



The Adopter's Guide

...that your new cat would love for you to read!

Cats Anonymous, Inc.

2770 Manitowoc Rd., Green Bay WI 54311 ph. (920) 593-2626 www.catsanonymous.org

Here are some helpful ideas and reminders when you bring your new cat home. Thank you for your support of Cats Anonymous, Inc. and we hope that you and your new family member(s) have many happy years together!

Items to have before you bring your new cat home

Litter box(es) – box should be 1 ½ times as long as the cat; plastic storage boxes work well
Litter cleaning scoop(s)
Cat Litter*, most cats prefer unscented and scoopable
Cat/Kitten Food*
Cat toys
Nail clippers
Food and water dishes
A big heart full of love and patience!

** Ask the cat's foster caregiver what brand of food and litter they are using currently. If you want to use a different brand, it will still be best to make the transition slowly by gradually decreasing the amount of the "old brand" mixed with the new one of your choice.*

How to introduce a new cat to your family

When you first bring your cat home, place her in a carrier in a fairly quiet part of the house that can be closed off, like a spare room or your bedroom. This can be her "safe room" to hang out in at first. It will give her a chance to get used to the normal noises of your home like the furnace, clocks, appliances, voices, sounds from other pets, outside traffic, etc. Have her litterbox, food and water already in the same room.

Open the carrier door and let her come out when she's ready – don't try to pull her out. Stay in the room with her and let her explore. Everyone should use low voices at first, and approach the cat in a non-threatening manner (slowly, palm out and low to the ground for her to sniff) until she gets used to her new surroundings. Don't chase the cat.

When she seems comfortable in her new space, you can begin introducing her to the rest of the house and/or other pets. There are extra steps to take, however, to help make meeting the rest of the animal family successful.

Introducing other pets

Take a blanket, towel, toy, or other item with each pet's **scent and exchange** them so your pets can get used to the new sibling's smell. You can also let each pet smell your hands after handling the other. Give small treats so that they begin to associate the smell with good things!

Take turns letting the new cat out of the safe room to explore, while putting the existing pet members in the new cat's room to sniff around. Don't forget the treats!

Once they've spent *at least* 1 full day getting used to a new smell being around, **let them start to see each other**. Open the door to the cat's safe room slightly so they can see each other without threat of entering the same room. A baby-gate or screen door can work great too, but be sure to supervise. Try to avoid having to hold one of the animals for this stage because that pet may feel more threatened if they are restrained.

For several days, continue to let them see each other – removing the barrier if things are going well but ALWAYS supervising. Don't forget the treats every time – even if there is growling, hissing, or running away. The goal is still to make them associate the other pet with good things!

Another way to build positive associations is to **let them play** with toys shared by a long string under the door or toys that can be passed back & forth.

Make sure cats have places they can get up higher, like a kitty-condo, back of a couch, window seat, etc. Many cats prefer to survey their surroundings from a higher vantage point because they feel less vulnerable to being surprised by the dog or others, but also in a multi-cat household, which cat gets to relax in the highest seat is often an important part of establishing social order and peace.

Gradually increase the interaction time until you have one big happy family. Have patience! There is no hard and fast rule for how long it will take, but it is not unusual for it to take weeks for pets to get comfortable – for both “old” and “new”! Imagine someone just showed up to live in your home – someone you did not know, did not choose, and knew nothing about ... and they sniffed around your closet, ate food out of your fridge, etc. – how long before *you* would feel comfortable and trusting of the new person?

Let the cat greet people on her own terms. Some cats will always run and hide when others are around, some will come out after a while ... it depends on the cat's inherent personality and experiences with meeting people in the past.

When brought to a new place, it is common for cats to show **no interest in eating** at first, often for several days. Provide fresh water and food daily regardless.

Veterinary Care

You will receive your new cat's medical records at the time you pick him/her up from foster care. It's important to make an appointment with your veterinarian soon after you take your cat home to assess what additional care he/she requires. Bring the records with you so your DVM (Doctor of Veterinary Medicine) has the information on file in case of an emergency.

Cats Anonymous, Inc. does not test or vaccinate for feline leukemia. You might want to discuss the pros/cons of including this with your cat's annual exam. If you have other cats at home, you might want your cat tested prior to bringing her home.

At a minimum, all cats should have a veterinary exam once each year. It's a good idea to plan for your cat's medical care either with pet insurance or by saving a bit each month in a fund so that if they have a sudden need, you are able to take care of them. Carefully go over your cat's body periodically and check for fleas, ear mites, bumps or cuts. Not only is touch a great way to bond with your cat, but it will help you become familiar with your cat's body and become aware of any changes presenting possible problems as early as possible.

