want to use a boarding cattery always go and visit it first and ask to be shown round so you can see how the cats are kept. Visiting a few different boarding catteries and comparing them will help you choose the best one.

Cat health

How often should I take my cat to the vet?

Preventive care is essential for keeping your cat healthy. Like all pets, cats need regular trips to the vets, for routine health checks and vaccinations.

In addition, changes in the behavioural or feeding habits of your cat may be a sign of illness and should prompt a veterinary check.

Kittens typically need to get their first vaccination administered between 6 to 9 weeks of age. However, if your kitten is sneezing, has diarrhoea or any other symptoms, it should be taken to the vet immediately. It is advisable to take a newly acquired kitten to the vet for a check-up within the first few days. If you want to bring a new kitten home, and you already have cats, it is ideal to get a vet to do a health check before taking the kitten home.

After the first vaccination (typically at 6-9 weeks of age) one or more booster vaccinations will be needed (typically around 13 to 16 weeks). These are crucial to ensure your cat is properly protected against major infectious diseases. Doing only the first vaccination (without the booster s) is throwing



away money and putting your animal in danger. In some countries, some vaccinations (such as rabies) will be required by law.

Neutering your kitten is important to protect their health and prevent unwanted litters of kittens. In pet cats this is usually recommended at around 4 months of age.

Adult cats

Regular health checks with your vet are advisable at least yearly – your vet will check the general health of the cat and advise on any booster vaccinations that may be necessary and other preventive healthcare measures (such as worming and flea treatments, diet etc). You can also discuss with your vet anything that you are concerned about. Cats are excellent at hiding signs of illness, so regular veterinary checks are always recommended.

Older cats (>10 years)

As cats get older, their need for veterinary care increases. Therefore it is advisable to have more regular health checks (at least twice yearly) with your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will be able to check for many things on a routine examination and should monitor the weight of your cat routinely. They may also recommend additional investigations such as blood pressure measurement, urine tests or blood tests.

Where can I find veterinary assistance?

Registered veterinary practices exist in most European regions. Some veterinary practices specialise in a particular area of work (such as large animals, horses or companion animals) and some cover a wide range of animals. In some countries there are even veterinary clinics that only see cats. It is best to select a practice with sufficient experience in cats. Furthermore, it is important to find a veterinary practice which you feel comfortable with. You can also ask friends for input. Some veterinary practices provide only first line treatment, while others will provide more advanced treatments. If your clinic provides mainly first-line veterinary treatment, they will be able to refer you to another practice if more specialised investigation or treatment is needed.



To find veterinary practitioners in your country, you can use the local phone book or contact the national veterinary associations: http://www.fve.org/about_fve/members.php

A number of veterinarians are specialised in feline (meaning cat) medicine, you can find them via the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM - <http://icatcare.org/advice/choosing-vet>). Some veterinarians are specialised in behavioural problems. You can find these via www.ecawbm.eu

How to take your cat to the vet?

Veterinary visits can be stressful, both for your cat and for you. Nevertheless, this should never be a reason not to take your animal to the vet, as the long-term welfare risk is much greater. The key question is how to make it less stressful.

It is always good to get your cat used to travelling in the car on a regular basis from a young age. Try to use the same basket and just take the cat on short journeys. Make sure there are nice rewards too – tasty treats at the end of the journey for example. Always use a good cat carrier that closes securely so your cat cannot escape - a cardboard box is never secure enough. Never travel with the cat loose in the car – always use the carrier, and make sure the carrier is secured so that it will not move. Use bedding in the carrier that the cat normally sleeps on at home. In the car, you can cover the carrier with a cloth or towel during the journey to help keep the cat calm. In the waiting room, search for a quiet place to put the carrier, away from other animals (e.g. barking dogs). If your cat becomes stressed, you can also leave the cat in the carrier in the car until you are seen by the vet. Some vet clinics make an effort to have separate areas in the waiting room for cats, and take other measures to help reduce the stress for cats. For more information on how to reduce stress for your cat see the International Cat Care's information centre: www.catfriendlyclinic.com

Which plants and materials are toxic for cats?

