

RSPCA.

**Getting ready
for your RSPCA
rescue cat**



Your cat's details

Name

Age

Weight

Microchip provider

Microchip number

Their diet while in RSPCA care

A little bit about them

Your notes

Make sure you:

- register with a local vet – visit: findavet.rcvs.org.uk
- check your house is free from hazards – see page 9
- arrange pet insurance – see page 30.

Microchipping

The law states all cats in England must be microchipped and have their details kept up to date. Your cat will have been microchipped by the RSPCA. If you move house or change phone number, you'll need to update your contact details on the microchip provider's database.





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Thank you

Thank you for choosing to adopt a cat rescued by the RSPCA. The next stage of the process is for us to help you get ready to welcome your new cat into your home.

We'll usually arrange for one of our adoption support volunteers to visit you at home, but in some circumstances this will happen online. They'll discuss with you any specific needs your cat has, and suggest adjustments to your house, garden or lifestyle that may be needed to help you and your rescue cat settle into a safe, secure and happy life together.

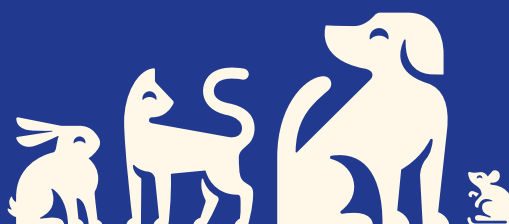
Introducing a new cat to your home will be exciting, rewarding and, at times, challenging. It may take a while for your new cat to settle into life with you, but don't worry – we're here to support you.

Each of the cats in our care comes with a story. Some may have been a victim of cruelty, others are unwanted or have been abandoned, and some may never have experienced life in a loving home – until now.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the RSPCA centre you've been dealing with.

Together, we can create a better world for every animal.

RSPCA Rehoming Team



The Animal Welfare Act 2006

All animal owners are required by law, under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, to care for animals properly by meeting their five welfare needs.

Animals' welfare needs are:

1. a suitable place to live
2. a healthy diet, including fresh, clean water
3. the ability to behave normally
4. the right company, including any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
5. protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Preparing for your RSPCA rescue cat

If you're a first-time cat owner, here's a guide to what you'll need to think about and get before your RSPCA rescue cat comes home.

What you'll need

Food

You should continue with the food your cat has been fed at the RSPCA, because sudden changes in their diet can cause stomach upsets.

If you want to swap to another food, do this gradually over five to seven days, mixing a little of the new food with the old to gradually wean your cat onto their new diet.

Bowls

Give your cat clean bowls for food and water. Cats prefer their food and water to be separate, so keep the two bowls apart. Make sure your cat has access to fresh, clean drinking water at all times.

Cats feel most comfortable with wide, shallow food and water bowls, as these allow them to watch what's going on around them and prevent their whiskers from getting dirty or wet. Avoid using plastic bowls, as they can make the water taste odd.

Bed

Your cat will need somewhere warm, dry and quiet to sleep, away from draughts. Cats like a soft bed that's large enough to stretch out on and curl up in. Your cat should always be able to get to their bed and be left undisturbed when they're resting. Make sure you get a bed that's washable and easy to dry.

“

Cabbage came out of her cardboard box hidey-hole after two days.”

Cabbage's adopter



Essentials shopping list

- Food
- Bowls
- Bed
- Hiding places
- Toys
- Feeding toys
- Litter tray and litter
- Litter scoop
- Cat carrier
- Scratching post

Other items we recommend, depending on the needs of your cat

- Cat tree
- Cat water fountain
- Activity tunnel
- Calming pet pheromone diffuser
- Quick-release safety collar
- Grooming brush

TOP TIP

You may be able to buy these products directly from us – either from the RSPCA centre you've been dealing with or through our website: shop.rspca.org.uk

Hiding places

As well as a comfortable bed, your cat will also need snug hiding places. You can buy igloo-type cat beds or simply make them from cardboard boxes and blankets. You can find out more about the importance of hiding places on page 14.

Toys

Cats are active animals and love playing, so toys are very important to them. There are many types of toys available, including catnip-filled toys, fishing-rod-type toys, balls and toy mice. It's a good idea to rotate through a variety of safe toys to keep things interesting and fun for your cat, but of course they'll probably have their favourite!

Feeding toys

Feeding toys, such as Kitty Kongs, treat balls and puzzle feeders, can help keep your cat mentally stimulated and active. Once your cat has settled in and is eating normally, try putting some of their daily food portion into one of these to encourage them to exercise their senses and use their natural instincts to get at the food.

Litter tray, litter and scoop

Your cat will need at least one large litter tray to use as a toilet. It's best to continue with the same type of litter they used at the RSPCA centre – we can let you know what that is. If you want to change the type of litter at some point, do so gradually, as it can put your cat off using their litter tray. You'll also need a scoop to help you clean it out. There's lots more information on page 15 to help you set up your cat's litter tray and prevent any mishaps.

Carrier

Make sure you have a carrier to pick up your new cat from the RSPCA. It should be sturdy, secure and large enough for your cat to sit down in, turn around and lie down naturally. Carriers that allow you to remove the top half are the easiest and most stress-free for getting your cat in and out. Putting familiar-smelling items inside the carrier, such as a blanket from their bed at the RSPCA centre, can also help them feel at ease while travelling to their new home.

Scratching post

All cats need opportunities to scratch and should have at least one good scratching post available. Choose a scratching post that's tall and sturdy enough to allow your new cat to stretch up fully when using it without it tipping over. You may also want to buy extra items such as disposable scratching boards, but these should be in addition to a scratching post.

Collar

Cats aren't legally required to wear collars, but you may want your cat to wear a collar for safety. For instance, a reflective collar will help them be visible at night and a bell will help them be heard. However, badly designed or ill-fitting collars, including elasticated collars, can be dangerous, so if you want your cat to wear a collar, make sure it has a quick-release safety buckle that snaps open when pressure is applied.

Setting up a cat-friendly room

Access to the whole house can be overwhelming for your new RSPCA rescue cat when you first bring them home. If you simply let them loose in the house, they'll most likely hide away in fireplaces, behind sofas and in any other small gaps they can find!

It's best to set them up in their own room, which helps them feel safe, so they can gradually get used to their new surroundings. This will also help prevent escapes in the early days, because unsettled cats may take advantage of open doors or windows.

Your cat-friendly room will need the following:

- litter tray
- water
- food
- hiding place
- somewhere to get up high
- comfortable bed
- familiar-smelling item from their RSPCA pen – this should be a different item to the one you put in their carrier on the way home
- scratching post.

TOP TIP

Some cat owners have found pheromone products help their cats to settle. Try plugging in a pet pheromone diffuser in their cat-friendly room at least 24 hours before they arrive.



Once you have everything you need for the room, set it up in a way that will make it most comfortable for your cat. Cats don't like to eat, drink, toilet and sleep in the same area, so make the best use of the space you have to keep bowls, beds and litter trays apart. For example, don't just use the floor – cats also like to get up high.

