



Top 15 tips for keeping your cat happy and healthy



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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THANK YOU for downloading this e-book. We hope you'll enjoy these articles written by the animal care and veterinary experts at the Humane Society of the United States.

Although these tips serve as a good overview of ways to keep your cat happy and healthy, they represent just a small fraction of our articles devoted to pet care and animal welfare. To learn even more about cats, plus other animals from alligators to zebras, visit our website at [humanesociety.org](https://www.humanesociety.org).

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Your new cat

HOW TO INTRODUCE CATS

People looking to add another cat to their family often gravitate toward kittens, equating youth with instant acceptance by resident cats. But the age bias is unfounded. Dominant males can be great with kittens, who are territorially malleable, but cats with different personalities may be stressed by a lawless kitten who hasn't yet learned the language of cat.

Instead of focusing on age or your own preferences, search for a good fit for your feline team, then take a slow and structured approach to an introduction.

EXCHANGE OF SMELLS In the beginning, keep the cats separate. Confine the new addition to a small area, such as a bathroom, for up to a week. Give the newcomer a blanket or pillow that your resident

cat has lain on and swap in new items daily. This will help acclimate your new cat to the smells of her new home and her new housemate

SUPERVISED EXPLORATION Next, put your resident cat in a separate room while letting the new cat investigate other rooms. Keep some doors closed so the cat isn't overwhelmed and you can control where she goes.

VISUAL INTRODUCTIONS So far so good? With one cat confined to a room, crack open the door and let the cats see each other from a comfortable distance as you offer them each a meal. Depending on your cats' apparent comfort level, gradually decrease the distance between the feeding bowls and open the door a little wider each time. You can use a baby gate across the door to keep the cats physically separated.

SUPERVISED PHYSICAL INTRODUCTIONS Once the cats are tolerating the sight of one another, they can meet (at first it might be wise to keep them on harnesses or leashes). Have toys or treats handy that you can use to help each cat associate one another with something positive and to distract them.

LOOSELY SUPERVISED PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS If supervised meetings are successful, allow your cats to mingle while you're home. You don't need to monitor every interaction.

SOLO PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS If all is going well, it's time to leave the cats alone for gradually longer periods. Start by leaving the house for a few minutes, then increase the amount of time the animals go solo.

KEEP THE PEACE LONG-TERM Cats are territorial, so spread out bowls, litter boxes (provide one box for every cat in your household plus one extra), beds and scratching posts. Provide multiple "vertical spaces," such as cat trees and window perches, and give each cat individual playtime.

Looking for information on cats who live outdoors without owners, aka feral or community cats? Visit our outdoor cats FAQs at humanesociety.org/resources/outdoor-cats-faq.

HOW TO TRANSITION OUTDOOR CATS INDOORS

The key to helping a formerly outdoor cat become a content indoor-only kitty is all about making their inside environment just as interesting and stimulating as the outside. Start by providing store-bought or homemade cat shelves, perches, tunnels, cubbies, condos or catios (enclosed patios or outdoor areas for cats) where cats can observe their environment from a safe vantage point. Here are some other tips for convincing a free-roaming feline that indoors is the place to be.

TAKING NOTE Observe your cat's likes and dislikes. Is she a climber or more grounded? Does she sharpen her claws on vertical or horizontal objects? Are her favorite lounging spots in the shade or sun? Once you've determined her preferences, look for places around the house she might naturally enjoy: a shelf in front of a window, a cozy spot beneath an end table, or a cool patch of tile flooring that catches the morning sun.

SMOOTH TRANSITIONS Keep your cat indoors for longer and longer stints or keep them indoors at night. Make the move more appealing by feeding and playing with them inside. Timing can also help: The start of a cold season or a stretch of bad weather can be a good

time for your cat to make the switch, since the outdoors will be less alluring. If your cat has never been indoors, start by confining her in a small room or enclosure with access to a litter box, food and water.

FUN AND GAMES Cats want to be stimulated; moving toys trigger their hunting and stalking instincts. Incorporate interactive playtime to meet those needs for about 10 to 15 minutes three times a day. Give your cat new things to explore, such as interactive toys, open paper bags or even a cardboard box turned on its side. Food-dispensing toys are also a great way to stave off boredom.