Most cats are careful what they eat, so luckily, poisoning in cats is uncommon. However, cats will groom their coats carefully and thoroughly so if anything poisonous is on the coat or paws, cats may ingest it this way. Cats may be at risk of serious poisoning by eating or coming into contact with some household plants (eg, lilies) – for more information on poisonous plants see <http://icatcare.org/advice/poisonous-plants>



One of the more common reasons for cats to be poisoned is when products intended for use on other animals are used on cats. This can happen, for example, when products designed for flea control in dogs are used in cats. This can have fatal consequences (especially when the products contain drugs such as permethrin) so always make sure that any medication you use is designed for use on cats – if in doubt check with your vet.

If your cat is vomiting or has diarrhoea, or shows signs of irritation (redness, swelling, blistering or rawness) of the skin of the mouth or throat, becomes depressed or generally behaves unusually, contact your veterinarian.

Should I have my cat microchipped?

Yes!

Identification and registration is mandatory in some countries and highly recommended in all others.

Having your pet microchipped is by far the best and most reliable way to increase your pet's chances of getting home if he or she is lost or stolen and ends up being found or is taken to an animal shelter or a pet rescue. Unlike collars, which can fall off or simply be removed, microchipping is a permanent mean of identifying your beloved pet which lasts the whole lifetime of the animal. A microchip is a tiny capsule about the size of a grain of rice that is injected just under the skin between the shoulders or in the left side in the neck.

The microchipping procedure is no more uncomfortable than a vaccination, and is done by a veterinarian during a routine consultation often before the cat is acquired, purchased or adopted by new pet owners. If your cat has not been microchipped already, it is never too late though.

At the time of microchipping, the microchip identification number for your cat needs to be registered on an online database. Your vet will advise you on the procedure, but this registration will enable to your contact details to be linked with the details of your cat on the microchip database. If your cat ever gets lost, any veterinary practice, animal shelter or police station would then be able to find your contact details by scanning the microchip in your cat and looking up the details on the database. Please remember that you must keep your contact details up-to-date (address, phone number, email), and if any of these change, you should either inform your veterinarian or contact the pet registration database directly.



Owners don't regret having their pet microchipped; but if their pets are lost, they will always regret if didn't!

If you have any questions on microchipping and/or registering a pet, feel free to contact your veterinarian. More information on <http://carocat.eu/identification-and-registration/>

What do I need to do to travel with my cat abroad?

Before travelling with your cat abroad it will need to be microchipped, has to be vaccinated against rabies, may need other treatments, and needs to carry a special travel certificate. Your vet will be able to give you more details.

If you travel to a country outside the EU, you must inquire about the requirements of the country you are travelling to, and the EU requirements that apply on return from that country. In addition to microchipping and rabies vaccination, your pet may need to have a blood sample tested before leaving the EU to ensure the rabies vaccine has worked. You should start preparation for travelling abroad with your cat by contacting your vet well in advance of your travel.

For more information please visit: <http://www.fve.org/news/publications.php?item=269>

What are the common preventive healthcare measures that should be done for all cats?

The basic treatments are:

- Identification and registration via microchip (obligatory in some countries, but strongly recommended in all countries!)
- Preventive health checks (see question above)
- Vaccinations: First vaccinations need to be given between 6-9 weeks. Core vaccinations are feline panleukopenia (distemper), feline viral rhinotracheitis, feline calicivirus and in some countries rabies. Some other vaccinations are strongly recommended in some regions or for certain cats. Your vet will be able to advice you on this.
- Worming: Cats are commonly infected with roundworms or tapeworms often without any signs. It is very important to worm your cat regularly to prevent health problems for the cat or to humans. Talk with your vet about the best products and times to worm your animal.



- Preventing fleas: Flea control is very important. Cats easily get fleas but it is also easy to treat and prevent them. Be careful which product you choose to use and ideally always seek the advice of your vet – they will know what is best and safest for your situation. Pet shops sell flea treatments but these are not always as safe or as effective as the products your vet can supply.
- Neutering

If you want to travel with your cat to another country, see specific question on this issue.

What diseases can be transmitted from cats to humans?

While most cat diseases affect only cats, it is important to be aware that some diseases, called zoonotic diseases, can be transmitted between cats and humans. Most zoonotic diseases pose minimal threat, however, humans with immature or weakened immune systems such as young children, elderly people or those receiving immunosuppressive therapy may be more vulnerable. Simple precautions, common sense, good hygiene can prevent most diseases.

