

# Tips on Caring for Your New Cat



**Thank you for making a shelter animal a loved pet!**

**Please read these tips to learn how to keep your new kitty happy, healthy and well-behaved.**



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## Introducing Your New Cat to Other Pets

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It's important to have realistic expectations when introducing a new pet to a resident pet. Some cats are more social than other cats. For example, an eight-year-old cat that has never been around other animals may never learn to share her territory (and her people) with other pets in the household. However, an eight-week-old kitten separated from her mom and littermates for the first time, might prefer to have a cat or dog companion. Cats are territorial and need to be introduced to other animals very slowly in order to give them time to get used to each other before there is a face-to-face confrontation. Slow introductions help prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing. PLEASE NOTE: When you introduce pets to each other, one of them may send "play" signals which can be misinterpreted by the other pet. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one animal, then you should handle the situation as "aggressive."

### **Confinement**

Confine your new cat to one medium-sized room with her litterbox, food, water and a bed. Feed your resident pets and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room. This will help all of them to associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Don't put the food so close to the door that the animals are too upset by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly, directly on either side of the door. Next, use two doorstops to prop open the door just enough to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process.

### **Swap Scents**

Switch sleeping blankets or beds between your new cat and your resident animals so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal. You should do this with each animal in the house.

### **Switch Living Areas**

Once your new cat is using her litterbox and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other animals to the new cat's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the other animals.

### **Avoid Fearful And Aggressive Meetings**

Avoid any interactions between your pets that result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. If these responses are allowed to become a habit, they can be difficult to change. It's better to introduce your pets to each other so gradually that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. You can expect mild forms of these behaviors, but don't give them the opportunity to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start over with the introduction process in a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

### **Precautions**

If one of your pets has a medical problem or is injured, this could stall the introduction process. Check with your veterinarian to be sure that all of your pets are healthy. You'll also want to have at least one litterbox per cat, and you'll probably need to clean all of the litterboxes more frequently. Make sure that none of the cats are being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the litterbox. Try to keep your resident pets' schedule as close as possible to what it was before the newcomer's appearance. Cats can make lots of noise, pull each other's hair, and roll around quite dramatically without either cat being injured. If small spats do occur between your cats, you shouldn't attempt to intervene directly to separate the cats. Instead, make a loud noise, throw a pillow, or use a squirt bottle with water and vinegar to separate the cats. Give them a chance to calm down before re-introducing them to each other. Be sure each cat has a safe hiding place.

### *Cat To Dog Introductions*

Dogs can kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing. All it takes is one shake and the cat's neck can break. Some dogs have such a high prey drive they should never be left alone with a cat. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive. Use the techniques described above to begin introducing your new cat to your resident dog. In addition:

## **Practice Obedience**

If your dog doesn't already know the commands "sit," "down," "come" and "stay," you should begin working on them. Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a new cat. Even if your dog already knows these commands, work with obeying commands in return for a tidbit.

## **Controlled Meeting**

After your new cat and resident dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door, and have been exposed to each other's scents as described above, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on, and using treats, have him either sit or lie down and stay. Have another family member or friend enter the room and quietly sit down next to your new cat, but don't have them physically restrain her. Have this person offer your cat some special pieces of food or catnip. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression or other undesirable behavior.

## **Let Your Cat Go**

Next, allow your cat freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash and in a "down-stay." Meanwhile, keep giving your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned with a treat lure, and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps. If you cannot get a handle on your dog's behavior, a good quality training class can put you back in control of your dog so that your cat can enjoy her home too! Do not allow your dog to chase ANY small animals. That will only undermine training your dog to leave your cat alone.

## **Positive Reinforcement**

Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behavior, he must also be taught how to behave appropriately, and be rewarded for doing so, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around, and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may redirect aggression toward the cat. Allow your cat to approach your dog. By all means, allow your cat to walk up and investigate your dog but watch carefully so your dog does not attempt to chase your cat. By allowing this to happen, your cat will gain trust in you and your dog that nothing bad is going to happen to her. Your cat will begin to realize that sharing a house with a dog (who is not allowed to approach her) isn't so bad at all!

Give your dog an outlet for his chase behavior. Teach your dog to chase a ball, Frisbee, tether ball or squeaky toy rather than your cat. Regular exercise can help your dog remain calm around your cat.

## **Directly Supervise All Interactions Between Your Dog And Cat**

You may want to keep your dog on-leash and with you whenever your 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 your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you're certain your cat will be safe.

## **Precautions**

Dogs like to eat cat food. Eating cat food can cause kidney and liver problems in dogs because the protein and fat content in cat food is too high for dogs to digest appropriately. You should keep the cat food out of your dog's reach (in a closet or on a high shelf). Eating cat feces is also a relatively common behavior in dogs. Although there are no health hazards to your dog, it's probably distasteful to you. It's also upsetting to your cat to have such an important object "invaded." Unfortunately, attempts to keep your dog out of the litterbox by "booby trapping" it will also keep your cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behavior. The best solution is to place the litterbox where your dog can't access it, for example: behind a baby gate; in a closet with the door anchored open from both sides and just wide enough for your cat; or inside a tall, topless cardboard box with easy access for your cat.

## **A Word About Kittens And Puppies**

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured, of being killed by a young energetic dog, or by a predatory dog. A kitten will need to be kept separate from an especially energetic dog until she is fully-grown, and even then she should never be left alone with the dog. Usually, a well-socialized cat will be able to keep a puppy in its place, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to keep her separated from your puppy until he matures enough to have more self-control.