Ideally, the room will have a window (which can be kept securely shut) to provide your new rescue cat with a view. Use a cat tree, chair or other piece of sturdy furniture so they can look out easily. Their hiding place is best located in as private a spot as possible and away from the door. For ideas on how to set up your cat's safe room, see our illustration above.

Making your home safe

Cats love to explore their surroundings, which can unfortunately sometimes lead them into danger. Make sure your home and garden are safe for your cat. Check that the following items, which are poisonous to cats, are locked away or safely disposed of before your new RSPCA rescue cat arrives:

- lilies – these flowers are very poisonous to cats
- paracetamol, aspirin and other medicines
- antifreeze
- laundry detergent capsules
- white spirit
- permethrin – found in some spot-on dog flea treatments
- benzalkonium chloride – a common ingredient in household disinfectants and some patio cleaners
- slug and snail pellets
- weed killers
- rodent poisons
- other toxic cleaners (especially those containing phenols).

Preparing other pets

You can start introducing your RSPCA rescue cat to other family pets before they actually meet.

To do this, swap a familiar-smelling item belonging to your family cat or dog with that of your rescue cat while they're still at the RSPCA centre – this could be some bedding or a toy.

Alternatively, take two cloths and stroke your family cat or dog with one and your rescue cat with the other. Make sure you only collect scent when the animals are happy and relaxed, otherwise their stress will be present in their scent. Next, swap the cloths over, leaving one with your new rescue cat and taking the other home to allow your family pets to sniff and explore – it's almost like us seeing photographs of someone before we meet them!

To help the first meeting be a positive experience for you all, plan it well in advance. Read our step-by-step guide at: rspca.org.uk/cats/company Remember, the better prepared you are, the more likely it is that your pets will live in harmony.

Preparing your family

One of the most common reasons for an adoption not working out is because a family member is thought to be allergic to the cat. Before you bring your cat home, make sure everyone in the family has met and spent time with them. If you think a family member might be allergic, you could bring home one of the cat's blankets and get them to sit with it and see if they have a reaction, or spend time with a friend's cat to check for any sensitivity. You can also talk to your GP about having an allergy test.

You may have heard there are certain breeds of cat that people aren't allergic to, but this isn't really true. In most cases, allergic reactions to cats are caused not by their hair but by a protein found in their skin and saliva – all cats produce this protein. How bad an allergic reaction is tends to depend upon the person's sensitivity to the protein.



It took a month to properly integrate Kitty Erin with our other pets, especially Monty, our terrier. It took lots of patience and planning but eventually it worked and now they curl up happily together.

Kitty Erin's adopter

TOP TIP

If a family member starts to have an allergic reaction to your rescue cat, don't panic – there may be ways to help. Turn to page 28 for information and advice.

Bringing your rescue cat home

No doubt you'll be feeling excited – and maybe a little bit anxious – about bringing your rescue cat home. This is likely to be how your rescue cat feels, too, as they begin a new life with you. Here are a few tips to help keep those early days as stress-free as possible.

The journey home

Make sure you and your cat are safe when travelling in a car by using a suitable cat carrier and securing it correctly.

Place a familiar-smelling item in the carrier, such as a blanket from their bed at the RSPCA centre, to help your rescue cat feel more at ease. A light blanket or towel over the top of the carrier can also help them feel more secure.

Many cats don't feel safe while travelling, so your new cat may become quite vocal on the way home – but don't be tempted to let them out of their carrier.

Some cats will poo or vomit because they're nervous or not used to travelling. If they do, please remember to be patient and don't tell them off. Instead, calmly remove them from the car when you get home – you can clean it up later.

Introducing the cat-friendly room

With all the excitement of arriving home, it can be tempting to let your new cat out to explore the house and meet everyone. However, this is overwhelming for most cats, making them feel very worried and want to hide away. Instead, it's best if you introduce them to their cat-friendly room straight away (see page 8).

Place their carrier next to their hiding place so they can easily move there. Make sure the door to their cat-friendly room is closed before you open the carrier. Let your cat come out of their carrier in their own time – don't try to take them out. Slow and calm is best. Some cats may take a while before they decide to come out of their carrier. This isn't anything to worry about and you can always get on with other things in the house and leave them to it.

Helping them settle

It will naturally take your cat a while to settle into their new home, in the same way that it will take time for you to get to know them. Here are some tips to help you during the first few days.

Keep things familiar

Cats have a powerful sense of smell, which they use to explore. It helps them to understand whether the environment is safe or not. Familiar-smelling items can help cats to feel a bit more settled when everything else around them looks, sounds and smells very new. That's why bringing a familiar-smelling item home from the RSPCA and putting it in their cat-friendly room is a great way to help your rescue cat settle. However, make sure it's a different item to the one you put in their carrier on the way home.