TASTE OF THE OUTDOORS Provide a perch below a window, train your cat to walk outside on harness and leash, or try a pop-up tent with mesh siding outdoors. If you want a more spacious or permanent structure, several companies sell prefabricated catios in a range of sizes and configurations.

DETECTING ESCAPES If your cat yowls to be let outside and bolts toward the door every time it opens, they're bored, and it's time to make their indoor space more engaging. To deter door-barging, pair those times when you leave the house with an engaging activity. For example, you can shake a bag of treats when you're at the door and ready to leave. When your cat approaches, toss several treats away from the door.





Your cat at home

How to prevent common behavioral issues

LITTER BOX ISSUES If your cat boycotts the litter box, they're trying to tell you something is wrong.

VETERINARY INTERVENTION The first step when dealing with litter box avoidance is to check for inflammation, infection, obstruction in the urinary tract or constipation. If your cat associates pain with the litter box, they might stop using it—or even urinate right in front of you to tell you they're not well.

BIGGER BOXES The bigger the box, the better. It should be large enough and the sides high enough that your kitty's rear end doesn't hang out. Kittens and arthritic or disabled cats do best with low-sided boxes or one with an opening cut into the end for easy access. Since cats feel vulnerable in the box and prefer an unobstructed view to watch for threats, your kitty may refuse to use an enclosed box.

Hoods also keep in odor, which can offend a cat's sensitive olfactory system.

LITTER LAW Use a litter that your cat likes. Many prefer the finer texture of clumping litter over pellet or "pearl" litters, and clumping litter helps keep the box clean, but if your cat prefers something else, go with it. Keep in mind that while you may appreciate a perfumed litter, some cats dislike it.

FRESH AND CLEAN Scoop the box every day, or your cat might avoid it entirely. Replace non-clumping litter completely at least once a week and clumping litter about every two weeks. Wash boxes with hot water and mild dish detergent (bleach and ammonia can leave a kitty-repelling scent).

MAGIC NUMBER Provide one box for every cat in your household plus one extra. This helps keep each box cleaner and reduces competition. Prevent territorial behavior by placing the boxes in different rooms. Two boxes next to each other only count as one.

DO NOT DISTURB Give your kitty privacy by placing litter boxes in quiet, low-traffic areas. The laundry room isn't ideal; the noises frighten some cats and heat intensifies litter box odors.

STAYING PATIENT Litter box avoidance is due to sickness or stress, not spite. Never punish your cat by hitting, yelling or "rubbing their nose in it." You'll only teach them to fear you and the litter box.

PETTING AGGRESSION

If you're petting your cat and they suddenly bite or scratch you, it's likely they're suffering from overarousal, also called overstimulation. In your cat's view, the petting went from being pleasant to simply too much. Help prevent petting aggression by learning how to read feline body language. By understanding the cues, you can determine whether your cat prefers long, slow strokes; shorter scratches; or something in between. You can also identify where she likes to be petted (the chin, head and neck are often favorite spots, while the chest and belly are typically no-go zones). Warning signs that your cat's had enough include a turn of the head to look at your hand, ears pricked forward, a swishing tail or the subtle bristling of hairs along the shoulders or back. If you notice these signs, it's time to stop petting before your kitty resorts to a more drastic way of conveying the message. If you miss the cue and your cat lashes out, stay still for a moment and then slowly remove your hand. Don't use punishment, which will only make things worse.

DESTRUCTIVE SCRATCHING

Scratching is a normal, instinctive cat behavior. Cats do it to express emotions like excitement or stress, to mark objects with their scent (they have scent glands in their paws), to remove the dead part of their nails and, often, just to get a good stretch. Cats have no concept of "right" and "wrong" places to scratch.

THE GOOD SCRATCH Most cats prefer (even more than furniture!) a scratching post that is at least 32" tall, will not wobble when scratched and is made of a type of rope called sisal. If your cat prefers to scratch horizontally, you can either place a vertical scratching post on its side or find a sturdy sisal-covered horizontal scratcher. Introduce the post using catnip, a fishing rod toy or laser light so they will interact with the post. Do not rub your cat's paws on the post, which could cause them to avoid it.

