



Support for adopters

GUIDANCE FOR NEW CAT OWNERS

Meeting the needs of indoor cats

Indoor environments can become predictable and boring, leading to stress, inactivity and obesity. However in some instances, for example when a cat has a disability or medical problem, it may be considered more appropriate to keep a cat indoors only. If this is the case with your new cat then you can help ensure they remain happy and healthy through following the below guidance.

Ensure your cat has enough space. Cats that live indoors-only should have access to several rooms, if not the entire house.

Think carefully about where to place your cats belongings within the available space to best suit their needs. Like us, cats like privacy when using the toilet so place their litter tray away from the noisy kitchen or busy corridor. Cats also prefer to eat and drink away from where they toilet so ensure their food and water bowls are placed in a separate part of the house. In addition, cats don't like to drink close to where they eat so make sure you place their food and water apart; in separate rooms is ideal. Vertical resting spaces and hiding places should be located in a variety of spots throughout the house.

Vertical space is important for cats for the following reasons;

- Cats are naturally great climbers and it is a good way for them to exercise
- Cats like to go and rest up high when they are feeling afraid or uncomfortable

You should provide a choice of raised areas within the home which they can access safely. These resting places should be large enough for them to lie out on comfortably with minimal risk of falling. If you have more than one cat then you will need a number of vertical resting places so that they can chose to rest apart. Ideally, at least one of the vertical resting places should allow your cat to have a good view.



Vertical resting places can be made by putting up shelving or through adapting existing furniture e.g. lay cosy blankets on top of a wardrobe (as long as your cat can get up and down from it safely). You can also purchase radiator beds and 'cat trees' which come in a variety of sizes and with a variety of accessories like cosy hammocks and scratching material.

Even if you are adopting an elderly cat or a cat with a physical disability vertical space is still important; make sure they have something raised that they can access easily (without jumping) and which they can rest on comfortably.

Hiding Place

Cats hide when they are frightened or unsure of something. Providing cats with places to hide is necessary to help them to cope with any fear or anxiety they may experience and to give them somewhere to relax. You can make a great hiding place by cutting an entrance and exit hole (big enough for your cat!) into a cardboard box and filling with soft bedding. You can also purchase igloo type cat beds. The hiding place should allow your cat to be almost completely concealed. Make sure you place the hiding place in a quiet part of your house.



Scratching Posts

Having the opportunity to scratch is important to cats because;

- It's a normal natural behaviour
- It keeps their claws in good condition and strengthened their muscles
- It is a method of communication. Cats have scent glands in-between the pads on their paws which produce a unique smell – this smell is deposited on whatever the cat is scratching. Cats may choose to leave this smell as a reminder to themselves, for example to make somewhere more familiar or as a message for other cats.



A cat who has no outdoor access will not have as many suitable places they can scratch; this can be why they sometime scratch your furniture! Providing a suitable scratching post is essential. A suitable scratching post will:

- be tall enough that your cat can stretch up fully
- be sturdy enough that it doesn't fall over and onto them when they are using it!
- ideally cats prefer a vertical thread

Ideally cats that live indoors-only should be provided with scratching posts in several locations. Cats like to scratch and stretch after they have been sleeping so it can be a good idea to place one scratching post next to their favourite sleeping spot. In addition if you find your cat does scratch your furniture then try placing the post in front of wherever they usually scratch i.e. in front of the corner of the sofa.

Litter Tray

Cats have specific needs when it comes to where they toilet. Failure to provide a suitable toilet can cause a lot of stress for your cat and can potentially lead to house soiling and health problems.

- Just like us, cats like a bit of privacy when doing their business so make sure their litter tray is placed in a quiet location away from any busy or noisy parts of the house.
- A big litter tray is better: your cat should have enough space for them to be able to comfortably turn around in and be able to dig and cover their business up.
- Cats like to use clean litter trays. Scoop out any mess as soon as possible and regularly clean the entire tray. Regular cleaning will also minimise the smell in your home.
- Cats can be very sensitive to strong smells and it can put them off using their litter tray. When choosing products for your cats litter tray avoid anything heavily scented such as scented litter, very strong smelling cleaner or air freshener.
- There are many types of cat litter and each cat will have their preference. Most cats prefer a thinner more sandy litter rather than the thick clumping variety. It's fine to try your cat on new types or brands of litter but if you regularly change their litter type it

can upset them and put them off using their litter tray. If you find a type that they seem happy with then it's a good idea to stick with it.

- Never punish your cat if they toilet outside of the litter tray. Your cat will not understand why they are being punished and it is likely to make the situation worse. Going to the toilet in the house is a very common problem in cats and can be caused by a number of reasons including fear and illness; punishment will not help. If your cat toilets in the house speak to your vet.

If you have more than one cat living in your house you will need to provide one litter tray per cat. The reason for this is to prevent one cat from monopolising the litter tray and therefore the other cats access to it being restricted. The litter trays should not be positioned directly next to each other but placed in different locations within the house as far away from each other as possible.

Diet and Weight

If your cat lives indoors-only you may need to take extra steps to ensure they stay in shape and do not become overweight. Ensuring your cat doesn't become overweight is essential for their health and requires a combination of a healthy diet and regular exercise. A lean cat is likely to live longer, have more energy and be much less prone to disease than a cat that is allowed to become overweight.

How much should I feed my cat?