Always call your veterinarian if your cat refuses to eat for more than a day or two, or anytime your cat is sick or injured. Whenever you contact your veterinarian, it is helpful to supply some details about your cat's condition – here are some questions you might be asked:

- Is she alert and active?
- Is she eating and drinking?
- Is she vomiting or retching?
- Is she passing urine and feces normally?
- Is she coughing or sneezing?
- Is she pawing at her eyes or ears?
- Is she showing any signs of pain?

The Litterbox

Using a strongly perfumed litter may discourage litterbox use. Some cats have a strong preference for certain brands or types of litter, so you may need to find out what your cat wants to use. Most standard litterboxes are not large enough for the average cats. For many cats a plastic under-bed storage type container works great, or you can choose one with higher sides if your cat tends to spill litter out of the box. Many cats do not like plastic litterbox liners.

If your cats are having litterbox issues, add another box. The general rule is 1 more box than the number of cats in the home. Some cats do not require this many, but if problems are occurring it may help. Sometimes a single cat will prefer two boxes so they can urinate and defecate in separate boxes.

Litterboxes should be scooped daily and the box should be emptied and washed at least once a month or as often as soiled.

Most cats who have used their litterbox and suddenly stop have a medical reason for doing so. If your cat stops using the litterbox, take them to a veterinarian and have a urinalysis done to look for infection or crystals. If a cat (especially males) is trying to urinate and not producing any urine, it is an emergency and he needs to be seen by a veterinarian right away.

Top Ways to Prevent Destructive Scratching

Cat Claw Scissors

A good, sharp claw trimmer is essential for preventing damage to furniture (and tender skin), caused by scratching or clawing. Hold her paw and press gently on one toe at a time to extend the nail. Cut just the tiniest tip at first, and trim frequently until you and your cat are comfortable with it. Then schedule a claw-trimming day every 10 days to 2 weeks. Trimming claws can be fast and easy if it is an established routine.

Scratching Post

Nothing substitutes for a nice tall, stable scratching area, where cats can really dig in and pull, for developing strong shoulders and legs. Stretch your arms out high and see how good it feels – your cat loves it too! Instructions for building a simple scratching post can be found on the website for Cats International:

http://www.catsinternational.org/articles/scratching_and_declawing/build_a_scratchingpost.html

Hanging Scratcher

For a small apartment or as an accessory scratcher in a small room. It hangs from a doorknob so cats get that stretching exercise they need as well as satisfying their scratching needs. It's inexpensive enough that if your cats like it, try one in every room.

Throw Cover

If you have a new "untested" cat, you might consider using a furniture cover over valued pieces, until you've established her scratching habits. It's not a substitute for other anti-clawing aids, but can protect your furniture to some degree as either a temporary or permanent aid.

Miscellaneous

Cats keep themselves relatively clean. Most cats rarely need a bath, but they do need to be combed or brushed. **Frequent grooming** helps keep your cat's coat clean and reduces both shedding and hairballs.

Rotate toys every week or two to keep your cat's interest piqued. If the cat is staying awake at night, try to play and socialize with her more during the day.

Monitor your cat's weight as obesity can lead to health problems.

Most cats will accept a **baby** coming into the household without any issues. **Children** should be taught to respect the cat as early as possible to ensure the safety of both. It is a good idea to give the cat a place to go where children and visitors are not allowed to disturb the cat. This allows the cat the option to stay away from stressful situations that can cause trouble.

Cats are adaptable and will generally adjust to **moving to a new house** or apartment. Anticipate having to pay an extra monthly charge and/or deposit for pets if you are renting. Much of the advice contained in the section "How to Introduce a New Cat to Your Family" applies to a change in household as well.

Cats and Allergies

Typical allergic reactions to an animal include runny nose, itchy or watery eyes, cough, shortness of breath, wheezing, or hives. Allergic reactions can be to the animal's saliva, urine, or dander – it does not necessarily relate directly to the length of the cat's coat. If your allergies are uncomfortable but not life-threatening, there are steps you can take to be more comfortable. Remember that your pet may not be the only cause of your reactions, and symptoms can be cumulative. Being tested for specific allergies can help you pinpoint other possible sources of your symptoms such as dust, insects, pollen, cigarette smoke, and mold. Only you can decide if your symptoms are tolerable or not – but please consider the recommendations below before subjecting yourself and your new feline friend to the heartbreak of surrender:

Clean Routine (wear a dust mask while cleaning – it makes a difference!)

