

ADOPTED & ADORED

Adopter's Guide to Cat Care and Behavior

SANCTUARY ROOM

First days to rest. First weeks to explore. First months to belong. Creating a "sanctuary room" allows your cat to gradually adjust to their new home without feeling overwhelmed. This can be a small room or bathroom, set up with all necessary resources. This room will give your cat the gift of time to adjust to the new sights, smells and sounds of their home, allowing them to decompress and settle in at their own pace.



EXPLORING

Once your cat has shown confidence in their sanctuary room, **gradually** allow access to other areas of your home. Cats learn their environment through exploration and scent-marking. Rubbing on furniture, scratching posts and investigating new spaces helps them build confidence and feel secure.

Living with other pets? Please review [Building Bonds](#) for step-by-step guidance on introducing your new cat to resident pets.

CAT-PROOFING

Cats are naturally curious and love to investigate their surroundings. Taking a few simple precautions can help your feline safely settle into their new home.

Toxic to cats: Lilies, tulips, aloe vera, snake plants, daffodils, onions, chives, garlic, grapes, raisins, chocolate, alcohol, caffeine, dairy products, coconut, xylitol, Ibuprofen, Vitamin D3, flea products for dogs, cleaning products, medications and essential oils.

Hazards: string, yarn, hair ties and rubber bands.

PURR-SUIT OF HAPPINESS

Cats are intelligent predators that are highly sensitive to their environment. Understanding this helps explain why they need daily "hunt sessions," places to perch, scratching surfaces and opportunities to explore their surroundings. Interactive play builds confidence, reduces unwanted behaviors and satisfies their natural instinct to stalk, chase and hunt. Choose toys that engage all five senses.

Enviornment

Cat trees, window perches, tunnels, boxes or catios.

Visual/Auditory

Cat TV (on YouTube), sound machines, bubbles or soft music.

Taste/Smell

Catnip, silvertvine, pheromone spray, foraging mats or puzzle feeders.

Touch

Wand toys, coils, kick sticks, pom poms, scratching posts or brushing.

CAT ADJUSTMENT TIMELINE

Bringing home a new cat is an exciting milestone, but patience and understanding during the adjustment period are the keys to building a lasting bond. Laying the groundwork for a successful transition comes from the earliest experience of introducing your cat to their new home. Cats are extremely territorial animals and will find stability, comfort and confidence through their relationship with their environment.

Cats use their sensitive sense of smell to establish their territory and identify safe spaces. They do this through the use of **"scent marking"** with glands on their head, cheeks, paws, body and tail. This behavior leaves their scent behind and creates a sense of familiarity and establishes their territory. **"Mapping"** involves the discovery and marking of hiding spots, elevated surfaces and any additional cat resources.

FIRST DAYS TO REST



Start your cat in a quiet sanctuary room for the first few days to decompress and adjust to their new surroundings. Include food, water, a litter box, scratching post, toys and places to hide and climb. A Feliway diffuser can help create a calm, familiar environment during the transition.

FIRST WEEKS TO EXPLORE



Allow your cat to gradually explore the rest of the home at their own pace, returning to the sanctuary room when desired. This phase allows your cat to mark the environment with their scent glands and **"map"** out the home. Mapping involves the discovery of hiding spots & elevated surfaces.

FIRST MONTHS TO BELONG



Give your cat the time and space they need to build trust, comfort and confidence. Many cats hide for days, weeks or even months while adjusting, and that's completely normal. Consistent routines, scent marking and a stable environment will help them feel safe, secure and thrive.

TIMID OR FEARFUL CATS

Cats may be timid for a variety of reasons, including lack of socialization, environmental changes or new family members. To ease their anxiety, first identify the source and then work to establish a secure environment. Providing **hiding spots and cat tunnels** will offer **"safe"** pathways and encourage exploration. **Vertical spaces** can provide a reassuring visibility advantage, especially in homes with dogs or small children.

Interactive play sessions are invaluable by building confidence and strengthening your bond. Always monitor a cat's **body language** for stress cues, and allow fearful cats to control their interactions and navigate surroundings at their own pace. Choice = Trust.

Cardboard boxes are an inexpensive way to provide your cat with safe hiding spots.

FOOD & WATER BASICS

As obligate carnivores, kittens and cats should be eating several small meals throughout the day. In the wild, they hunt 8-20 times a day. Their tummies are about the size of a ping pong ball, so they don't eat a large portion in one

sitting. A combination diet consisting of mostly wet food is nutritionally beneficial because it consists of about 70% water and will help keep your cat staying hydrated.



TWO - THREE MONTHS OLD

3-4 small wet food
servings per day
+
dry food



FOUR - NINE MONTHS OLD

3 wet food servings
per day
+
dry food



ADULT CAT

2 wet food servings
per day
+
dry food

Always consult with your veterinarian regarding total daily caloric intake and nutritional needs that are appropriate for your cat's age, weight and developmental stage.