# Tom, Meet Geri

## New Cat Introductions



**When** Tom Terrific turned one, his family decided to adopt a play pal for him. They believed that their rambunctious adolescent tabby would benefit from a buddy with whom he could play away the workday until they returned home. With help from an adoption counselor at a local shelter, Tom's guardians carefully chose a smaller, younger female calico they named Geri.

**Geri** appeared confident enough to hold her own with the boy and was young enough to appreciate Tom's playfulness in a way that an older cat might not. She would likely accept that her home was his home with minimal fuss -- something an adult male would have more difficulty doing. But while careful selection was important, Tom's caretakers knew that a formal introduction was also in order.

### Who's There?

**Change** is difficult for cats, so the introduction needed to move ahead slowly. As soon as Geri was brought into the house, her new guardians set up a "guest room" for her in the spare bathroom, complete with food, water, comfy bed, litterbox and toys. After releasing Geri into her temporary living quarters, they removed her carrier and left it out for Tom to investigate. Filled with her scent, the carrier served as a subtle introduction to the newcomer.

**For** the next several days, Tom camped outside the spare bathroom. At first, he had plenty to say about sharing his home with some girl cat. But over time, he seemed more comfortable having her scent in his territory. Soon he was lingering in the doorway, trying to swat paws under the door and catch a glimpse of his new housemate as his guardians went in and out with fresh food or used litter.

**This** two-week isolation period proved to be an advantage for both cats. It helped Tom get used to the idea of having another cat on his turf while Geri was busy acclimating to her new digs. Since a new home often means different food and litter material as well as new routines and environments, starting off in a small, cozy space helped keep Geri's stress level to a minimum. She had her own box and bowls so sharing food -- or illness -- wasn't an issue. If she were to come down with an upper respiratory infection, as some feline adoptees do, she wouldn't be sneezing on Tom or sharing germs via a communal water bowl. Also during this two-week period, Geri had a check-up and was de-wormed. (While she had left the shelter already spayed, this would have been the perfect time to spay or neuter an unaltered cat.)

**When** Geri was given a clean bill of health, it was time for the next phase in the introductory process. Since the guest room was quite small, and Geri was full of kittenish energy, the cats were given an opportunity to swap living spaces for an hour each morning and evening. Tom got to investigate Geri's quaint quarters while she made a mad dash around his kingdom. This was also a clever way to immerse the cats in each other's scent. To further build up pleasant associations, once the cats were back in their respective spaces, their guardians placed food bowls on both sides of the bathroom door.

### Hello, Gorgeous

**Things** were proceeding well. Both cats ate normally and appeared playfully curious about the other. And so came the day for their first face-to-face meeting. After feeding the cats and trimming their nails, the guardians left the bathroom door ajar and busied themselves around the house. They knew it was up to Tom and Geri to take the next step. Aware that a little hissing, swatting and chasing was to be expected, the family planned to intervene only if World War III erupted.

But thanks to their careful selection and a slow, cautious introductory period, no intervention was needed. Tom and Geri were soon playfully chasing each other around the house and napping in a shared patch of afternoon sunlight. Their well-orchestrated introduction resulted in perfect harmony.

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## Cat Toys and How to Use Them

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### **“Safe” Toys**

There are many factors that contribute to the safety or danger of a toy. Many of those factors, however, are completely dependent upon your cat’s size, activity level and personal preference. Another factor to be considered is the environment in which your cat spends her time. Although we can’t guarantee your cat’s enthusiasm or her safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

#### *Be Cautious*

The things that are usually the most attractive to cats are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Cat-proof your home by checking for: string, ribbon, yarn, rubber bands, plastic milk jug rings, paper clips, pins, needles, and anything else that could be ingested. All of these items are dangerous, no matter how cute your cat may look when she’s playing with them.

Avoid or alter any toys that aren’t “cat-proof” by removing ribbons, feathers, strings, eyes, or other small parts that could be chewed and/or ingested.

Soft toys should be machine washable. Check labels for child safety, as a stuffed toy that’s labeled as safe for children under three years old, doesn’t contain dangerous fillings. Problem fillings include things like nutshells and polystyrene beads. Also, rigid toys are not as attractive to cats.

### **Toys We Recommend**

#### **Active Toys:**

- ◆ Round plastic shower curtain rings are fun either as a single ring to bat around, hide or carry, or when linked together and hung in an enticing spot.
- ◆ Plastic rolling balls, with or without bells inside.
- ◆ Ping-Pong balls and plastic practice golf balls with holes, to help cats carry them. Try putting one in a dry bathtub, as the captive ball is much more fun than one that escapes under the sofa. You’ll probably want to remove the balls from the bathtub before bedtime, unless you can’t hear the action from your bedroom. Two o’clock in the morning seems to be a prime time for this game.
- ◆ Paper bags with any handles removed. Paper bags are good for pouncing, hiding and interactive play. They’re also a great distraction if you need your cat to pay less attention to what you’re trying to accomplish. Plastic bags are not a good idea, as many cats like to chew and ingest the plastic.
- ◆ Sisal-wrapped toys are very attractive to cats that tend to ignore soft toys.
- ◆ Empty cardboard rolls from toilet paper and paper towels are ideal cat toys, especially if you “unwind” a little cardboard to get them started.