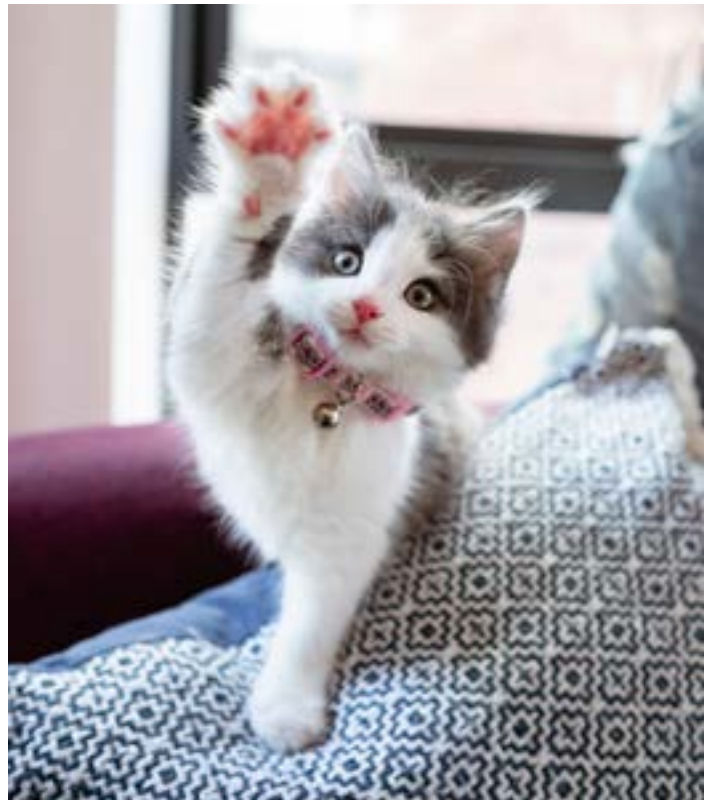
LOCATION MATTERS If your cat enjoys scratching the couch, place a scratching post next to the couch. If your cat enjoys scratching the wall by your front door when you come home, place a scratching post near your front door. Give your cat multiple scratching options throughout your home.

HOUSEHOLD DETERRENTS Temporarily deter cats from scratching the object(s) you don't want them to scratch. For furniture, the easiest and most effective solution is to cover it with a tight-fitting sheet. For smaller surfaces, use double-sided sticky tape or any other covering that will make the object's surface sticky, smooth or slick.

DECLAWING IS NOT THE ANSWER Declawing traditionally involves the amputation of the last bone of each toe. If performed on a human being, it would be like cutting off each finger at the last knuckle. This can cause lasting physical and behavioral problems for your cat.

AGGRESSION BETWEEN CATS

Aggression between cats typically comes from two impulses: fear and mistrust. The good news is that cat owners can reduce their cats' fear and mistrust of each other and increase positive feelings among the cats in the household with these steps.



THE IMPORTANCE OF SPAY/NEUTER Spaying and neutering greatly reduce aggression in cats by decreasing their territorial and sexual instincts. It's often impossible to resolve aggression among cats if one or more cats is intact. Learn more about spay/neuter at humanesociety.org/spay-neuter.

SLOW INTRODUCTIONS Cats do not “work things out.” If cats are not getting along, the tensions will only increase unless there's a proper introduction or reintroduction.

AMPLE RESOURCES Cats shouldn't need to fight over litter boxes, scratching posts, food/water bowls, human attention, play time, resting spaces, hiding spaces or toys. Make sure each cat has equal access to these resources.

PLENTY OF PLAYTIME One cat (typically the younger, active cat) chasing the other cat in play is often perceived as aggression when it's actually a result of the cat not having their daily energy needs met. Cats have much more energy to expend than most of us realize. Play is a great way to reduce stress in cats and can boost a cat's confidence while also expending physical and mental energy.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT Provide your cats with something they love (like food or a treat) when the other cat is around or when they see the other cat. Learn more about positive reinforcement at humanesociety.org/positive-reinforcement.