Remember to clean food and water bowls daily as they can harbor harmful bacteria if not cleaned.

Need help encouraging your cat to drink more water? A pet water fountain may do the trick! Many cats prefer running water and are more likely to drink from a fountain than a traditional bowl.

LITTER BOX SUCCESS

Cats are naturally clean animals and appreciate a litter box that is clean, adequately sized and easy to access. Most cats prefer a large, uncovered litter box filled with **2 inches of unscented clumping litter**. While covered litter boxes may appeal to people, many cats find them less inviting because odors can become trapped inside or can lead to unwanted run-ins with other pets in the home.

To encourage consistent litter box use, **scoop waste twice daily** and completely replace litter once a month. Because cats have an incredibly sensitive sense of smell, scented litters can be overwhelming and may discourage use.

Location matters, too. **Place litter boxes in quiet, low-traffic areas** where your cat can feel safe and undisturbed. Avoid noisy locations, such as laundry rooms or areas near loud appliances, which can create negative associations with the litter box.

In multi-cat households, there should be **one litter box per cat, plus one**. Ensure cats have easy access to their litter boxes and can enter and exit without feeling trapped or cornered. **We do not recommend automatic litter boxes**, as they can malfunction, pose a safety risk and make it difficult to monitor changes in your cat's bathroom habits.

(If at any time your cat stops using the litterbox, seek veterinary attention immediately. Litterbox issues are typically the result of UTI's or other health related concerns that can be life threatening if left untreated.)

SHELTER FAVORITES

Cat Litter: Dr. Elsey's Ultra Unscented Clumping Litter

Cat Food: Nutrisource, Tiki Cat, Royal Canin Mother & Babycat



SCRATCHING IS ESSENTIAL

Scratching is a **natural and essential behavior** for cats. It allows cats to mark territory with their scent glands, provide an emotional release and it's the only way a cat can fully stretch their back and shoulder muscles.

Every cat has their own preferences when it comes to scratching. Some enjoy vertical scratching posts, while others prefer horizontal scratchers. Materials such as sisal, cardboard, carpet and rope are all popular options. Providing a variety of scratching surfaces can help you **discover what your cat likes best**.

Encourage appropriate scratching by placing scratchers in areas where your cat spends time and rewarding them with treats, toys, catnip or praise when they use them.

- Play with your cat near the scratching post using interactive wand toys. Cats often enjoy scratching during and after play sessions
- Don't be afraid to demonstrate! Gently scratching the post yourself can spark your cat's curiosity—cats are excellent observers and often learn by watching

If your cat is scratching something they shouldn't, such as your couch, trim their nails and place a scratching post nearby to redirect them to a more suitable outlet.



COMMON CAT MISCONCEPTIONS

"Spray bottles teach cats right from wrong"

Cats don't respond to punishment. Yelling, spraying water or scolding may stop a behavior in the moment, but it often teaches your cat to fear or avoid you instead. Positive redirection and rewarding good behavior is more effective.

"Cats don't need playtime"

Cats are highly intelligent animals that need daily mental and physical enrichment. Regular interactive play helps build confidence, reduce stress and prevent unwanted behaviors.

"Declawing a cat is harmless"

Declawing a cat is equivalent to amputating a human finger at the first knuckle. This procedure can lead to chronic pain, nerve damage, arthritis, difficulty walking or balancing, and behavioral problems.

"Cats love milk, right?"

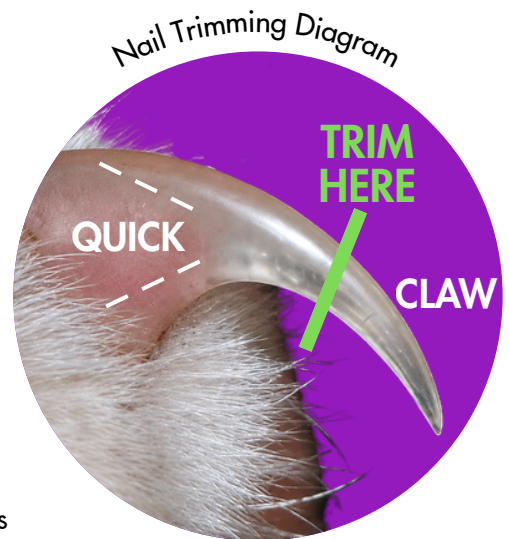
While kittens can digest their mother's milk, most adult cats are lactose intolerant. That saucer of milk may be more likely to cause an upset stomach than a happy cat.

NAIL TRIMMING GUIDE

The younger you start, the easier it gets!