#### **Catnip:**

- ◆ Catnip-filled soft toys are fun to kick, carry and rub.
- ◆ Plain catnip can be crushed and sprinkled on the carpet, or on a towel placed on the floor if you want to be able to remove all traces. The catnip oils stay in the carpet, and although they’re not visible to us, your cat will still smell them.
- ◆ Catnip sprays rarely have enough power to be attractive to cats.
- ◆ Not all cats are attracted to catnip. Some cats may become over-stimulated to the point of aggressive play and others may be slightly sedated.
- ◆ Kittens under six months old seem to be immune to catnip.
- ◆ Catnip is not addictive and is perfectly safe for cats to roll in, rub in or eat.

## **Comfort Toys**

- ◆ Soft stuffed animals are good for several purposes. For some cats, the stuffed animal should be small enough to carry around. For cats that want to “kill” the toy, the stuffed animal should be about the same size as the cat. Toys with legs and a tail seem to be even more attractive to cats.
- ◆ Cardboard boxes, especially those a tiny bit too small for your cat to really fit into.

## **Get The Most Out Of Toys!**

- ❖ Rotate your cat’s toys weekly by making only four or five toys available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your cat has a huge favorite, like a soft “baby” that she loves to cuddle with, you should probably leave that one out all the time, or risk the wrath of your cat!
- ❖ Provide toys that offer a variety of uses - at least one toy to carry, one to “kill,” one to roll and one to “baby.”
- ❖ “Hide and Seek” is a fun game for cats to play. “Found” toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is blatantly introduced.

## Starting Out Right With Your New Cat and the Litterbox

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Most cats have a specific preference about where they want to eliminate. By following the suggestions outlined in this handout, you'll be able to start off on the right foot with your new cat.

### Location

Most people are inclined to place the litterbox in an out-of-the-way spot in order to minimize odor and loose particles of cat litter in the house. Often, the litterbox ends up in the basement, sometimes next to an appliance and/or on a cold cement floor. This type of location can be undesirable from your cat's point of view for several reasons.

If you have a kitten or an older cat, she may not be able to get down a long flight of stairs in time to get to the litterbox. Since she is new to the household, she may not remember where the litterbox is if it's located in an area she seldom frequents. Your cat may be startled while using the litterbox if a furnace, washer or dryer suddenly comes on and that may be the last time she'll risk such a frightening experience! If your cat likes to scratch the surface surrounding her litterbox, she may find a cold cement floor unappealing.

**Therefore, you may have to compromise. The litterbox should be kept in a location that affords your cat some privacy, but is also conveniently located. If you place the litterbox in a closet or a bathroom, be sure the door is wedged open from both sides, in order to prevent her from being trapped in or out. Depending on where it's located, you might consider cutting a hole in a closet door and adding a swinging door. If the litterbox sits on a smooth, slick or cold surface, put a small throw rug underneath the litterbox.**

### Type of Litter

Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grained litters, presumably because they have a softer feel. The new scoopable litters usually have finer grains than the typical clay litter. However, high-quality, dust-free, clay litters are relatively small-grained and may be perfectly acceptable to your cat. Potting soil also has a very soft texture, but is not very absorbent. If you suspect your cat has a history of spending time outdoors and is likely to eliminate in your houseplants, you can try mixing some potting soil with your regular litter. Pellet-type litters or those made from citrus peels are not recommended. Once you find a litter your cat likes, don't change types or brands. Buying the least expensive litter or whatever brand happens to be on sale, could result in your cat not using the litterbox.

Many cats are put off by the odor of scented or deodorant litters. For the same reason, it's not a good idea to place a room deodorizer or air freshener near the litterbox. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the box will help absorb odors without repelling your cat. Odor shouldn't be a problem if the litterbox is kept clean. If you find the litterbox odor offensive, your cat probably finds it even more offensive and won't want to eliminate there.

### Number of Litterboxes

You should have at least as many litterboxes as you have cats. That way, none of them will ever be prevented from eliminating in the litterbox because it's already occupied. You might also consider placing them in several locations around the house, so that no one cat can "guard" the litterbox area and prevent the other cats from accessing it. We also recommend that you place at least one litterbox on each level of your house. It's not possible to designate a personal litterbox for each cat in your household, as cats will use any litterbox that's available. Occasionally, a cat may refuse to use the litterbox after another cat has used it. In this case, all of the litterboxes will need to be kept extremely clean and additional boxes may be needed.

## **To Cover Or Not To Cover**

Some people prefer to use a covered litterbox, however, there are some potential problems with using this type of box. You may want to experiment by offering both types at first, to discover what your cat prefers.

### **Potential Problems**

- ◆ You may forget to clean the litterbox as frequently as you should because the dirty litter is “out of sight – out of mind.”
- ◆ A covered litterbox traps odors inside, so it will need to be cleaned more often than an open one.
- ◆ A covered litterbox may not allow a large cat sufficient room to turn around, scratch, dig or position herself in the way she wants.
- ◆ A covered litterbox may also make it easier for another cat to lay in wait and "ambush" the user as she exits the box. On the other hand, a covered litterbox may feel more private and may be preferred by timid cats.

## **Cleaning The Box**

To meet the needs of the most discriminating cat, feces should be scooped out of the litterbox daily. How often you change the litter depends on the number of cats you have, the number of litterboxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may need to change it every other day or once a week. If you scoop the litter daily, scoopable litter can go two to three weeks before the litter needs to be changed. If you notice an odor or if much of the litter is wet or clumped, it's time for a change. Don't use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the litterbox, as it may cause your cat to avoid it. Washing with soap and water should be sufficient.