MINIMIZING STRESS Cats are very sensitive to changes in their territory. When they feel less safe and secure in their home, this stress could indirectly cause tensions among cats.

VETERINARY CARE Ill or injured cats do not feel safe and secure, which can create tensions in a multi-cat household.

HOW TO FIND A LOST CAT

It's scary when a pet goes missing, but most lost cats are found less than a third of a mile from where they escaped. Use the following systematic approach to bring your cat home.

PREVENT PET LOSS Ensure your cat has an up-to-date microchip and a collar with ID. Register your microchip at my24pet.com.

INVESTIGATE WITHIN A FIVE-HOUSE RADIUS Talk to your neighbors. Get permission to check under decks and porches and in crawl spaces, garages and sheds.



ALERT YOUR COMMUNITY Share eye-catching posters in your neighborhood with a clear image of your cat and your contact information. Share the same information in local Nextdoor and Facebook groups.

SHARE A PIC Upload your cat's photo to lost.petcolove.org. The site uses facial recognition software to find your pet.

NOTIFY ANIMAL SHELTERS Submit lost-pet reports to local animal shelters. Visit in person to ensure your cat isn't accidentally missed.

SEARCH AT NIGHT Scared cats are more likely to venture out of hiding when the neighborhood is quiet.

USE TECHNOLOGY Place food and water near where your cat escaped or where your cat has been sighted. Use a motion-activated camera to see if your cat visits the spot. Once you know where and when your cat is eating, you can set a humane trap to capture them.

CONSIDER RECENT EVENTS Your cat may have hitched a ride on a moving truck or be trapped in a newly constructed wall. If your cat escaped through a window, consider leaving the window open for a day—they may simply reenter.

DON'T GIVE UP Many cats are found after weeks or months of searching.



Your cat's health

How to identify common health issues

OBESITY

Giving treats might feel like an easy way to bond with your cat, but the average indoor cat only needs about 180 to 200 calories per day. Overweight pets may suffer health complications like heart disease, fatty liver, difficulty breathing/moving, skin infections, hypertension, heat sensitivity or digestive issues. Increased pressure on joints can cause arthritis, torn ligaments, hip dysplasia and slipped disks.

CHECK FOR HEALTH ISSUES Before embarking on any weight loss efforts, have a veterinarian test your cat for undiagnosed conditions like diabetes or hypothyroidism.

MEASURE CALORIES Check the nutrition facts label on your cat's food, then measure out their daily food allotment to ensure they're getting the right number of calories. You can also try a prescription diet pet food.

KEEP THEM ACTIVE Consider doing away with traditional pet food bowls entirely and instead using a kibble-dispensing toy or puzzle food bowl. Bond with your cat through daily interactive playtime.

TAKE IT SLOW Cats are vulnerable to hepatic lipidosis, a life-threatening condition also known as fatty liver disease that can be triggered by rapid weight loss, so any diet and exercise regime should happen gradually.

COLDS

In cats, colds are referred to as feline upper respiratory infection, and cases can range from mild to severe. Young kittens and senior or immunocompromised cats are particularly susceptible to URIs and require enhanced care and monitoring. You can protect your cats against some of the most common causes of URI by keeping them current on vaccines. Most URIs are caused by viruses, and just like

with people, antibiotics don't cure viral infections. But some bacterial infections can cause URI, and cats with a viral URI can develop a secondary bacterial infection. In those cases, your veterinarian will likely prescribe an oral antibiotic and/or an antibiotic eye ointment.

SIGNS OF A URI

- Sneezing
- Runny nose or nasal congestion
- Red, swollen or runny eyes; squinting
- Coughing; hypersalivation
- Ulcers on the tongue, lips, nose or roof of mouth
- Fever
- Lack of appetite
- Decreased energy

TREATMENT

- Provide a quiet, relaxed space where your cat can recover. Keep them separated from other pets to reduce stress, which can weaken the immune system, and to avoid spread to other cats in your home.
- Feed canned food, warmed slightly in the microwave, to help stimulate your cat's appetite.
- Gently clean discharge from the nose and eyes with a warm moist cloth.
- Never treat your cat with human cold medications.