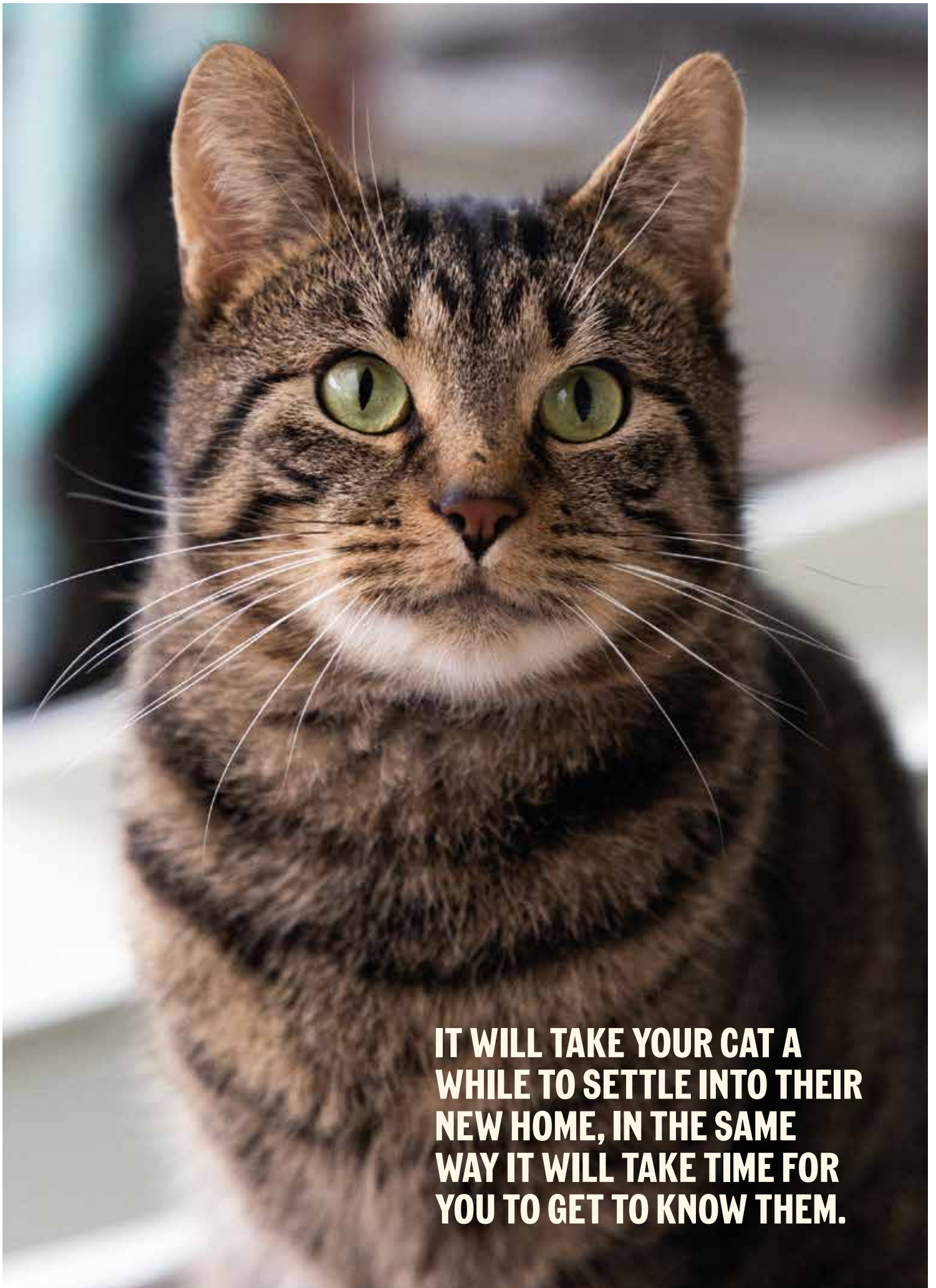


We left Barney in his own room and gave him time to come out. It took a little while but then he was out exploring.

Barney's adopter

TOP TIP

A carrier can make a great hiding and resting place for cats. And leaving it out in their room can help them feel more comfortable the next time they need to travel in it.



IT WILL TAKE YOUR CAT A WHILE TO SETTLE INTO THEIR NEW HOME, IN THE SAME WAY IT WILL TAKE TIME FOR YOU TO GET TO KNOW THEM.



**SET OUT A GOOD
ROUTINE FROM THE
BEGINNING – THIS
WILL HELP YOUR CAT
SETTLE IN BY KNOWING
WHAT’S GOING TO
HAPPEN AND WHEN.**

TOP TIP

Make sure you give your rescue cat space when they're meeting new people so they don't feel overwhelmed. And always supervise children when they're near your cat.



Nelson was a little shy at first when exploring and finding his feet. He hid under the bed for a while but eventually came out when he was ready to explore and now he has the run of the house.

Nelson's adopter

Establish a good routine

Set out a good routine from the start – this will help your cat settle in by knowing what's going to happen and when. Try to keep the main activities, like feeding and playtime, to around the same time each day.

Take things slowly

Getting a new cat can be very exciting. You'll probably want to spend lots of time with them and show them off to friends. But be patient – leaving the RSPCA and going to a new home can be overwhelming for your cat, so it's best to take things slowly.

First, give your cat time to settle in their cat-friendly room. It's fine to pop in and see your new cat, but try to keep these times short and calm to start with. It's a good idea to chat away whenever you're in the room so your new rescue cat can start to become familiar with you and all the household sounds.

Some cats become very scared when first introduced to a new environment and may spend a lot of time hiding. Don't worry, this is a completely natural cat behaviour. If you take things calmly and slowly, their confidence will grow.

Once your cat has had time to settle and seems comfortable in their room, they should be ready to meet you and other members of the household properly. Sit calmly in the cat-friendly room and allow your new rescue cat to approach you. Talk gently to them and offer them a few tasty treats by placing these on the floor, then move away so your cat is able to feel safe when approaching and eating the treats.

If your cat appears worried or backs off, give them some space and keep the session short – you have years to bond with each other, so you don't need to rush it. There's more information on introducing your cat to new people and children on pages 20–21.

Introducing the rest of the house

You can expect it to take a few days for your cat to be ready to have access to the whole house. Signs your cat is ready include them being comfortable in your presence and consistently using their litter tray and feeding areas.

When your cat is ready, you can simply prop open the door to their cat-friendly room a little and allow them to wander out in their own time. Depending on the size of your home, it's best to gradually allow access to all areas – a couple of rooms at a time.

Always make sure they can retreat back to their room or to a hiding place any time they want to. Once your cat has had a good chance to explore, gently encourage them back to their room with a tasty treat or toy. It's best to have a few sessions like this before you give them unlimited access to the whole house.

House rules

Start as you mean to go on with any house rules – for example, which areas of the house your cat will have access to and whether they'll be allowed on work surfaces or furniture. Prevent access to any areas where you don't want your cat to go – consistency from day one will make things much clearer for your cat to understand, and can help avoid problems at a later stage.

Creating a cat-friendly home

Once your cat is ready to explore the rest of your house, you'll need to start adding resources to other rooms. This means separate food and water bowls, beds, toys, scratching posts and litter trays. Take time to think about where each item would be best located.

Your rescue cat should still have access to the resources in their cat-friendly room until they're consistently using the resources elsewhere in the house.

Scratching posts

Different cats will want to scratch in different areas of the house. For example, you may find your cat likes to stretch and scratch after a snooze, so it's a good idea to place their scratching post next to their bed. Follow your cat's preferences and place scratching facilities in their favourite spots.

Remember, cats are highly motivated to scratch – it's a way of stretching, keeping their claws in good condition and also a method of communication. Never shout at or punish your cat for scratching somewhere you'd rather they didn't. They'll find it really scary and it might make things worse. Instead, try to give them suitable places to scratch in that area.

Hiding places

Hiding is one of the ways that cats cope when they're feeling worried or stressed – it helps them to feel more safe. The more hiding places you can offer them the better, especially while your rescue cat is settling in and exploring a whole new house.

Put hiding places in a few locations around the house, away from noisy or busy areas such as corridors or kitchens.

Hiding places needn't cost much. You can make a great hiding place by cutting an entrance and exit hole (big enough for your cat!) in a cardboard box and filling it with soft bedding.

Raised resting spots

Being able to get up high is another important behaviour for cats. Having a good view of their surroundings can help them to feel safe and secure. You can put up sturdy shelving or use a cat tree, or adapt existing window sills or furniture – for example, lay cosy blankets on top of a wardrobe. Just make sure it's secure and your cat will be able to get up and down safely.

Food and water

Although we typically place our pets' food and water next to each other, cats actually prefer them to be kept apart. This isn't because cats are fussy; it's a behaviour they've inherited from their wild ancestors.

Litter tray

Just like us, cats like to have privacy when they use the toilet, so place their litter tray in a quiet part of the house. Remember, utility rooms may be quiet at times but the noises from washing machines and tumble dryers could put your cat off their business!