## **Liners**

Some cats don't mind having a liner in the litterbox, while others do. Again, you may want to experiment to see if your cat is bothered by a liner in the box. If you do use a liner, make sure it's anchored in place, so it can't easily catch your cat's claws or be pulled out of place.

### **Depth of Litter**

Some people think that the more litter they put in the box, the less often they will have to clean it. This is not true. Most cats won't use litter that's more than about two inches deep. Usually about 1.5 to 2 inches is sufficient. In fact, some long-haired cats, actually prefer less litter and a smooth, slick surface, such as the bottom of the litterbox. The litterbox needs to be cleaned on a regular basis and adding extra litter is not a way around that chore.

## **"Litter-Training" Cats**

There's really no such thing as "litter-training" a cat in the same way one would house-train a dog. A cat doesn't need to be taught what to do with a litterbox. The only thing you need to do is provide an acceptable, accessible litterbox, using the suggestions above. It's not necessary to take your cat to the litterbox and move her paws back and forth in the litter, in fact, we don't recommend it. This may actually be an unpleasant experience for your cat and is likely to initiate a negative association with the litterbox.

## **If Problems Develop**

If your cat begins to eliminate in areas other than the litterbox, your first call should always be to your veterinarian. Many medical conditions can cause a change in a cat's litterbox habits. If your veterinarian determines that your cat is healthy, the cause may be behavioral. Most litterbox behavior problems can be resolved by using behavior modification techniques. Punishment is not the answer. For long-standing or complex situations, contact an animal behavior specialist who has experience working with cats.

# House Training & House-soiling Problems/Solutions

**Prevent house-soiling from the get-go:** Until your cat is reliably house trained, she should not have free run of your home. If your cat continually makes mistakes, the behavior can simply become a habit. Punishing a cat after the fact teaches her to be afraid of you. Scolding and then taking the cat to her litterbox after she has already eliminated teaches her to associate the litterbox with punishment. Basically, punishment doesn't work with cats; prevention and praise for getting it right are the keys to training.

When litterbox training, anytime you leave the house for any length of time, your cat should be confined to a single room, preferably one with non-porous floors, such as a kitchen, bathroom, utility room, basement or climate controlled garage. Provide your cat with a bowl of water and a warm place to sleep at one end of the room and a freshly cleaned litterbox at the other end. Until the house soiling has been cured, your cat should have a regular feeding schedule so she will develop a corresponding elimination schedule.

**The most common reason a cat stops using its litterbox is because the litterbox is dirty.** Your cat does not simply need a litterbox - she needs a clean litterbox with fresh litter. Your cat will be inhibited from using her litterbox if it smells of urine. Think about it from the cat's viewpoint. When she soils your dining room carpet, the area is immediately and thoroughly cleaned. Given the choice between a regularly cleaned place and a litterbox that gets changed only once or twice a week, your cat will naturally prefer the carpet. The litterbox must be scooped daily and fresh litter added as needed. Weekly, the litter contents should be discarded, litterbox rinsed, and replaced with at least 1.5 inches of fresh litter. Adding a little vinegar, lemon juice or bleach to the water will help neutralize the odor of the cat's urine. (Do not use ammonia; this will make the litterbox smell worse. Rinse and dry thoroughly.

**The next most common reason for litterbox problems is that your cat just doesn't like the type of litter you are providing.** If your new kitty is not using the litterbox consistently, we suggest trying different types of litter; clay, clumping/scoopable, scented/unscented, etc. Most cats prefer to consistently use one type of litter, not just what is on sale. So experiment before assuming there's a real problem! Often paying a dollar or two more for the litter your kitty prefers (and will use consistently!) will ultimately save you more in upset and cleaning expenses, and allow you both to create and maintain a forever loving bond.

**The type of litterbox is also important:** As with litter types, some cats prefer a specific type of litterbox; some prefer covered, some open.

**Placement of the litterbox:** Regardless the type of litter or litterbox used, cats do not like their litterboxes to be in heavily trafficked areas. They prefer a bit of privacy, just like you! Make sure that the litterbox is in an appropriate place. Cats do not like to soil the areas close to their sleeping or eating areas, so place the litterbox some distance away. However, do not place the litterbox in an area that is too inaccessible. For example, if the litterbox is placed in the bathroom, make sure the door cannot swing shut preventing the cat from getting to it. If the cat is new to your home, she may go into hiding for a few days so place a litterbox close to her hiding place. Some additional factor may be inhibiting your cat from using her litterbox, so put down an extra one in a different location. If there is more than one cat in the house, have several litterboxes available. A special litter named additive called Cat Attract has worked wonders in getting cats to exclusively use the litterbox. There is also a product called Feliway, by Farnam Pet Products, which has been used successfully; talk to your vet about it. or they simply do not like the type of litter.

**Stress/changes in the home:** From the cat's viewpoint, not yours. Cats often react to any type of stress by suddenly urinating or defecating outside the litterbox. The stress may be caused by a new cat in the neighborhood; children home on vacation; a person moving in/out, too many cats in the house; your going away on vacation or a new piece of furniture. Any changes in a cat's normal routine or surroundings can stress some cats. Urinary tract problems also cause cats to urinate in places other than the litterbox. Any sudden change in elimination habits should be discussed with your veterinarian.