WHEN TO CONTACT A VET

Reach out to your veterinarian if your cat:

- Hasn't eaten for more than 24 hours.
- Has green or yellow discharge from the nose.
- Has difficulty breathing, especially if they're panting or breathing through an open mouth.
- Shows signs of dehydration (dry, tacky gums or skin that slowly settles back into position, rather than snapping back, after being gently pinched.)
- Seems depressed or unresponsive.
- Has vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours.
- Shows little or no improvement after five days of care.

DENTAL ISSUES

Some cats may have obvious signs of disease, but in other cases, the signs may be subtle even when disease and pain are severe. If your cat was adopted with an unknown medical history or rescued from a hoarding situation, they are at higher risk of mouth diseases. To prevent cats from suffering in silence, you should watch for the signs and obtain prompt treatment.

SIGNS OF MOUTH DISEASE

- Bad breath
- Inflamed gums
- Tartar buildup
- Unkempt coat, especially along the back and rump
- Drooling
- Changes in eating habits such as poor appetite ("finicky eating"), swallowing food whole or dropping food
- Teeth chattering or lip smacking
- Weight loss
- Pawing at the face
- Facial swelling
- Sneezing
- Behavioral changes such as social withdrawal, reluctance to cheek rub, persistent hiding or aggression

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Periodontal disease can cause inflammation and gingivitis.
- Stomatitis can cause widespread oral inflammation around the teeth and can extend to the tongue and back of the mouth.
- Tooth resorption can cause very painful cavity-like lesions in the teeth.

TREATMENT

Cats showing these signs should receive an oral examination from a veterinarian (X-rays may be necessary for diagnosis). For periodontal disease and tooth resorption, treatment generally involves removal of severely affected teeth and antibiotics. Stomatitis can be more challenging to treat and may occur concurrently with other mouth issues. Most cats with stomatitis will recover (and feel much better) after surgery to remove most or all of their teeth.

EAR MITES

Ear mites are tiny, highly contagious parasites that live in cats' external ear canals and cause itching, irritation and sometimes secondary bacterial or yeast infections. Detect them early to prevent them from spreading among cats.

SIGNS

- Dry, black ear discharge that resembles coffee grounds
- Small wounds or lesions near the base of ears from excessive scratching
- Scratching at ears
- Head shaking
- Irritation and inflammation in ears

TREATMENT

GET STARTED Accumulated debris can be uncomfortable for your cat and can lead to secondary infections. Gather a towel, cotton balls and a cerumenolytic cleaner recommended by your veterinarian. Place the bottle of cleaner in a bowl of warm water and gently restrain your cat.

CLEAN THE EARS Soak a cotton ball in the cleaner, place it in the ear and massage the area. Allow your cat to shake their head, then wipe out the ear with another cotton ball, going only as far as your finger will fit without force. Do not use Q-tips or a bulb syringe, and be sure to avoid the eardrum.

KILL THE MITES Ask a veterinarian to prescribe the appropriate medication (over-the-counter medication may be ineffective or even harmful.) Pay close attention to dosing guidelines.

SOOTHE THE EARS If needed, a veterinarian can provide a topical steroid to ease inflammation and itching.

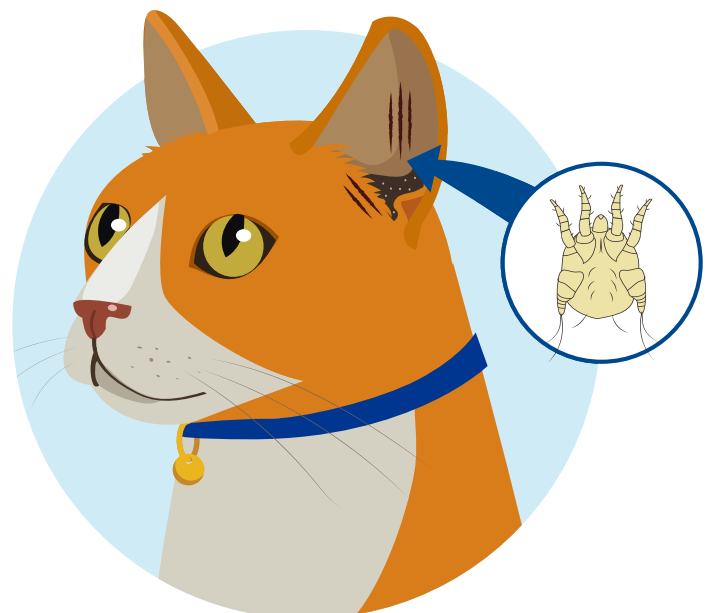
TREAT EVERYONE Treat all cats and kittens who have been exposed to the infected cat to prevent mites from spreading.