Bed

With so much going on, your new rescue cat will need a nice quiet place to rest. Just like with their hiding places, their bed is best placed in a quiet, warm and draught-free part of the house.



We set up lots of hiding places around the house, such as cardboard boxes Spike could hide in if he wanted. However, we quickly discovered he much prefers to be up high! He used to spend a lot of time on the kitchen cupboards, so we bought him a tall cat tree to climb and perch on.

Spike's adopter

TOP TIP

Even if you're adopting an elderly or disabled cat, access to a raised resting spot is important. Make sure they can get to it easily without having to jump and can rest on it comfortably.

TOP TIP

Don't interrupt your cat while they're using their litter tray.



Buzz took to using a litter tray very well. He lets me know if it needs to be cleaned out – he likes it cleaned immediately!

Buzz's adopter

Toilet training

Cats are very clean animals who have quite specific needs when it comes to going to the toilet. Mishaps in the house can be common, especially when they're settling into a new home, but one reason a cat may go to the toilet somewhere they shouldn't is because their litter tray environment doesn't meet their needs.

Because different cats will have different preferences, getting the set-up right for your new cat is likely to involve some trial and error. To start you off on the right path, here are some tips.

Setting up their litter tray

- Always use the biggest tray you can for your cat, as they like to move around a lot before they toilet. As a minimum, their litter tray should be one and a half times the length of your cat from their nose to the base of their tail.
- You'll need more than one litter tray if you have more than one cat, but even for one cat it's helpful to give them a choice of toilet places. Some cats prefer to poo in one tray and wee in another. Having multiple litter trays also means it's easier to make sure there's always one clean tray available, as cats often prefer to go in a clean tray.
- Work out where to put the litter trays – remember, cats like privacy, so choose a quiet spot away from activity in the home, and make sure everyone in the house knows to give the cat space when they're going to the toilet. Avoid putting litter trays next to doors, windows, cat flaps and hallways.
- Fill the trays with a good depth of litter – at least 3cm (1in). This is important to allow your cat to dig and cover their mess.
- To start with, use the type of litter your cat has been using at the RSPCA centre. Most cats prefer a soft sandy litter that they can easily dig and rake with their claws. To see which litter your cat prefers, give them options by trying a different litter in a second tray.
- Most scented litters are for the owner's benefit and not the cat's. Strong smells can actually be unpleasant to cats and may put them off using the litter tray.
- Avoid litter tray liners – most cats will be put off by these.
- Some cats prefer using hooded trays, while others don't. If you want to use a hooded tray, start by giving your cat options – provide a hooded tray alongside an uncovered tray.



Litter training your new rescue cat

Most RSPCA rescue cats won't need to be trained to use their litter tray, but here are some tips if your cat needs a little refresher course.

- Use the advice on page 15 to make their litter tray as appealing as possible.
- Make sure your cat knows where and what their litter tray is. With a tray full of clean litter, dig and scratch around a little with your fingers to show your cat.
- Make sure anything else in the house with surfaces similar to litter, such as large plants in pots, are covered so your cat isn't tempted to go to the toilet there instead.
- While your cat's learning to use their litter tray, remove the clumps and any wet litter each time they use it. Check out the advice on cleaning, below.

Remember, accidents happen. Please don't tell off your cat, as they won't understand and it will make them scared of you.

Cleaning

You'll need to clean your cat's litter tray regularly. Make sure your cat isn't around when you do this – for some cats, seeing their litter tray investigated by others is stressful. Scoop out any clumped litter or poo at least once a day and maybe top up with a little fresh litter if it's looking low. Remove the old litter and clean the whole tray at least once a week. To encourage your cat to keep using their litter tray, keep a little of the old (unsoiled) litter and mix it with the new.

In order to thoroughly clean up after an accident and remove the smell, you'll need to use a specific type of cleaner called an enzymatic cleaner, which you can buy from most pet shops. Alternatively, wash the area with a 10 percent solution of biological washing powder before rinsing with water and allowing it to dry.