## Destructive Scratching in Cats

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### Why Do Cats Scratch?

- ❖ It's normal for cats to scratch objects in their environment for many reasons:
- ❖ To remove the dead outer layer of their claws.
- ❖ To mark their territory by leaving both a visual mark and a scent – they have scent glands on their paws.
- ❖ To stretch their bodies and flex their feet and claws.
- ❖ To work off energy.

Because scratching is a normal behavior, and one that cats are highly motivated to display, it's unrealistic to try to prevent them from scratching. Instead, the goal in resolving scratching problems is to redirect the scratching onto acceptable objects.

### Training Your Cat To Scratch Acceptable Objects

1. You must provide objects for scratching that are appealing, attractive and convenient from your cat's point of view. Start by observing the physical features of the objects your cat is scratching. The answers to the following questions will help you understand your cat's scratching preferences:
  - ❖ Where are they located? Prominent objects, objects close to sleeping areas and areas near the entrance to a room are often chosen.
  - ❖ What texture do they have – are they soft or coarse?
  - ❖ What shape do they have - are they horizontal or vertical?
  - ❖ How tall are they? At what height does your cat scratch?
2. Now, considering your cat's demonstrated preferences, substitute similar objects for her to scratch (rope-wrapped posts, corrugated cardboard or even a log). Place the acceptable object(s) near the inappropriate object(s) that she's already using. Make sure the objects are stable and won't fall over or move around when she uses them.
3. Cover the inappropriate objects with something your cat will find unappealing, such as double sided sticky tape, aluminum foil, sheets of sandpaper or a plastic carpet runner with the pointy side up. Or you may give the objects an aversive odor by attaching cotton balls containing perfume, a muscle rub or other unpleasant odor. Be careful with odors, though, because you don't want the nearby acceptable objects to also smell unpleasant.
4. When your cat is consistently using the appropriate object, it can be moved very gradually (no more than three inches each day) to a location more suitable to you. It's best, however, to keep the appropriate scratching objects as close to your cat's preferred scratching locations as possible.
5. Don't remove the unappealing coverings or odors from the inappropriate objects until your cat is consistently using the appropriate objects in their permanent locations for several weeks, or even a month. They should then be removed gradually, not all at once.

### **Should I Punish My Cat For Scratching?**

**NO!** Punishment is effective only if you catch your cat in the act of scratching unacceptable objects and have provided her with acceptable scratching objects. Punishment after the fact, won't change the behavior, may cause her to be afraid of you or the environment and may elicit defensive aggression. Used by itself, punishment won't resolve scratching problems because it doesn't teach your cat where to scratch instead. If you do catch her in the act of scratching inappropriate objects, remote punishment is best, in which you do not directly interact with her. Ideas for remote punishment include making a loud noise (using a whistle, shaking a pop can filled with rocks or slapping the wall), throwing a pillow at her or using a water-filled squirt bottle. If punishment is interactive, she'll learn to refrain from scratching in your presence but will continue to scratch when you're not around.

### **How Do I Trim My Cat's Claws?**

To help keep them sharp, cats keep their claws retracted except when they're needed. As the claws grow too long and become curved, they can't be retracted completely. You should clip off the sharp tips of your cat's claws on all four feet every week or so. Clipping your cat's claws will also help prevent them from becoming snagged in carpets, fabrics and skin. Before trimming your cat's claws, accustom her to having her paws handled and squeezed. You can do this by gently petting her legs and paws while giving her a treat. This will help to make it a more pleasant experience. Gradually increase the pressure so that petting becomes gentle squeezing, as you'll need to do this to extend the claw. Continue with the treats until your cat tolerates this kind of touching and restraint. It may take a little longer if she's not used to having her legs or paws handled. Apply a small amount of pressure to her paw, with your thumb on top of her paw and your index finger underneath, until a claw is extended. You should be able to see the pink or "quick," which is a small blood vessel. Don't cut into this pink portion, as it will bleed and be painful for your cat. If you cut off just the sharp tip of the claw, the "hook," it will dull the claw and prevent extensive damage to household objects and to your skin. There are several types of claw trimmers designed especially for pets. These are better than your own nail clipper because they won't crush the claw. Until you and your cat have become accustomed to the routine, one foot a day is enough of a challenge. Don't push to do all four at once, or you'll both have only negative memories of claw clippers!

### **Should I Declaw My Cat?**

We strongly discourage cat owners from having their cats declawed. Scratching is a natural behavior for cats and can be directed to appropriate items. However, if you feel that you must either declaw or give up your cat, we would rather see your cat stay in her home and be your lifelong companion. If you do decide to have your cat declawed, we suggest you have the surgery done at the same time she's spayed (or neutered if your cat is a male), that you only declaw the front paws and that you **always** keep your cat indoors.

## Managing Your Kitten's Rough Play

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Play-motivated aggressive behaviors are common in young, active cats less than two years of age, and in cats that live in one-cat households. When cats play they incorporate a variety of behaviors into their play, such as exploratory, investigative and predatory behaviors. Play provides young cats with opportunities to practice skills they would normally need for survival. Kittens like to explore new areas and investigate anything that moves, and may bat at, pounce on and bite objects that resemble prey.