- Wash floors and furniture, including crevices often
- vacuum with a vacuum cleaner equipped with a HEPA filter daily
- Wipe down walls and flat surfaces regularly
- Replace or clean filters often on furnaces, air conditioners, and vacuums
- Launder pet beds and throw rugs frequently
- Wash your hands after touching your pet

Reduce allergen-attracting surfaces

- Wherever possible, replace rugs and carpeting with vinyl, stone or wood
- Minimize overstuffed furniture and upholstery that is not easy to clean
- Replace curtains with solid blinds or easy-to-wash material
- Choose impermeable mattress and pillow covers

Other

- Brush the cat daily and bathe her weekly – many pet stores sell wet wipes to make bathing much easier. Try AllerpetC, a solution you can wipe over the cat weekly.
- Keep your bedroom off-limits to pets (or some other allergy-free “safe room” for you)

Safety

I.D. tags are essential for cat safety as they make it possible for someone to return your pet to you if she becomes lost. A safety collar or “breakaway collar” has an elastic panel or clip that will release under enough weight so that your cat can free herself if the collar becomes caught on something. Avoid dog collars or any style collar that does not have a breakaway feature.

Taking precautions against hazards that threaten the typical feline will help keep your household calm and your cat safe. Many common household items can pose a threat to animal companions. Even some items specifically meant for pets could cause health problems. To protect your pet, simply use common sense and take many of the same precautions you would with a child.

- **Unplug dangling cords.** Kittens have a teething phase from around 10 weeks to 6 months of age. Some adult cats like to chew on cords. Until your kitten grows up or until you know for a fact that your cat isn't a chewer, it's best not to risk electric shock. Products such as a “bitter apple spray” can be sprayed on many surfaces and will deter chewing. Also, be alert to potential fire hazards—lamps can tip over while you are out of the room and start a fire.
- **Remove tablecloths from unattended tables.** New kittens will be especially curious about what's up there on the table and will try to use the tablecloth to climb up. The result could be broken china and crystal and an emergency trip to the vet.
- **Cover garbage disposal switches.** Natural climbers, cats usually find their way to the kitchen sink sooner or later. Many have been known to play with electric switches such as the one for a garbage disposal. Special covers are available at hardware stores to help avoid disaster.
- **Keep drapery cords out of reach.** It's a good idea to use childproofing devices to wind up dangling cords—cats can strangle themselves by catching their necks in the loops.
- **Close the dryer door.** Cats love to explore, especially dark, quiet places. Always check inside large appliances before closing their doors to make sure your cat is not inside.
- **Make sure your screen door has a securing latch.** Don't run the risk that your cat could slip out unnoticed.
- **Antifreeze** that contains ethylene glycol has a sweet taste that attracts animals but is deadly if consumed in even small quantities; one teaspoon can kill a seven-pound cat. The HSUS recommends pet owners use a pet-safe antifreeze in their vehicles. Look for antifreeze that contains propylene glycol, which is safe for animals if ingested in small amounts.
- **Chemicals used on lawns and gardens**, such as fertilizer and plant food, can be easily accessible and fatal to a pet allowed in the yard unsupervised.
- **Chocolate** is poisonous to dogs and cats; so is the popular garden material **cocoa bean mulch**.
- **De-icing salts** used to melt snow and ice are paw irritants that can be poisonous if licked off. Paws should be washed and dried as soon as the animal comes in from the snow. Animal safe de-icing salts are available at pet stores.
- **Insect control** products, such as the insecticides used in many over-the-counter flea and tick remedies, may be toxic to pets. Prescription flea and tick control products are much safer and more effective. Pet owners should never use any product without first consulting a veterinarian.
- **Human medications** such as pain killers (including aspirin, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen), cold medicines, anti-cancer drugs, anti-depressants, vitamins, and diet pills can all be toxic to animals. Keep medication containers and tubes of ointments and creams away from pets who could chew through them, and be vigilant about finding and disposing of any dropped pills.
- **Chicken bones** easily shatter and can choke a cat or dog.