HOW TO TAKE YOUR CAT TO THE VET

Stress—for both owner and pet—is a prime obstacle to people taking their cats to the vet for preventive care. Stressed cats often act aggressively, which can prevent vets from performing a thorough exam or diagnostic tests. Here are some tips for keeping vet checks low-stress.

CARRIER ACCLIMATION Choose a carrier with a top that comes off easily and quietly. Instead of storing the carrier out of sight, place it in a comfortable spot, furnish it with a soft blanket and consider it a permanent part of your home décor that is always accessible to your cat.

PRACTICAL TRAINING Using positive reinforcement, teach your cat to enter the carrier, accept handling by strangers and cooperate for nail trims and other common procedures.





STAYING CALM Avoid scheduling appointments on hectic days, leave yourself plenty of time to prepare and don't wait until the last minute to get your cat into the carrier.

TRANSPORT TIPS Cats feel more comfortable when surrounded by familiar smells. Cover the carrier with a blanket or towel, preferably one with your scent or treated with a feline pheromone spray. Hold the carrier in your arms, not by the handle, as the swinging motion can cause fear. Place the carrier securely in your car, using straps if needed to ensure it won't slide, bounce or tip over. Avoid making sudden stops and hard turns.

AT THE CLINIC Ask the staff if you and your pet can wait in the car until the vet is ready to see you. If you must hang out in the waiting room, keep the carrier covered and, because your cat will feel more secure at an elevated vantage point, place the carrier on a chair or counter rather than the floor.

DRUG ASSISTANCE Talk with your vet about anti-anxiety medications you can give your cat before the vet visit. If your pet gets car sick, consider an anti-emetic drug too.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CAT AGE

Geriatric pets have many of the same health concerns as geriatric people: arthritis, reduced motor and cognitive skills, balance problems, hearing loss and vision impairment. Other signs can include muscle and weight loss, social withdrawal, an unkempt coat, confusion, fatigue and sunken facial features. Even if your senior pet still pounces on toys, make home modifications sooner rather than later,

because change is more stressful for older animals. Here are some tips for rendering your home more old-age-friendly and easing your best friend through their golden years.

BODIES IN MOTION Play with your cat. Activity helps loosen stiff joints and reduces the risk of pressure sores, and mobility is also key to animals' emotional health.

TRACTION EQUALS ACTION Use nonslip carpet runners to provide stability on hardwood, tile and linoleum floors.

ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES Make sure your geriatric pet has easy access to their food and water bowls, litter boxes and pet beds, and consider placing these basics in each of the rooms they frequent. Litter boxes should have low sides or ramps, and food and water bowls should have nonslip bottoms.

CREATURE COMFORTS Designate sanctuary spaces where your pet can escape the activity in your home. Place beds against a wall, furniture or in a corner to help them feel safe. Since older animals are more sensitive to heat and cold, be sure to keep the spaces at a comfortable temperature.

SAFETY CONCERNS As their mental and physical faculties decline, pets can encounter trouble in areas they once navigated with ease. Keep nails trimmed, use baby gates to block stairs and restrict access to other potential problem spots. The top of a floor-to-ceiling cat tree may not be safe for an elderly cat with balance issues; you can provide an alternative perch by creating a ramp that leads to a wide window ledge or tabletop.



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We fight all forms of animal cruelty to achieve the vision behind our name: a humane society.



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