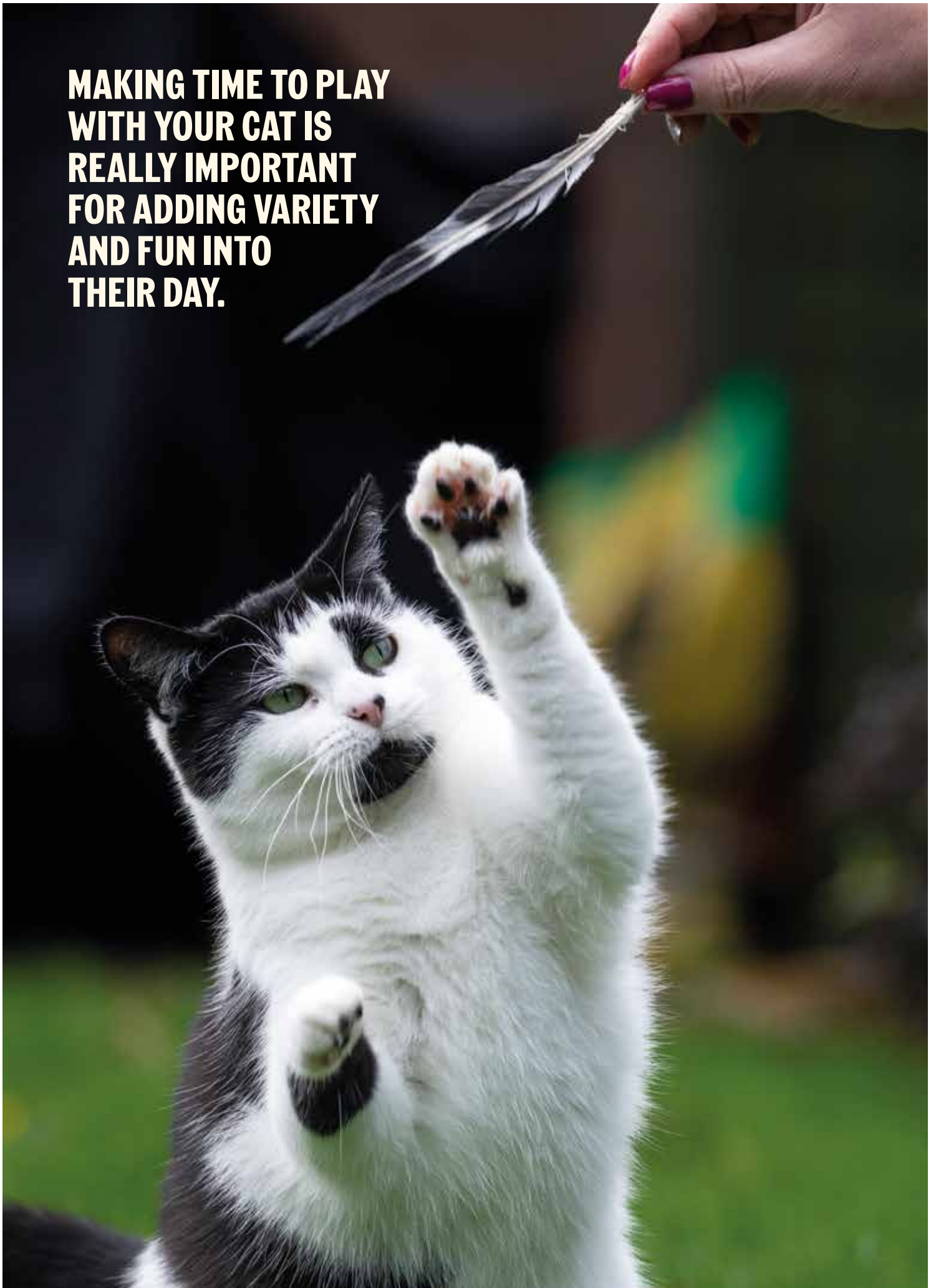
TOP TIP

Avoid cleaning with heavily scented products or spraying air fresheners. Cats are very sensitive to smells and this could put them off using their litter tray. Make sure cleaning products are safe to use around pets.





**MAKING TIME TO PLAY
WITH YOUR CAT IS
REALLY IMPORTANT
FOR ADDING VARIETY
AND FUN INTO
THEIR DAY.**



Learning to live together

Over the next few weeks you'll start to discover your new cat's true personality and what they're like at home. You'll also find out how they like to play, what their favourite toy is and where they like to sleep. Follow our advice over the next few pages so you and your cat can live happily together.

Playtime

Cats are active animals and many enjoy playing. Play can be great exercise, both for your cat's brain and body – it stops them getting bored and keeps them at a healthy weight.

Some cats enjoy playing on their own, so make sure there are always suitable, safe toys available. Cats tend to like small, multi-textured toys but they'll all have their favourites – take time getting to know which toys your cat most enjoys playing with.

Playing together can also help to strengthen your bond. There's a bit of an art to playing with cats and if you're a first-time cat owner it might take a little practice to master your skills. Please don't encourage your cat to jump on you or to use your hands as a toy, as this can lead to painful injuries!

Cats like to chase objects that are moving in rapid and unpredictable ways – just like a mouse or bird does. Try using a stick-and-string toy and encourage your cat to stalk, chase and grab at the toy. Be sure to always let your cat grab and hold the toy during play so they don't get frustrated. For this reason, laser-pen-type toys are best avoided.

Showing affection

You may be keen to show your cat lots of affection, but most cats won't appreciate cuddles or belly rubs, and many don't like to be picked up and held. When cats groom each other, they focus on the head and neck and most cats prefer these areas to be stroked by people, too.

Getting out and about

Outdoor access is important for your cat so they can do all the things that cats like to do, including snoozing in the sun, climbing and exploring. Letting them out can cause a bit of anxiety the first few times, but if you take things slowly then both you and your cat will soon feel more relaxed.

You should keep your new cat indoors for around two to three weeks before letting them outside for the first time. This gives them a chance to settle into their new home and become familiar with where they live. The right amount of time will vary depending on the cat – your cat should be comfortable in their home environment, and with people, before they have outdoor access.

When it's time to start letting them out, begin with short and supervised sessions. To start with, it's best not to let your cat outside when they're most active – this is generally around dawn and dusk. Instead, let them into your garden in the early afternoon, before their dinner time. Sit out with them and keep the door propped open so they can go back inside at any point. After they've had a good chance to explore, call them back in for some food.



Spike's such a big personality and his antics always put a smile on our faces. We love him to bits and can't imagine life without him.”

Spike's adopter

TOP TIP

Make playtime extra satisfying for your cat by giving them a tasty treat at the end of every play session. But keep treats small – remember, they count towards your cat's daily food intake.

In and out

After a few supervised sessions your cat should be ready to start spending time outside on their own. It's best if you have a cat flap so your cat can always get into the house. We recommend microchip-operated cat flaps, which you can programme to recognise your cat's chip. These have the added bonus of preventing unwanted neighbourhood cats letting themselves in.

Place large potted shrubs around the outside of the cat flap to give your cat a more secure exit – they can use the pots to hide behind while they check out who or what else is in the garden.

If you don't have a cat flap, you'll need to let your cat in and out yourself. If this is the case, make sure your cat has a waterproof and draught-free shelter in the garden that they can always access to stay warm and dry.

Introducing new experiences

There may be things your cat has never experienced before, or they may have had bad experiences, which can make them feel anxious. Help them by making sure any new experiences are positive. The key to this is to help them feel safe.

Help your cat feel safe by:

- always keeping calm
- introducing new things gradually
- using treats or toys to create positive associations
- allowing your cat to approach in their own time
- allowing your cat to move away from anything that worries them.

Meeting new people

Some cats really enjoy human company and will be comfortable and happy meeting new people. But all cats are different, and some may be a little worried or nervous around new people. Watching your cat closely can help you to understand how they're feeling (see page 22).

If your cat seems scared or worried when meeting new people, make sure your cat can always move away easily and isn't pressured to greet them. Make sure visitors don't accidentally block your cat's exit out of the room. Ask new people to give your cat space and allow your cat to approach in their own time. Once your cat's ready to approach, you may want to ask the person to offer them a treat or a game, or hold out their hand for your cat to smell and rub against.

Avoid exposing your cat to lots of people all at once. Even if they appear happy to meet new people, it's important to take things slowly to avoid overwhelming your cat.

TOP TIP

The outside can be really exciting for your new rescue cat. To give them an incentive to come back in, have a pot of tasty treats ready to shake and give as a reward. You can also add a verbal cue such as 'home time' when you shake the treats to start teaching your cat a recall.

TOP TIP

When your cat meets new people, look at the position of their tail. Approaching with their tail held upright with the tip curved signals a friendly greeting.



Spending time with children

Cats can find children hard to understand because they behave in a very different way to adults – they can be loud and unpredictable and many show their feelings by using lots of physical contact such as hugs and kisses. For many cats, this type of behaviour can be threatening, particularly for those who weren't introduced to children when they were kittens. Here are some important tips to keep children safe and cats happy.

- If children are very young, it's best not to leave them alone with your new rescue cat. Cats sometimes use their teeth and claws when they play and can become quite excited.
- Children need to be shown how to be gentle with cats. Instead of picking up and cuddling your cat, teach them to give gentle strokes on your cat's head, cheeks and chin. Sometimes young children, particularly toddlers, don't know their own strength, so it's sensible to supervise them when they're with your new rescue cat.
- Cats need lots of rest, so children (and adults) should never force your cat to play or disturb them while they're sleeping or eating. If your cat moves away or hides, they may be stressed and should be left alone.



Understanding your cat's behaviour

Just like you, your cat can experience a range of emotions, including happiness, anxiety and fear. It's important to understand which emotions your cat is feeling so you can make sure they're happy and healthy.