Kittens learn how to inhibit their bite from their littermates and their mother. A kitten that is separated from her family too early may play more roughly than a kitten that has had more valuable family time. In addition, if humans play with a young kitten using their hands and/or feet instead of toys, the kitten is liable to learn that rough play with people is okay. In most cases, it's possible to teach your kitten or young adult cat that rough play isn't acceptable behavior.

### Encourage Acceptable Behavior

Redirect your kitten's aggressive behavior onto acceptable objects like toys (see our handout: "Cat Toys and How To Use Them"). Drag a toy along the floor to encourage your kitten to pounce on it, or throw a toy away from your kitten to give her even more exercise chasing the toy down. Some kittens will even bring the toy back to be thrown again! Another good toy is one that your kitten can wrestle with, like a soft stuffed toy that's about the size of your kitten, so she can grab it with both front feet, bite it, and kick it with her back feet. This is one of the ways kittens play with each other, especially when they're young. It's also one of the ways they try to play with human feet and hands, so it's important to provide this type of alternative play target. Encourage play with a "wrestling toy" by rubbing it against your kitten's belly when she wants to play roughly - be sure to get your hand out of the way as soon as she accepts the toy.

Since kittens need a lot of playtime, try to set up three or four consistent times during the day to initiate play with your kitten. This will help her understand that *she* doesn't have to be the one to initiate play by pouncing on you.

### Discourage Unacceptable Behavior

You need to set the rules for your kitten's behavior, and every person your cat comes in contact with should reinforce these rules. Your kitten can't be expected to learn that it's okay to play rough with Dad, but not with the baby.

- ❖ **Use aversives to discourage your kitten from nipping.** You can either use a squirt bottle filled with water and a small amount of vinegar or a can of pressurized air to squirt your kitten with when she becomes too rough. To use this technique effectively, you'll always need to have the spray bottle or can handy. You can either place one in each room, or carry one with you as you move around the house. In some cases, you may want to apply taste aversives to your hands. If you have sensitive skin you may want to wear gloves and put the aversive on the gloves. The possible disadvantage to this method is that your kitten may learn that "hands with gloves taste bad and those without gloves don't." For more information on aversives, see our handout: "Aversives for Cats." Remember that aversives will work only if you offer your kitten acceptable alternatives.
- ❖ **Redirect the behavior after using the aversive.** After you startle your kitten with the aversive, IMMEDIATELY offer her a toy to wrestle with or to chase. This will encourage her to direct her rough play onto a toy instead of a person. We recommend that you keep a stash of toys hidden in each room specifically for this purpose.
- ❖ **Withdraw attention when your kitten starts to play too roughly.** If the distraction and redirection techniques don't seem to be working, the most drastic thing you can do to discourage your cat from her rough play is to withdraw all attention when she starts playing too roughly. She wants to play with you, so eventually she'll figure out how far she can go if you keep this limit consistent. The best way to withdraw your attention is to walk away to another room, and close the door long enough for her to calm down. If you pick her up to put her in another room, then you're rewarding her by touching her. You should be the one to leave the room.

Please Note: None of these methods will be very effective unless you also give your kitten acceptable outlets for her energy, by playing with her regularly using appropriate toys.

### **What Not To Do**

- ❖ Attempts to tap, flick or hit your kitten for rough play are almost guaranteed to backfire. Your kitten could become afraid of your hands, or she could interpret those flicks as playful moves by you and play even more roughly as a result.
- ❖ Picking up your kitten to put her into a “timeout” could reinforce her behavior because she probably enjoys the physical contact of being picked up. By the time you get her to the timeout room and close the door, she has probably already forgotten what she did to be put in that situation.

**Aggression:** Kittens can bite or scratch through the skin. In these cases it’s best to seek help from a behavior specialist to work with your kitten’s behavior. Be sure to keep your kitten confined until you can get professional help. Also, be sure to thoroughly clean all bites and scratches and consult your physician, as cat scratches and bites can easily become infected.

## Your Cat: Indoor vs. Outdoor

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If you want your cat to live a long and healthy life, keep her inside. If you allow your cat to wander around on her own, without your supervision, she is susceptible to any of the following tragedies:

- ❖ becoming hit by a car
- ❖ ingesting a deadly poison like antifreeze or a pesticide
- ❖ becoming trapped by an unhappy neighbor
- ❖ being attacked by a roaming dog, cat or wild animal
- ❖ contracting a disease from another animal
- ❖ becoming lost and unable to find her way home
- ❖ being stolen
- ❖ encountering an adult or child with cruel intentions

Following are some of the reasons people have provided for allowing their cat to be outdoors without their supervision, along with our comments and suggestions.

### **"I have a six-foot fence."**

Unless you have special fencing that's designed to prevent a cat from climbing out, your cat will be able to scale your fence and escape the confines of your yard. Even if you do have special fencing, you need to make sure that it can keep other cats or animals from getting into your yard to get to your cat.

### **"My last cat went outdoors and he loved it."**

Your cat may enjoy being outdoors, but by allowing him to go outside, unsupervised, you're putting him at risk and shortening his life span. Most cats that are allowed to roam outdoors usually don't live for more than a few years. Cats who live strictly indoors can live up to 18 - 20 years of age.

### **"My cat's litterbox smells."**

Scoop your cat's litterbox on a daily basis. How often you change the litter depends on the number of cats in your home, the number of litterboxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may need to change it every other day or once a week. Wash the litterbox with soap and water every time you change the litter. Don't use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the litterbox, as it may cause your cat to avoid it.