- **Human foods** to keep away from pets include onions and onion powder, alcoholic beverages, yeast dough, coffee grounds, beans, salt, macadamia nuts, tomato, potato, rhubarb leaves and stems, avocados, chocolate, and anything with mold growing on it.
- **Poisonous household plants** include azalea, geraniums, dieffenbachia (dumb cane), lilies, mistletoe, and philodendron, among others. Please see the list at the end of this document.
- **Rawhide doggie chews** may be contaminated with *Salmonella*, which can infect pets and humans who come in contact with the chews. These kinds of chews should be offered to a pet only with supervision, as they can pose a choking hazard as well.
- **String, yarn, rubber bands, and even dental floss** are easy to swallow and can cause intestinal blockages or strangulation.
- **Toys with removable parts**—like squeaky toys or stuffed animals with plastic eyes—can pose a choking hazard to animals. Take the same precautions with pets as you would with a small child.
- **Do not give your cat/kitten cow's milk** -- it can cause diarrhea.

For more information about common household dangers, see The American Veterinary Medical Association's *Pet Owner's Guide to Common Small Animal Poisons*.

The HSUS recommends that pet owners use all household products with caution and keep a pet first-aid kit and manual readily available. The HSUS puts out a first-aid book in conjunction with the American Red Cross entitled *Pet First Aid: Cats and Dogs*. If all of your precautions fail, and you believe that your pet has been poisoned, contact your veterinarian or emergency veterinary service immediately. Signs of poisoning include listlessness, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle tremors, lack of coordination, and fever.

The ASPCA National Animal Poison Control Center operates a hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 888-426-4435, for a fee of \$50 per case. If you call, you should be prepared to provide the following information: the name of the poison your animal was exposed to, the amount and how long ago; the species, breed, age, sex, and weight of your pet; and the symptoms the animal is displaying. You'll also be asked to provide your name, address, phone number, and credit card information.

Common Poisonous Plants

More than 700 plants have been identified as producing physiologically active or toxic substances in sufficient amounts to cause reactions ranging from mild nausea to death. Following is a list of some common plants which may produce a toxic reaction in animals. This list is intended only as a guide to plants generally identified as having the capability for producing a toxic reaction.

Other Resources

www.catsinternational.org

www.hsus.org

www.asPCA.org

Common Poisonous Plants

PLANT	TOXIC PARTS	PLANT TYPE	PLANT	TOXIC PARTS	PLANT TYPE
Apple	seeds	cultivated tree	Iris	leaves, roots	wild & garden flower
Arrowgrasses	leaves	marsh plants	Larkspur	young plants	wildflower
Autumn Crocus	entire plant	garden flower	Laurels	leaves	shrub
Azaleas	entire plant	cultivated & wild shrub	Lily of the valley	leaves, flowers	garden & wildflower
Bird-of-Paradise	Pods	garden flower	Lupines	seeds, pods	shrub
Caladium	entire plant	house plant	Mistletoe	berries	house plant
Carolina jessamine	flowers, leaves	ornamental plant	Morning glory	seeds, roots	wildflower
Castor bean	entire plant esp. beans	house plant	Mustards	seeds	wildflower
Christmas Rose	rootstock, leaves	garden flower	Narcissus	bulbs	garden flower
Daffodil	bulbs	garden flower	Oaks	shoots, leaves	tree
Day lily	entire plant is toxic to cats	garden & wildflower	Oleander	leaves	ornamental shrub
Delphinium (Larkspur)	entire plant esp. sprouts	wildflower	Philodendrons	entire plant	house plant
Dumbcane	entire plant	house plant	Poinsettia	leaves, stem, flowers	house plant
Easter lily	entire plant is toxic to cats	flowering house plant	Poison hemlock	leaves, stem, fruit	field plant
Elderberry	leaves, bark, roots, buds	tree	Potato	shoots, sprouts	garden plant
Elephant's ear	entire plant	house plant	Rhododendron	leaves	ornamental shrub
English Ivy	entire plant esp. leaves, berries	ornamental vine	Rhubarb	leaves	garden plant
European Bittersweet	entire plant esp. berries	vine	Rosary pea	seeds	house plant
False Flax	seeds	wild herb	Sago palm	entire plant esp seeds	ornamental plant
Flax	seedpods	wildflower, herb	Skunk cabbage	entire plant esp roots, leaves	marsh plant
Holly	berries	shrub	Sorghum	leaves	grass
Horsechestnut	nuts, sprouts	tree	Wild radish	seeds	wildflower
Horse nettle	entire plant esp. berries	wildflower, herb	Wisteria	Pods, seeds	ornamental plant
Hyacinth	bulbs	wild & house plant	Yellow oleander	entire plant esp. leaves	garden plant