It's not always obvious how a cat is feeling – for example, a cat who's worried might spend a lot of time hiding. Use our guide below and share it with your friends and family so you can all recognise important body language signals and get to know how your cat is feeling.

TOP TIP

Cats prefer brief interactions. They like to be able to say a quick 'hello' and then move away. Allow your cat to approach you, then treat them to a gentle chin, cheek and head rub – perfect cat etiquette!

Recognise your cat's body language

A HAPPY CAT – this cat is relaxed and happy.



1. Cat is standing, body posture is relaxed, ears are in a natural position, tail is upright with the tip curved, eyes are a normal shape, mouth is closed.



2. Cat is lying down, belly is exposed, body is stretched out and relaxed, ears are in a natural position, eyes may be partly closed, mouth is closed.



3. Cat is sitting, body posture is relaxed, tail is held loosely from the body, ears are in a natural position, eyes are a normal shape, mouth is closed.

A WORRIED CAT – this cat is uncomfortable and doesn't want you near them.



1. Cat is in a crouched position, muscles are tense, tail is tucked tightly into body, ears are swivelled sideways, head is slightly lowered and tucked into body, pupils are dilated, mild tension shows in face.



2. Cats who are worried or anxious may hide.

AN ANGRY OR VERY UNHAPPY CAT – this cat isn't happy and wants you to stay away or go away.



1. Cat is lying down, limbs and tail are held tight and close to body, ears are flattened, pupils are dilated.



2. Cat is lying down, body is tense and slightly rolled over to one side, ears are flattened and drawn back, pupils are dilated, mouth is open and tense, teeth are showing.



3. Cat is standing, back is arched, body is held sideways, hair is raised, posture is tense, front paw is slightly lifted (ready to swipe if needed), ears are lowered and pointing to the side, mouth is open and tense, teeth are showing, tail is tense.



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Training your cat

Cats may not need to learn how to sit on command or walk nicely on a lead, like dogs, but there are some really useful behaviours you can teach them. You could train your cat to come when called, which is handy if you need to get them inside. Cats should also be trained to feel comfortable getting in and out of their carrier – this can make travelling and visits to the vet much less stressful for you and your cat. Training your cat to enjoy grooming is especially helpful if they're long-haired.

Training should be fun for both you and your cat – it can help to build your relationship and is a great way to enjoy each other's company. Learning new behaviours is also an excellent form of physical and mental exercise for your cat – teaching tricks, such as giving a paw or rolling over, can get them thinking and moving.

All training should be reward-based. The better the reward, the more your cat will enjoy training and learning. If you give your cat something they really like when they show positive behaviour, they're more likely to do it again. This means it's important to find out what your cat's favourite things are. Some cats find a chin or head rub very rewarding while others love a particular food, such as dried fish or small pieces of chicken. Have fun getting to know your cat and finding out what motivates them the most!

Remember, treats count towards your cat's daily food intake, so watch what you give them to stop them getting overweight. Keep treats small – about half the size of your fingernail.

Top training tips

- Give your cat time to settle into their new home before starting any training.
- Practice makes perfect and training can take time.
- Break training up into short but regular sessions.
- Train in a room in your house where your cat feels comfortable.
- Train at a time when your cat's active and awake.
- Reward your cat with something they really love.

Remember, never shout at your cat or tell them off for mistakes they make. This won't help them learn and is very likely to damage your relationship as it can make them afraid of you. Be patient if mistakes are made during training, or if your cat is showing a behaviour you don't want.





Living with two or more cats

We'll do our best to match you with a cat who'll fit into your family, including any other pets you have. But it's important to remember that not all cats will become friends. If you already own one or more cats, make sure you follow our advice so all your cats live as happily together as possible.

Introductions are important

The way cats are introduced to each other can make a difference to how happily and comfortably they'll live together, so check out our advice on page 9. Don't be tempted to skip the step-by-step process – taking time and making introductions gradually is the best way to go.

Cat social behaviour

Understanding cat social behaviour can be helpful if you have more than one cat. The social behaviour of the domestic cat is a little complex. Sometimes domestic cats will form a social group and become friends. But, just like their wild, solitary ancestors, many cats are happiest living on their own.

Unless cats consider themselves to be in the same social group, they won't be friendly with each other and will do their best to keep away from one another. They can also find it stressful sharing important resources, such as food, water and litter trays.

Many owners think their cats are friends if they don't fight, hiss or swipe at each other, but this isn't always the case. There are other more subtle signs, such as avoidance, hiding, and blocking access to resources, that can mean cats aren't friends. These less obvious signs can sometimes be missed.

Cats who are friends tend to:

- groom and clean each other
- rub against each other
- sleep side by side, snuggled up together
- play together.

TOP TIP

Sometimes a cat will deliberately block another cat's access to important resources, such as food or the cat flap. The cat might put themselves between the other cat and the resource, or stare at the other cat when they try to get to the resource. If you see this happening, add another resource in a different location.

Managing resources

Your cat's resources include all the essential items they need, such as water, food, scratching posts, hiding places, bed, litter tray and toys.

Each cat in your household needs to be able to access all the resources without being stopped by another cat, or having to get close to another cat they aren't friendly with. For this reason:

- Make sure you have at least one more resource than there are cats. So, if you have two cats, you'll need at least three hiding places.
- Spread the resources throughout the house. Take care to put them where every cat can easily access them and where they spend their time. For example, if one cat spends most of their time upstairs, make sure they can access all their resources there without having to come downstairs.

If you place feeding bowls in the same area, it means cats often have no choice but to get close to one another through fear of missing out on a tasty meal. Although your cats may be prepared to do this, it might be unpleasant and uncomfortable for them. Instead, give your cats a chance to relax and enjoy their meals in peace by feeding them in separate areas.

Two litter trays placed next to, or nearby, each other will be seen as only one toilet by your cats. Make sure the right number of litter trays for the number of cats you have are placed carefully in private spots throughout the house.

Preventing and managing behaviour problems

As your cat settles into their new life and routine, you may start to experience some problems or see behaviours you didn't expect and are worried about.

Always try to think about things from your cat's perspective, as this can help you to understand why they may be behaving in a particular way.

Try to understand your cat

Although we see them as pets, in many ways our cats today behave in similar ways to their wild cat ancestors. For example, they're still territorial (protective of an area they see as theirs) and have a natural instinct to hunt prey as well as being vulnerable prey themselves. It's helpful to remember this when you're trying to understand your cat's behaviours and are thinking about how you want them to behave.

How we think about our cats can influence their behaviour. For many people, cats are a significant member of their family and can be treated very much like people. There's nothing wrong with this, as long as we remember that cats are cats and not little people – or even small dogs. Although cats are very intelligent, they don't always experience emotions in the same way as us or think about things in the same way we do. For example, they can't plan ahead or think about what happened yesterday. They don't do things deliberately to annoy us, such as going to the toilet in the house. And they don't know that jumping up on the counter when we turn our backs is wrong.