1. Choose a comfortable place to trim cat nails
2. Gather your nail trimming supplies
3. Enlist the help of a friend or family member if possible. Have them offer a Churu treat to the cat throughout the process.
4. Hold the nail clippers in one hand. With the other hand, gently squeeze your cat's paw to expose the nails.
5. Focus on one nail at a time. Hold the toe between your thumb and pointer finger
6. Snip the hooked white part of the nail only, being careful not to get too close to the quick
7. Trim each of your cats nails, including the nails of any dewclaws

[Watch ASPCA nail trimming tutorial for a visual example](#) 

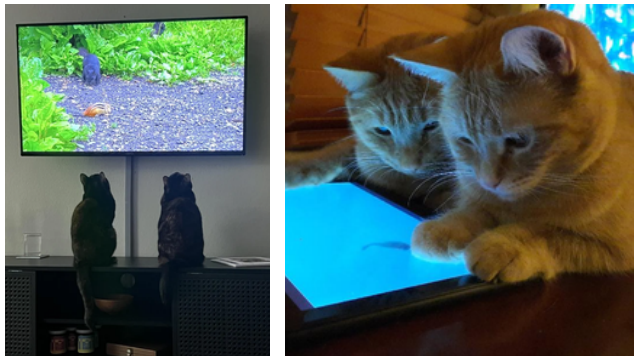


PLAYTIME WITH PURPOSE

Bringing a cat into your family means creating an environment that keeps them **mentally stimulated and physically active**. Enrichment helps satisfy their natural instincts, builds confidence, reduces stress and allows them to live happier, healthier lives.

Aim for two play sessions every day using interactive wand toys, balls, mice or toys that encourage your cat to stalk, chase and catch.

Cat screen time? Yes! There's a great deal of content made specifically for cats – just search YouTube for "Cat TV" and you'll find plenty wildlife nature scenes to captivate your cat. Ensure your TV is mounted and volume is up.



Kittens have especially high energy levels and need plenty of play. Rotate toys regularly to keep playtime exciting and prevent boredom.

As kittens lose their baby teeth, you may notice an increase in biting and chewing behaviors, so be sure to provide appropriate teething toys.

Never use your hands, feet or other body parts as toys. While it may seem harmless, it can teach kittens that biting and scratching people is acceptable play behavior. If your kitten is frequently attacking your ankles, it's often a sign they need more interactive play.

[View Mikel Delgado's Interactive Cat Play handout for more information](#) 



SKIP THE LASER POINTER

Laser pointers can create frustration and stress because cats are unable to physically catch their prey. We recommend choosing other toys that are interactive.

CAT BODY LANGUAGE

EARS **Forward/neutral ears** suggest a relaxed and confident cat. **Flattened ears** often indicate fear or anger. **Sideways-facing** "airplane ears" typically signal agitation, discomfort, pain or overstimulation.

BODY SHAPE A **relaxed cat** will often have a loose, comfortable posture and may even roll onto their side or expose their belly as a sign of trust. When a **cat feels fearful**, they may appear smaller by crouching low or tucking their body inward. A **frightened or defensive cat** may also try to appear larger by arching their back, puffing up their fur and turning sideways toward a perceived threat.

EYES **Slow blinks** are often a sign that your cat feels safe and comfortable. **Large, dilated pupils** indicate stimulation and heightened emotions. This may mean the cat is feeling playful and excited or it can signal fear, stress or frustration.

TAIL SHAPE A **high, upright tail or curved tip** is often a sign of a happy, confident and friendly cat. A **low or tucked tail** may indicate fear, anxiety or uncertainty. A **puffed-up tail** is a defensive response meant to make a cat appear larger when feeling threatened. **Tail quivers** can signal excitement and happiness, while **rapid flicking** or thumping may indicate irritation, overstimulation or precede a hunting sequence.

KEEPING YOUR CAT HEALTHY

Just like people, cats benefit from **regular wellness exams**. Cats are experts at hiding pain and illness, which means underlying health concerns can sometimes go unnoticed until they become more serious. Annual veterinary visits help ensure your cat stays happy and healthy throughout their life.

Between checkups, pay attention to any changes in your cat's appetite, litter box habits, grooming, mobility, energy level, body language or behavior. Even subtle changes can be an early sign that something isn't quite right.



To help make veterinary visits less stressful, **leave your cat's carrier out at home** with a favorite blanket, treats or toys inside. Allowing your cat to explore and relax in the carrier throughout the year can help it become a familiar, safe space rather than something associated only with trips to the veterinarian.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

We hope this guide has been helpful as you and your new feline friend begin your journey together. Remember, every cat is unique, and it's perfectly normal to have questions along the way.

If you need advice, have behavior concerns or simply need guidance, our team is here to help.

Helpful Resources

ASPCA: Overall Cat Care Resources
<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/cat-care>

Cat Behavior Associates: Solutions for Behavior Issues
<https://catbehaviorassociates.com/articles/>

International Cat Care: Health Concerns
<https://icatcare.org/cat-advice/cat-health>