It is recommended to

- Wash hands before eating and after handling cats,
- Schedule annual check-ups,
- Seek prompt veterinary care for sick cats,
- Keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date,
- Maintain appropriate flea and tick control,
- Avoid letting your cat lick your face, food utensils, or plate,
- Disinfect cat bites immediately and if necessary seek medical attention,
- Feed cats cooked or commercially processed foods,
- Clean the litter tray daily,
- Periodically clean litter boxes with boiling water and detergent,
- Wear gloves when gardening or handling raw meat; wash hands afterwards,
- Cover children's sandboxes when not in use.



More information can be found on:

- http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health_Information/brochure_zoonoticdisease.cfm
- <http://www.abcdcatsvets.org/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/zoonotic-diseases.html>
- <http://www.callistoproject.eu/joomla/>
- <http://icatcare.org/advice/cats-and-human-health/zoonoses>

Do I have to give up my cat if I'm pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant?

No. Although it is true that cats play a role in the spread of toxoplasmosis; which can be harmful for unborn children, you can easily reduce any risks, and most people probably acquire this disease from handling and consuming undercooked meat rather than from a cat. The best advice is:

- Ask somebody else to clean the cat litter box. If no one else can perform the task, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands with soap and warm water afterwards.
- Ensure that the cat litter box is cleaned out every day. The *Toxoplasma* parasite, which can be very occasionally found in cat faeces, does not become infectious in faeces for 1 to 5 days after it is shed.
- Feed your cat commercial dry or canned food, not raw or undercooked meats.
- Keep outdoor sandboxes covered to prevent cats using them as a latrine.
- Wear gloves when gardening and during contact with soil or sand because it might be contaminated with cat faeces that contain *Toxoplasma*. Wash hands with soap and warm water after gardening or contact with soil or sand.
- Always cook meat thoroughly before eating it
- Always wash hands after handling raw meat

Should I neuter my cat?

In most cases, yes!



From around the age of 5 to 8 months, kittens reach sexual maturity and are therefore capable of breeding and producing kittens themselves. Unless you are intending to breed from your cat, it is best to have it neutered (both males and females) to prevent unwanted litters of kittens. Neutering a cat – castration in the male (removal of the testes), and spaying the female (removal of the ovaries and uterus) – not only prevents unwanted pregnancies occurring, but also curbs unwanted behavioural patterns associated with sexual maturity and reduces the risk of certain diseases.

What time to neuter?

Neutering of both male and female cats is best done before they reach sexual maturity. Traditionally this has been done at around five-six months of age, but new evidence shows that it is safe earlier than this, and as some cats will be sexually mature by 5 months of age (or even earlier), neutering is recommended from 4 months of age. In some situations it can be done even earlier (from around 2 months of age) - if the right techniques and procedures are used, this gives very good results, but for most pet cats neutering can be done at around 4 months.

For more information:

- <http://icatcare.org/advice/neutering-your-cat> and
- http://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/cats/health/neutering/-/articleName/CAD_cat_neutering
- <http://www.thecatgroup.org.uk/anaes.html>

How can I make a responsible decision if my cat is suffering from an incurable disease?

The difficult decision to euthanize or 'put to sleep' your cat is an issue which most owners will face at some time. We all would like our old cat to die peacefully during its sleep at home, but the reality is that this rarely happens. For most cats, you will need at a certain point to decide the time has come to put the animal to sleep in order to relieve it from suffering and/or pain. However, this is not a decision you ever have to make on your own - your vet will be able to examine your cat and help you to make this difficult decision at the right time.

Veterinarians can often provide you with informed, objective information and advice on what degree of suffering and/or pain your pet is in with regard to the type of condition it has. This advice can be very useful in the decision-making process because it comes from an informed, experienced,



professional source and is not being clouded by the grief and emotions that you will naturally be experiencing. Your vet can also provide you with pain killers (analgesics) and advice on ways to make your pet comfortable, should this be needed.

Other useful resources:

<http://www.icatcare.org>

<http://www.abcdcatsvets.org/>

<http://www.wsava.org>

<http://www.fecava.org>

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/cats>

<http://www.callistoproject.eu/joomla/>