



Stray cats

Taking responsibility for a cat in need



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Stray cats are much the same as pet cats – at some point in their lives they will have been cared for by people, typically living in a home, but they are now free-living.

Each stray cat will have a different story – they may have been abandoned, they may have become lost or they may have moved away from their home because they weren't happy.

'Free-living' means that stray cats spend a lot of time outdoors and many are happy with the freedom of that lifestyle. However, without somebody responsible helping to keep them safe and well-fed, they can end up with injuries or nasty health problems.

Sometimes cats with owners can be mistaken for strays. It's important to try and find the owner of any cat you think may be a stray – including asking a vet to scan for a microchip, creating 'found' posters and advertising on social media and other online resources such as Animal Search UK.



What does a stray cat need to stay happy and healthy?



A suitable place to live

- Somewhere warm, dry and draught-free to sleep. A cosy bed in a quiet spot in the house is great but if the cat has been used to living outdoors, then a cosy place in a shed or other waterproof shelter may do just as well.
- Somewhere suitable to toilet. Most stray cats will be used to toileting outside but it's still best to provide them with a litter tray so they always have access to a toilet.
- Somewhere to hide away so they can feel safe. Use spare boxes to create hiding places for the house and garden.



A healthy diet

- Constant access to fresh, clean, drinking water. Keep a few water bowls topped up around the house and garden.
- A good quality cat food to keep them fit and healthy.



To be able to behave normally

- Someone to understand them – just like pet cats, all strays are individuals with different personalities. Many strays are friendly with people and will enjoy your company so it's important to spend regular time with them. Other stray cats will be happier with a bit more space to do their own thing.
- To live happily with other animals. If you have existing pets, consider whether they'll be comfortable with a new arrival. If you already have a cat, make sure there is enough space, food and water bowls, beds, litter trays and other key resources so that they don't have to share and can keep out of each other's way if they want to.



Company

- Constant access to the outside, preferably through a cat flap – stray cats are so used to having the freedom to be outside they can easily become stressed and bored if shut up inside, which can even lead to health and behaviour problems.
- Someone who can recognise changes in their behaviour. Spend time getting to know your stray cat's behaviour – this way you will be able to spot if it changes. Changes in behaviour can be a sign that they are bored, stressed or ill.



To be kept healthy

- Preventative treatment including neutering, vaccinations and treatment for fleas and worms.
- Regular health checks – keeping an eye out for any lumps, cuts or sore areas.
- Advice from a vet if you are concerned about their health. Consider taking out pet insurance to help pay for any unexpected vet bills.



Is taking on a stray cat right for you?

Giving a home to a cat in need can be hugely rewarding but it is also a responsibility and a long-term commitment.

Consider carefully whether you have the time, space and money to help care for a stray cat. If the cat becomes ill or injured in the future you'll be responsible for ensuring they get the veterinary care they need.

The benefits of helping

If after consideration, you've decided to take responsibility for a stray cat – thank you!

There are so many benefits for both the cat and the RSPCA. Cats that come into our care will live in one of our catteries until we can find them a suitable 'forever home' – this can be stressful for many cats, especially those stray cats who have been used to the freedom to roam and live outside. Taking on the responsibility yourself means the cat can return to a place they know and feel comfortable. You will also be helping us to care for more cats who are victims of cruelty or neglect and have been brought in by our dedicated inspectors.

Already feeding a stray cat?

If you have been feeding a stray cat, there's a chance that you are legally responsible for their welfare under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Quite often, community cats have more than one feeder. If this applies to you and your neighbours, it is worth agreeing between yourselves who is responsible for the cat and for ensuring their welfare needs are met. It may be worth creating a community cat fund with your neighbours to cover unexpected costs.

If you decide to take on responsibility for a stray cat, please make sure you have them microchipped and your contact details registered so that you can be identified as the owner.



Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Telephone: 0300 1234 999 | www.rspca.org.uk

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