

## Bringing Your New Cat Home



Congratulations! You are the proud new owner of a cat. No doubt you're looking forward to years of happy companionship. But what do you do now?

The first thing you should know about your new pet is that most cats hate to travel. After the ride home from the animal shelter, he will, most likely, not be in the mood for fun. For the trip home, confine your pet in a sturdy cat carrier.

Don't leave him loose in your car where he might panic and cause an accident.

To make his transition to your household as comfortable as possible, select a quiet, closed-in area such as your bedroom or a small room away from the main foot traffic, and provide him with a litter box. Let your new pet become acquainted with that limited area for the first few days. Let him sniff all your belongings and investigate all the hiding places. Over a few days, slowly introduce him to the rest of your house, including the other pets and household members. It will take a little while, but he will eventually begin to feel at home.

Cats vary in terms of how demanding they are as pets, so let yours guide you to the level of attention he wants, whether it's your hand for petting or your lap for sitting. Provide him with the necessary creature comforts and give him the companionship he seeks, and he will be content.

The following is a mini-primer of cats' requirements for a happy life:

**Cleanliness.** Your new cat will prize a clean environment and a clean body. Cats are naturally fastidious and most will instinctively use a litter box; for some, you may need to place the cat in the box and make little scratching motions with their front paws so they get the idea. Many place such a premium on cleanliness that you should clean the box daily or several times a week. Cats also value privacy, so place the litter box in a convenient but secluded spot.

Most cats will spend hours grooming themselves, but even the most avid groomer can use a little help from time to time. Nail clipping and ear and teeth cleaning are tasks you can do to keep your cat well groomed. Even short-haired cats benefit from weekly brushing, a task that can be pleasurable for both of you.

**Security.** Provide your cat with safety and security. Always use a cat carrier when transporting your pet. Protect him by making certain that all windows are securely screened, and that the washer and dryer are kept closed and are inspected before each use. Get into the habit of ensuring that drawers, closets, and cupboards are uninhabited before you close them. And for your own security, put a collar and tag on your feline—there's always the chance he may slip outside by mistake, and you want to make sure he can be identified as your pet.

**Health Care.** Animal shelters take in animals with widely varying backgrounds, some of whom have not been previously vaccinated. Despite the best efforts of shelter workers, viruses can spread and may occasionally go home with adopted animals. If you already have dogs or cats at home, make sure they are up-to-date on their shots and in good general health before introducing your new cat. Take your new cat to the veterinarian within 72 hours after adoption. There, he will receive a health check and any needed vaccinations or instructions. If your cat has not been spayed or neutered, make that appointment! There are already far too many unwanted kittens and cats; don't let your new pet add to the problem. If you need more information about why it is important to spay or neuter your cat, read our online information on spaying and neutering.

**Upper Respiratory Infections.** Respiratory infections are very common in cats and kittens, given the density of shelter populations, the unknown vaccination history of most animals and the range of environmentally prevalent viruses to which felines are susceptible. Shelters and Rescues spend a great deal of time and money on vaccinations to prevent and medications to treat these afflictions. Unfortunately, the FVCRP (Eclipse 4) vaccine is only designed to decrease the severity of an infection; it does not guarantee its prevention. Moreover, the incubations period of the viruses can be as much as a week – thus, a cat or kitten may appear healthy at the time of adoption and subsequently develop the sneezing, coughing, nasal and eye discharge, lethargy and fever of a URI after he or she arrives home. Please take your new cat to the veterinarian within 72 hours of adoption. ARI is unable to reimburse for any veterinary or adoption costs.

**Inappetance.** Another possible result of this stressful change of address is a refusal to eat. It is important to be aware of this possibility because cats' bodies are not equipped to deal with a hunger strike, even one as short as a few days. Cats that do not eat regularly are



at risk of developing hepatic lipidosis, also known as fatty liver disease. Hepatic lipidosis is a life-threatening condition requiring immediate veterinary attention. In the event that your new pet goes more than a day or two without eating, please call your vet. No one knows what motivates cats to do this, but timely intervention (in the form of coax feeding or, sometimes, force feeding) is necessary.

**What intestinal parasites are:** The most common intestinal parasites are roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms, giardia, and coccidia. Deworming your cat or kitten is very important. Even in the best of conditions, most pets will have intestinal parasites. For kittens whose immune system is not yet fully developed, these parasites can cause serious health problems or death.

Roundworms are long round worms that look like spaghetti. Their cyst stage is protected by a hard shell and can live outside a host for months or even years. They may be contracted from a contaminated environment and mature once they are inside a host.

Hookworms are small, thin worms that attach to the intestinal wall with 'hooks' or 'teeth' and drain blood from their host. Severe infestations can cause anemia and death in puppies.

Whipworms are tiny, thread-like worms that live in the colon and in the first section of the large intestine called the cecum, causing irritation in these areas. Whipworm eggs can remain infectious in soil for years.