There are many ways in which cat and human behaviour differs, and we sometimes need to hold back on some of our behaviours to have a better relationship with our cats. For example, as humans, we might greet friends and family with a big hug, but cats prefer to start interactions themselves and will often be much happier with a quick head rub as a greeting.

TOP TIP

If you have more than one cat, make sure there are enough litter trays, beds, toys, food bowls and water bowls for each of them, as well as enough space for them to get away from each other. Cats are territorial and can get stressed if they have to share these things with other cats.

TOP TIP

Some cats become anxious at the sound of fireworks. Help your cat cope with fireworks by preparing in advance of fireworks seasons. Find out how at: [rspca.org.uk/fireworks](https://www.rspca.org.uk/fireworks)

Speak to them in the right way

If we don't communicate with our cats in the right way, it can cause behaviour problems. If we upset them by shouting and telling them off, we can easily break the bond we have with them and potentially cause more problems. It's much better for us, and them, to try to understand how they think and feel – it makes it easier for us to communicate with them without damaging our relationship.

Make sure they're not bored

Some problem behaviours happen because a cat is bored. For instance, they may play with your feet or hands if they're not getting enough regular play sessions. Problems can also happen if a cat is unable to behave in a natural way – for example, if they only have access to a small or unstable scratching post, they might use the sofa or other furniture to scratch on instead.

Look out for signs of fear, anxiety or aggression

Fearful or anxious behaviour generally means your cat is unhappy in certain situations. This can be a result of poor breeding, experiences when they were a kitten, or something that happened to them before coming into RSPCA care. If your cat often shows fear, or is frightened of many things, then they may not be enjoying life to the full and it's important to seek expert help. Cats who show aggressive behaviour may be in pain or feel threatened and unhappy.



What to do if you're having problems

If you're worried about how your adopted cat is behaving, please get in touch with us as soon as possible – we'll work with you to help understand why your cat is behaving in a certain way and offer advice to help manage the problem. In some cases, we may refer you for more specialist advice, especially if we're worried about how your cat is feeling and think they may not be enjoying life to the full.

- If you experience problems and would like some help, please contact the RSPCA branch or animal centre where you adopted your cat.
- If you're still concerned about your cat's behaviour, it's a good idea to get them checked over by a vet to rule out illness or injury as the cause. If necessary, the vet can refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist (CAB) for further help. Work with your vet to make sure the animal behaviourist is accredited and registered with the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC). Use the ABTC website (abtc.org.uk) to help find a CAB that's local to you.

If a family member develops an allergy

Owner allergy is one of the most common reasons for a cat being returned to our care. However, cats are sometimes wrongly blamed for being the cause of an allergic reaction when there are many other possible causes, including grass and tree pollen or dust mites. If you or a member of the family does experience an allergic reaction, make sure you speak to your GP about the symptoms and arrange an allergy test so you can be sure what the cause is.

If you've seen the doctor and they've confirmed your new cat is the cause of your symptoms, it doesn't automatically mean you have to give up your new family member. As long as allergies aren't severe, it's possible to live happily and healthily with your cat by making a few adjustments.

- Talk to your GP about how you can manage your symptoms – for example, by using antihistamines.
- Reduce the amount of cat allergen in your home by keeping some rooms of your house, particularly bedrooms, cat-free zones. And make sure your cat always has outdoor access to encourage them to spend more time outside the house.
- Brush your cat regularly. This should be done outside and by a family member who isn't allergic.
- Wash your cat's bed regularly.
- Wooden or laminate flooring is best for controlling allergens, but if you have carpets, frequent vacuuming can help. Stay out of newly vacuumed rooms for a while, as vacuuming can stir up allergens into the air.

Of course, if the allergy is severe, or you're unable to manage your allergies, then please get in touch with the RSPCA branch or animal centre where you adopted your cat and we'll support you in finding them a new home.

TOP TIP *If you're concerned about allergies, or have never lived with a cat before, bring an item such as a T-shirt, scarf or towel into the cattery. We'll leave it with your chosen cat for 24 hours so that it gets covered in their hair and scent. You can then collect it and wear or wrap it around you to see if you're likely to have an allergy to that individual cat.*

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RSPCA 

*Provides control if used as part of a monthly flea and tick control programme (RSPCA FLEAaway® SPC).

Keeping your cat healthy

It's important to regularly check your cat for signs of poor health or injury. Make sure you take them to the vet for routine checks, advice or treatment, and keep up to date with their vaccinations.

Finding a vet

Your cat will need to visit the vet at least once a year for their annual vaccination and a health check. You can speak to your vet to see if they offer a healthcare plan for your pet. This will allow you to spread the cost of preventative veterinary treatment, such as regular health checks, annual vaccinations and flea and worm treatments, while making sure your pet remains fit and healthy.

Vaccinations

Cats are usually vaccinated against feline infectious enteritis, feline herpes virus and feline calicivirus. The RSPCA centre will have made sure your new rescue cat is up to date with their vaccinations.

We'll confirm with you exactly which vaccinations your new cat has had and when their annual booster is due. It's important to keep up the annual vaccinations for your cat to protect them from getting diseases and becoming ill. Speak to your vet for more advice.

Worms, fleas and ticks

All cats get worms at some point in their life. If regular worming treatment isn't given, your cat can get ill. Worms can also pose a small risk to your family's health. Make sure you clean away cat mess regularly and give your cat worming treatments as advised by your vet.

Fleas can thrive in your home, so keep giving your cat monthly flea treatment using RSPCA FLEAaway® to keep them at bay. If you do get fleas in your home, you'll also need to treat your carpets and soft furnishings with a suitable product.

RSPCA FLEAaway® also helps prevent ticks. Ticks attach to any part of a cat's body and feed on their blood. Ticks can pass diseases to your cat, so it's best to remove them as soon as possible – speak to your vet about how to do this safely.

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) is a cat disease that can be passed from cat to cat by direct contact. This virus is more commonly found in unneutered males (see page 34) and sickly cats. You'll be told whether or not your new cat has been tested while in RSPCA care and what the result was. If your new cat hasn't been tested, and you're concerned about this disease, you can ask for this to be done by your vet.

For more information, please visit: rspca.org.uk/fiv



Having pet insurance can help you cope with unexpected vet bills for illness or injury. For information on the benefits of pet insurance, visit: rspca.org.uk/petinsurance

A black and white cat is climbing a tree trunk in a garden. The cat has a white chest and belly, with black patches on its back and face. It has yellow eyes and is looking towards the right. The background is filled with green leaves and some brown autumn leaves on the ground.

**PLAYING AND EXPLORING
OUTDOORS WILL HELP
KEEP YOUR CAT HEALTHY
AND HAPPY.**

Looking after their teeth

Having clean and healthy teeth is as important for your cat as it is for you! Every cat who comes into our care will receive a health check where we'll check their teeth and gums for any problems. Immediate issues will be treated based on the advice of a vet.