The amount each individual cat should be fed will depend upon the diet you are giving them, their bodyweight and how active they are. If a cat eats more food than they need they will become overweight. Always read and follow the feeding instructions related to the food you are feeding your cat; your vet can also help advise. Cats naturally eat several small meals per day so ideally split your cats daily ration into several small portions throughout the day (unless advised otherwise by your vet).

How do I know if my cat is the right weight?

You should be able to feel your cat's ribs easily when you stroke their body lightly and, from above, you should clearly see a waistline, a cat's belly should also be tucked up when viewing from the side. If you are in any doubt about your cat's weight, always talk to your vet.

How can I encourage my cat to exercise?

There are many ways to keep your cat active - see below.

Food Games and Feeding Devices

Food games and feeding devices encourage physical activity, weight loss and can help prevent boredom. They can either be used as a special treat during the day or can be used to extend the amount of time that your cat spends eating. There are many different feeding devices and toys available to buy.

One example is treat balls, which are filled with your cat's dry food for the cat to roll around the floor until the food falls out through a hole.

If you feed your cat on a wet food try a kitty Kong toy which you fill with the wet food.



You can also make food games and devices. Try taping together the inside of toilet rolls and placing food inside each one, or using empty plastic biscuit trays to sprinkle treats in so your cat has to use their paws to get them out.

Another cheap and easy way to make a great food toy is to take the plastic inner of a Kinder Surprise, and cut a hole the size of a penny in one end of it. Fill with dry biscuits. Place it on the ground and shake it so a few biscuits come out. Your cat should figure out it contains food and should start playing with it to make the

food come out. Once they've got it mastered and are getting the biscuits out quickly, provide another version with a smaller hole. Repeat until the hole is small enough that it takes your cat quite some time to get all the food out. It's not exactly like hunting a mouse, but this will get your cat thinking and keep them active!

Calorie watch! If you are using treats in the food games and devices be aware of the calorie content and take account for these in your cat's daily calorie intake.

Playtime

Cats that are kept indoors may need encouragement to exercise. Find out what toys they like and spend plenty of time every day playing a game that encourages your cat to be physically active. Play also provides mental stimulation; as with physical exercise, mental stimulation is essential for ensuring your cat is healthy and happy.

Some cats will play on their own but a game with you can add variety and fun into your cat's day. It is also a great way to interact and bond with your cat. Stick and string (also called fishing rod toys) are great for interactive play. Use the toy to encourage your cat to stalk, chase and grab the toy.

Having a good variety of toys available does not mean spending a lot of money; there are plenty of cheaper alternatives and even homemade options:

- Kitchen foil balls
- Feathers
- Fishing rod toys
- Play tunnels
- Paper balls
- Cardboard boxes
- Toilet roll tubes/egg boxes containing treats

Regularly refreshing the toys and changing them for new and different ones will help to keep the toys exciting and your cat interested.

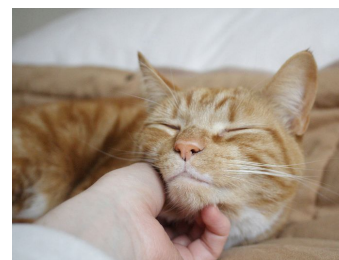
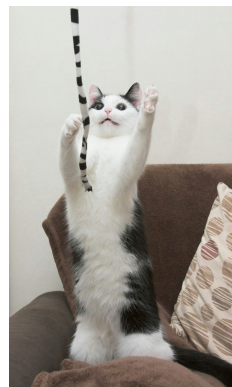
Many cats enjoy fast moving objects that are about the same size as their natural prey, so toys that are about the size of mice or small rodents are ideal.

Many cats also respond well to catnip and spraying catnip scent or stuffing toys with dry catnip can be a successful way to encourage cats to play and will get their excellent sense of smell stimulated.

Human Contact

Human contact can be a source of enjoyment for cats and can help build a bond between you.

Your cat will not appreciate a squishy cuddle or belly rub; it's important to spend regular time interacting with your cat in a way they do enjoy. When cats groom and rub against each other they focus on the head and neck and they prefer these areas when being stroked by people too. Take some time, allow your cat to approach you and treat them to a gentle chin, cheek and head rub in perfect cat etiquette style. Be sure to never force interactions with your cat and always look out for any signs that they are feeling anxious or afraid; if they are, end the interaction and allow them to move away. If your cat is shy or nervous of human contact then even just sitting and reading quietly close to them can make a big difference to



their well-being and help build their confidence with you.

Another way to provide human contact is through grooming. Grooming helps remove dead hairs, improve circulation and can feel great. Brush your cat at a quiet time of the day, be gentle and calm, giving occasional treats to make the whole experience positive. Let your cat be in control; if they've had enough, stop.

Clicker training can be great fun for the cats and you. Training should be kept simple and fun and daily sessions will help to keep your cats mentally stimulated; for information on how to clicker train your cat have a look at Karen Pryors' website www.clickertraining.com

Being Left Alone

A cat that lives indoors only won't have the freedom to interact with people/other animals outside and so you will become their main companion; make plenty of time to interact with them. You shouldn't leave cats alone for long periods during the day and when they are left you should provide them with toys and food devices to help prevent them from getting too bored.

Household Hazard

Indoor environments can be just as dangerous as outdoors; some common sources of poisoning can be found within the home such as paracetamol and lillies. For information on common cat poisons and what to do if you suspect your cat may be poisoned see www.rspca.org.uk/poisoning

Make sure your home a safe and suitable environment for cats.