### **"My cat likes to sun herself."**

Your cat can sun herself by any window indoors. If you're really set on letting your cat sun herself outdoors, put her on a harness and leash and stay with her while she's taking in the rays.

### **"I can't keep him in."**

Keep your windows closed or put in screens. Remember to always keep your doors closed and teach your children the importance of keeping the doors closed, too. It may take a few days or a few weeks, but if there are enough interesting things for your cat to play with indoors, he'll come to enjoy being indoors. Be sure to provide him with a scratching post and safe toys to bat or carry around (see our handout: "Cat Toys and How To Use Them").

### **"We've always let her out."**

You can change your cat's behavior. It will take time and patience, but it might save her life. When you implement your "closed door" policy, give her a lot of extra attention and entertainment. At first she may cry, but don't give in. Soon she'll be happy to stay indoors with you.

### **"My cat knows to avoid cars."**

Even if this were true, all it would take is another car, a dog or a shiny object to lure your cat into the street and into the path of traffic. Also keep in mind that some people may not swerve to miss a cat in the road.

### **"My cat needs exercise and likes to play with other cats."**

Stray cats are likely to spread viruses like feline leukemia and other fatal diseases. If your cat needs a friend, adopt another cat that's healthy and disease-free.

### **"My cat yowls and acts like he really needs to go outside."**

Your cat may be feeling the physiological need to mate. If this is the case, make sure your cat is neutered (males) or spayed (females). Sterilized cats don't have the natural need to breed, and therefore, won't be anxious to go out to find a mate.

## Cat Fencing and Enclosures

### What is it?

There are many products available that allow your cats to be outside without leaving your property. **Cat fencing** is one approach. It is a system of brackets that attaches to your existing fence. Attached to the brackets is weather-resistant plastic netting that runs from bracket to bracket enclosing your entire yard. The shape of the brackets and the feel of the netting prevent your cat from climbing up and over. **Cat Enclosures** can run the gamut from stand-alone structures to enclosures for your home's entire patio or side yard. There are many readymade cat fencing kits and enclosures to choose from. If you are a do-it-yourself person there are many options for you too.

### Why bother?

- Both cat fencing and cat enclosures are ways for your cat to be outside without the dangers free-roaming felines face: cars, dogs, disgruntled neighbors, cat fights, poisons, exposure to diseases (FeLV or FIV, for example), and getting lost or stolen.
- Cat fencing is far less expensive than vet visits for injuries or infections.
- Allowing your cat safe and limited access to the outside resolves a conflict many cat owners feel – that many cats are happiest having access to the outside. Controlling outside access means you won't have to search for your missing free-roaming cat which is stressful and quite often heartbreaking.
- Creating an oasis for you and your cats can also increase the amount of time you spend with your feline friends.
- Cat fencing or a cat enclosure can circumvent behavioral issues in the home created by territorial issues in a multi-cat household. By expanding your cat territory you can ease tension between cats.

### Can I make it work with my family?

- Can I keep all exits secure? If you have gardeners, the pool guy, meter readers, etc. -- service people who need regular access to your yard when you are not there -- maybe cat fencing is not a safe option. So often these people are thinking about the task at hand and not whether the exits are secured. A cat enclosure would be a good option if controlling the exits is a likely problem.
- Is everyone in the family on board with this decision? It's safest for your cats if everyone in the family is clear on the rules for keeping the cat in the cat-fenced backyard. Some children might have difficulty taking that extra precautionary step of checking to see that the cat isn't going to escape and making sure the gate is secure. The same holds true for one's partner or spouse who is busy with gardening or maintenance. While cat fencing is a wonderful option, it does mean family members will need to be paying attention.
- Is my cat properly identified? Your cat should have a microchip and a collar with a tag. For many people this is standard but often cats don't wear collars when they are indoor only felines.
- If you have a dog you will want to make sure he/she is comfortable sharing the backyard with the cat.

### Making your backyard suitable and safe

Evaluate your backyard and look for escape routes. Are there trees or structures near the fence the cats could climb up and leap over? Are there gaps at the base of the fence your cat can crawl under? Think like a cat. They are curious, clever creatures.

Things like tool sheds, wood piles, children's climbing structures or playhouses near the fence will need to be relocated if they are tall enough to be used as "launching pads." Gaps at the base of the fence can be blocked with stones, bricks or plastic bender board. Cat fencing makers sell barriers that wrap around trees. They also offer brackets and hardware for gates.

Make sure your garden does not have plants that are toxic to cats (or dogs). For a list of common toxic plants visit: [www.hsus.org/pets](http://www.hsus.org/pets) Click on **Pet Care**, then click on **Cat Care**, then click on **Common Cat Hazards**. **DO NOT USE COCOA MULCH. IT IS TOXIC TO DOGS AND CATS.** Be sure all garden chemicals or fertilizers are stored safely away from your pets. Plastic tubs with tight fitting lids work well for storing these products.

### **Where do I find these products?**

Below is a list of manufacturers of cat fencing and cat enclosures. Many have catalogs they will mail to you. There is also information and examples for do-it-yourselfers. Whether you choose cat fencing or an enclosure, both invite creativity. Turn that shed into a cat haven with a tunnel made out of corrugated tubing that runs from a window in your home to the shed. Convert that side yard into a cat sanctuary. Turn your back patio into a screened-in tropical oasis for you and your cats. If you cat fence your backyard the cubbies, tunnels and platforms added for your cats to enjoy can also add a sculptural look to your garden. (My bird bath tucked under a large shrub is a cool spot in the summer heat but also an interesting garden element especially when there's a cat sound asleep in it!)