Tapeworms are long flat segmented worms. They burrow into the intestinal wall and segments may break off and be passed in the feces but the worm can be regenerated from the head. Dogs get tapeworms from ingesting a flea host.

Giardia is a microscopic parasite that attaches to the surface of the intestine. It can be passed from one dog to another through standing water, food, or contaminated areas.

Coccidia is a microscopic parasite that lives in the lining of the intestinal tract. It can be passed from one dog to another through fecal contamination.

#### **How animals get intestinal parasites:**

Dormant larvae can live in the muscles of adult animals and may be activated by hormones during pregnancy. They are then transmitted from the mother to her puppies before birth or during nursing. Animals also contract intestinal parasites when they ingest larvae in an environment contaminated with flies, roaches, fleas, rodents, birds, or other hosts and their droppings. In other cases, parasite larvae may penetrate the skin of the animal.

**What to watch for.** Vomiting, Diarrhea or bloody diarrhea, Change in appetite, Lethargy, Weight loss, Dull coat, Bloated abdomen, Worms or evidence of eggs in stool or on fur.

**What you should do.** Make sure your kitten is on a veterinarian supervised deworming schedule by the age of 2 weeks; Take adult cats to the vet and arrange a regular deworming program; Ask about heartworm preventative that is also effective against some intestinal parasites; Don't allow your cat to roam and come in contact with rodents or animal carcasses; Scoop and clean up after your cat at least once daily; Keep food and water containers and bedding clean; Keep your cat free from fleas; Some parasites can be transmitted from cats to humans. Children and anyone with a weaker immune system will be most vulnerable. Do not allow your cat to lick you on the face; Do not walk barefoot in areas where pets relieve themselves; Practice hand washing after handling your cat.

Ask your veterinarian about other ways to keep you, your family, and your pet safe from intestinal parasites.

**Hiding.** The move to a new home can be very stressful to some cats, particularly shy or nervous individuals. Even friendly cats may be overwhelmed initially. It is perfectly normal and quite common for cats to hide under the bed, in closets, etc. upon arrival and to remain in hiding for weeks to months until they feel secure. Please do not assume that your new pet is antisocial if he or she is not twirling around your feed within the first month. Give them a chance to find their place. Nothing is more devastating to a cat than to be returned over a simple misunderstanding of this sort.

**House Rules.** Provide your cat with some "basic training" to help him get along in your home. It's true that cats usually have their own ideas about how to do things. Even so, most cats can be taught to obey simple rules like not scratching the couch, eating plants, or jumping up on the kitchen counter. With repeated, gentle, and consistent training, your cat will learn.

Yelling at your cat never works. Instead, positively reward him and provide him with alternative choices. A good scratching post—coupled with the handy squirt gun filled with water—can save your couch, your chair, and your nerves. If you help your cat understand the rules and give him a satisfying outlet for his scratching impulses, there will be no need to have him declawed, an unnecessary operation *no* cat should endure.

**Room for Fun.** Finally, provide your cat with an interesting indoor environment. Cats love to play and will appreciate simple and inexpensive toys. Ping-Pong balls and paper bags can provide hours of fun. A comfortable perch by a window can become your cat's very own entertainment and relaxation center.

Toys are very important for cats. They not only fight boredom, they also give cats a chance to express their prey-chasing drives. If you're the one moving the toy while your cat chases after it, playtime can be a bonding experience for both of you.

**Enjoy Your Rewards.** Now that you've made certain all the basic provisions are attended to, you can relax and enjoy your new pet. It may take a couple of weeks for him to adjust to life with you. But before you know it, you'll be curled up on the couch together, watching TV like old pals, and you won't remember what life was like without him.

The below behavior(s) have been observed in, \_\_\_\_\_ Chip # \_\_\_\_\_ :

litter box trained  expect accidents  not observed  \_\_\_\_\_

gets along with dogs  not observed  \_\_\_\_\_

gets along with cats  not observed  \_\_\_\_\_

gets along with Men  Women  Kids  not observed

Diet \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

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ARI does not guarantee the above observations or recommendations. Each new cat reacts differently in each new environment. I agree that I will allow my newly adopted cat a proper period of adjustment time of at least two weeks without excess stimuli (i.e. Introducing to animals or people who are not a part of the household); to keep the environment as quiet as possible for the adopted animal for said period of time; to not leave adopted pets unattended with elderly, young children or pets. I have read, understand and will abide by any information given to me. I have been given a summary of my pet's behavioral, medical history and vaccination status. All questions on the information given to me have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that information given in no way constitutes a guarantee of my adopted pet's behavior or health. Despite all efforts on the part of Animal Rescue of Illinois to disclose any and all pertinent medical/behavioral information, additional health/behavioral issues may become evident upon examination by a veterinarian or post adoption. As the adopter, I assume all financial and medical responsibility for any further expenses, liabilities or costs the animal incurs or requires.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Adopter's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date