We recommend you speak to your own vet about how to make sure your cat's teeth are in a healthy condition and how to keep them that way. You may find your vet recommends teeth scaling or polishing under anaesthetic – we try not to do this while cats are with us unless absolutely necessary.

Brushing your cat's teeth with a specially designed cat toothpaste and brush can help to keep their teeth healthy by dislodging food particles and preventing the build-up of tartar, which can lead to dental disease. Toys designed to help clean your cat's teeth can also be useful.

Grooming

Regularly grooming your cat can be a great way to bond with them and also a chance to keep a check on how healthy they are. It should be introduced slowly, using rewards to make your cat feel comfortable.

Grooming not only helps remove dead hairs and improve circulation but it can also feel nice for them.

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.

You can find more advice on grooming, including tips for short- and long-haired cats in our handy grooming guide at: rspca.org.uk/cats/health If you're having any problems grooming your cat, please speak to the RSPCA centre you've been dealing with or your vet.

Watching their weight

Just like us, cats can easily become overweight if they eat more calories than they use up. Being overweight can lead to health issues, such as diabetes, heart disease, respiratory distress, high blood pressure and cancers.

Always follow the instructions on the food packet to make sure you give your cat the correct portion size. And remember, treats and titbits count towards your cat's daily calorie intake.

Cats naturally eat little and often, so it's best to split their daily food into several small meals throughout the day, unless advised otherwise by your vet.

Check on a regular basis that your cat is the right size and weight – use our guide opposite. If you're worried about your cat's weight, it's best to speak to your vet.

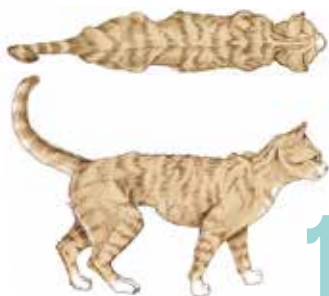
TOP TIP

Don't give your cat milk. Cats aren't able to properly digest lactose, so milk can give them an upset stomach. Even milks that are sold specifically for cats can be high in fat and lead to weight gain.

TOP TIP

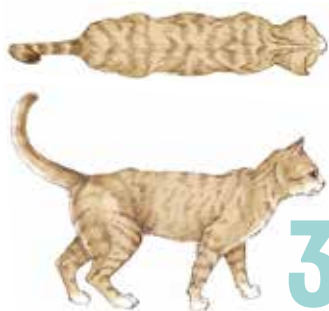
Just like people, white cats can get sunburnt. If your new RSPCA rescue cat is white or has patches of white on their coat, especially on their nose and/or ears, speak to us or your vet about how you can keep them protected from the sun.

The body condition system



TOO THIN

1. Ribs are seen on short-haired cats. No fat can be felt. Tummy is tucked up high. Backbone and wings of pelvic bones are easily felt.



2. Ribs are easily seen on short-haired cats. Obvious backbone with minimal muscle. Tummy is tucked up, no fat can be felt.

3. Ribs are easily felt, with minimal fat covering. Obvious backbone. Waist easily seen behind ribs. Minimal tummy fat.

4. Ribs can be felt, with minimal fat covering. Noticeable waist behind ribs. Slight tummy tuck. No tummy fat pad (the pouch under a cat's belly).



IDEAL

5. Well-proportioned waist is seen behind ribs. Ribs can be felt, with a slight fat covering. Minimal pouch beneath belly.



TOO HEAVY

6. Ribs can be felt, with a slight excess fat covering. Waist and pouch beneath belly can be seen, but aren't obvious. No tummy tuck.

7. Ribs aren't easily felt, with moderate fat covering. Waist barely visible. Obvious rounding of tummy. Moderate pouch beneath belly.

8. Ribs can't be felt, with excess fat covering. No waist. Obvious rounding of tummy with prominent pouch beneath belly. Fatty areas around backbone.



9. Ribs can't be felt under heavy fat cover. Heavy fatty areas around backbone, face and limbs. Swollen tummy with no waist. Large fatty areas over tummy.

Adapted from The BODY CONDITION SCORE, The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) Global Nutrition Committee.

Neutering

Your new rescue cat should be neutered (also known as 'spayed' for a girl cat or 'snipped' for a boy cat) before they leave RSPCA care. If for some reason your cat hasn't been neutered, for example due to advice from a vet, we'll let you know and may arrange for you and your cat to come back at a later date so this can be done. If it's easier, you can also make arrangements with your local vet.

Unless advised otherwise by a vet, cats should be neutered at around four months old. Neutering has many benefits for both you and your cat, including the following.

- If your new rescue cat is a girl, having her spayed will stop the attention of tomcats who'll want to mate with her. It's important to have her spayed when she's four months old to protect her from getting pregnant while she's still a kitten herself.
- If your new rescue cat is a boy, having him snipped can stop him spraying in your house to mark his territory (which can be very smelly!) and prevent him getting nasty injuries from fights. He'll also be less likely to wander off and come to harm because cats who are snipped tend to stay closer to home.

Poisoning

The following foods, and food containing these ingredients, are poisonous to cats:

- chocolate
- grapes
- raisins
- sultanas
- currants
- onions
- leeks
- garlic
- xylitol (sugar-free sweetener commonly found in sugar-free gums and sweets or as a replacement in baking).

Never 'watch and wait' if you think your cat might have been poisoned. Act fast and contact your nearest vet for advice immediately. There's also an Animal Poison Line at: animalpoisonline.co.uk

More information on poisoning can be found at: rspca.org.uk/poisoning

When to call a vet

Cats can suffer from a range of diseases and other illnesses but individual cats show pain and suffering in different ways. A change in the way your cat behaves can be a sign they're distressed, bored, ill or injured. Once your cat has settled into your home, take the time to get to know how they usually behave. That way, you'll be able to spot any changes in their behaviour, such as different toileting, eating or sleeping habits, or hiding or avoiding you more.

If you're worried about the health of your cat, if they're displaying any symptoms of ill health, or if you spot any changes in their behaviour, please contact your vet.

TOP TIP

Book your cat in for neutering as soon as possible. You may have heard it's good for cats to have a litter of kittens before they're spayed, but this isn't true. Once cats have been spayed or snipped they'll be able to start doing all the things that cats enjoy doing, including exploring outdoors, climbing trees and playing.

Useful contacts

Your RSPCA contact

RSPCA branch/animal centre

RSPCA telephone number

Vet

Pet insurance policy and telephone numbers

Cat behaviourist

Cat sitter

- RSPCA cat care advice: rspca.org.uk/cats
- Find a vet: findavet.rcvs.org.uk
- The Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors: apbc.org.uk
- The Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour: asab.org
- International Cat Care: icatcare.org/advice



**For more information on cat adoption, please visit:
rspca.org.uk/rehomeacat or scan the QR code**

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