### **Cat Fencing and Enclosures Links**

Affordable Cat Fence

[www.catfence.com](http://www.catfence.com)

Do-It-Yourself Cat Fence (from Alley Cat Allies)

[www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com)

Cat Fence-In

888-738-9099

[www.catfencein.com](http://www.catfencein.com)

C&D Pet Products Cat Enclosure Kit

888-554-7387

[www.cdpets.com](http://www.cdpets.com)

Just 4 Cats Outdoor Safety Enclosure Plans

[www.just4cats.com](http://www.just4cats.com)

Katwallks

[www.katwallks.com](http://www.katwallks.com)

Purr-fect Fence

888-280-4066

[www.purrfectfence.com](http://www.purrfectfence.com)

Habitat Haven

[www.habitathaven.com](http://www.habitathaven.com)

Cages by Design

1-800-941-2243

[www.cagesbydesign.com](http://www.cagesbydesign.com)

This site has some really great examples of cat enclosures and cat fencing in Australia(!).

[www.catsofaustralia.com/cat-enclosures.htm](http://www.catsofaustralia.com/cat-enclosures.htm)

## *What An Indoor Kitty Misses...*

- 🐾 Being Hit by a Car
- 🐾 Being Stolen
- 🐾 Getting Lost
- 🐾 Fights with other Cats, Dogs, Skunks or Raccoons
- 🐾 Fleas, Worms and Ticks
- 🐾 Exposure to Diseases from Other Cats
- 🐾 Possible Neighbor Complaints
- 🐾 Choking to Death / Collar Caught on Something
- 🐾 Cruel People Mistreating and Abusing Them
- 🐾 Rain, Wind, and Cold Temperatures
- 🐾 Animal Traps
- 🐾 Accidental Poisoning
- 🐾 Intentional Poisoning
- 🐾 Fear and Loneliness



Although cats are smart, alert and adroit, they are no match for the many perils that await them outside. That's why the average indoor-only cat lives up to three times longer than the cat that goes outside. Most outdoor cats die prematurely from auto accidents. It is a myth that cats are "streetwise" about cars. Some people say that a pet getting hit by a car is just a part of pet ownership. Your kitty is not likely to agree . . .

A number of stray cats have Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, a disease that compromises the immune system of the cat. There is no vaccine for FIV and no cure. FIV is generally transmitted between cats by biting. An outdoor kitty runs a significant risk of contracting FIV from other outdoor cats. Cats can be completely happy inside if you provide them with toys, good care and, most importantly, lots of love and attention.

Many people who have indoor-only kitties say they have deeper and more satisfying relationships with their cats as a result.



BRADSHAW ANIMAL SHELTER  
SACRAMENTO  
COUNTY

Bradshaw Animal Shelter  
[www.BradshawShelter.net](http://www.BradshawShelter.net)

# What You Should Know About Upper Respiratory Infections

Source: *Human Society of the United States*

## What is An Upper Respiratory Infection, and Why are Animals From Shelters Susceptible?

In a typical shelter, many animals are taken in every day, some of whom have never received proper health care and many of whom are already carrying infectious diseases. Feline upper respiratory infection (feline "URI") and canine "kennel cough" are the animal equivalents of a human cold or flu infection, and these disease often affect sheltered dogs, cats, puppies and kittens. They are "species specific" and therefore cannot infect humans.

Feline URI and canine kennel cough are usually mild diseases that can be easily treated. Without treatment, however, they can severely debilitate an animal and even lead to fatal pneumonia. Animals who have been subjected to overcrowding, poor nutrition, extreme heat or cold, fear or infection with another disease before being admitted to the shelter are more susceptible to these illnesses and may develop more severe symptoms. Even if animals are vaccinated against these infectious diseases as soon as they enter the shelter, vaccines may take up to two weeks to provide protections from disease. And many animals are infected prior to entering the shelter.

## What Are the Symptoms I Should Look For In My New Cat or Dog?

In cats and kittens, the signs of feline URI may include sneezing; fever; runny nose; red or watery eye; nasal congestion (often seen as drooling or open mouth breathing); ulcers on tongue, lips, nose, or roof of mouth; lack of appetite or thirst; and lack of energy. Dogs and puppies affected with canine kennel cough often exhibit a hacking or honking cough, sometimes followed by gagging. Some dogs and pups may only have a runny nose. Without veterinary care, they may become lethargic, run a fever, and lose their appetite.

## What Should I Do If My New Companion Animal Has These Symptoms?

Seek veterinary care as soon as possible (*immediately* for young pups and kittens or for adult pets who stop eating).

## What Can I Do to Help My Pet Get Well Fast?

Follow the veterinarian's instructions closely. Use all medications exactly as prescribed, even if your pet's condition seems to have improved. Encourage your pet to rest as much as possible by providing a quiet, warm place. This is not a good time to introduce your animal to family members and other pets in the household or your neighborhood. Provide food as recommended by your veterinarian and encourage your pet to eat; try warming a high-quality canned food. Gently wipe any discharge from the eyes and nose with a warm, damp towel. To help ease the discomfort of a congested cat or dog, use a vaporizer or place the animal in the bathroom and run hot water in the shower for a few minutes every day. Provide lots of love and concern and be patient; your new companion will be ready to join in your normal family activities soon.