

Cat Tips:

You can maintain your cat's overall health in two important ways: 1) schedule an annual preventive visit (including shots and an examination) with your veterinarian as well as other visits as needed; and 2) perform daily home examinations—petting and health care go hand in glove.

Do a nose-to-tail checkup every time you cuddle with your cat on the couch. Call your veterinarian if you detect any abnormalities during these regular checks. Start with the head. Are your cat's ears clean and pink? Do they give off an unpleasant odor? Have mites appeared as a black, waxy mess inside the ears? Are the eyes bright, clear, focused, and

free of discharge? Are the gums pink and the teeth clean? Has tartar appeared along the gum line? Is your cat's breath inoffensive? Don't check a cat's nose to see if it's cold and damp—contrary to myth, this is not a sign of health.

Proceed to a neck-to-tail inspection. Feel your cat's body for lumps, bumps, puffiness, sores, and any irregularities. Also look for flea dirt (which resembles black pepper and turns red when wet), scratches, and parasites. Be sure to check behind the ears, between the toes, and down the entire length of the tail.

Next, treat your feline companion to a good brushing. Rubber curry brushes are excellent at removing dead skin cells and loose hair. Fine-toothed metal combs are specifically designed to lift fleas out of the coat.

It's important to brush your cat daily to remove as much loose hair as possible. When cats groom themselves, they ingest a great deal of hair, which is often vomited out as hairballs. If your cat brings up hair, talk to your veterinarian to evaluate the situation and find out about hairball remedies.

Keeping your cat's claws clipped is an important part of grooming. If not kept at the proper length, a cat's claws can actually grow into the paw pads, so attend to the claws weekly. If you have never trimmed a cat's claws, have your veterinarian show you how. Briefly, you should snip off just the sharp tip (about an eighth of an inch) of each claw. Do not clip into the pink section of the nail, where a blood vessel and nerve endings reside.

Often, people believe declawing is the only way to address inappropriate scratching. However, it can be a painful procedure for your cat, and it is almost always unnecessary. Cats can be easily trained to scratch only in appropriate areas, such as well-placed scratching posts.

All cat owners should have at least one book on cat care (recommended by a veterinarian) that includes a section on emergency first aid. Home care alone is not appropriate in most cases of serious illness or injury; there are also some emergency procedures that could keep your pet relatively comfortable on the way to the veterinarian. Familiarize yourself with emergency procedures before an emergency happens.

Never give your cat any medications, including aspirin, without the advice of your veterinarian. Many common human drugs (like acetaminophen [Tylenol]) are poisonous to cats.

Keeping your house cat indoors:

It's a common belief that cats should be outdoors. Nothing could be further from the truth. Outdoor cats are exposed to threats of all types, including being hit by cars, attacked by other animals, ingesting poison such as antifreeze, and even attacks by people. They are also exposed to diseases and parasites.

Outdoor cats live only a few years, compared to indoor cats which can easily live a contented, full life into their teens. Many indoor cats even live into their twenties!

There are few things more distressing than listening to a well-meaning cat owner whose has just lost their beloved pet (run over by a car, killed by another animal or person). They let their cat outside because the cat "really wanted to go" and they "didn't have the heart to keep them inside".

... But you're not doing your cat a favor by letting him or her outside. They will be much safer and happier indoors.

Help Your Cat Adjust to Being Indoors By ...

- Purchasing toys and catnip. This will help to distract your feline from the lure of the outdoors. Play with your cat and make indoors seem like a happy place. He may cry to go out, but do not give in.
- Get a litter box, if you don't already have one. Outdoor cats may be used to digging in the dirt to do their business. Help your cat by gathering some dirt or sand from your yard and putting a few inches in the litter box. Place the litter box in an easily accessible spot. Gradually mix the dirt with kitty litter. You eventually want to be using kitty litter only.
- Note: Be sure to clean the litter box daily. Cats are naturally clean creatures, and you want to encourage them to use the litter box. If it's too dirty, your cat may decide to go elsewhere in the house (uh oh!).
- Think about introducing a harness or outdoor enclosure. Cats can be quite content outside on a harness and a leash, basking in the sun. Do not use a collar; cats are clever little escape artists and may slip free. Outdoor enclosures that are closed on all sides as well as on top are another alternative. If you live in a remote area, you should keep an eye out for your cat as wild animals may attempt to break in.
- Be alert! Your crafty cat may try to sneak by you whenever someone opens the door. Keep an eye out.
- Make sure your cat has permanent identification. Hopefully you'll never have to use their ID, but just in case, be sure your cat is wearing an ID tag (with the most up-to-date information on file), a tattoo, and/or a microchip.
- Be patient! It can take a while for both you and your cat to adjust to his new indoor life. He may yowl at the door to go outside, but be firm.

It's well worth the effort to reform an outdoor cat to the indoors. Your cat will lead a much safer, longer, and happier life with you.

How to satisfy your kitty's demands to go outside:

Do you have one of those cats that absolutely insists on going outside - despite your best efforts with cat trees, toys, and everything else you can think of?

You can safely let your cat outdoors ... well, at least enough so that kitty thinks she's wild and free.

- Build an escape-proof enclosure. This means the enclosure must be contained on all four sides and on top as well. Your cat should not be able to jump, squeeze through, escape, or injure itself in any way.
- Consider constructing a cat door for free access to the outdoor enclosure. If you can, you may want to build a cat door and connect a special little runway for your kitty that goes straight to his or her outdoor enclosure. That will save you from listening to the plaintive yowls of your cat, asking to go outside!
- Or take kitty out on a harness and leash. Some cats enjoy prowling outside on a harness. If you choose this option, your kitty still needs supervision: cats are clever little escape artists and may attempt to free themselves from the harness. They may also catch the leash on something and get stuck. Plus keep in mind that kitty can't protect herself from other animals if she's leashed!

It is so very important to keep your cat indoors (or protected outdoors, as explained above) that I just can't emphasize it enough. All too often we hear tragic stories about the beloved family cat that disappeared or was struck by a car. Don't let that happen to your own feline friend!

Litter training your cat:

Cats are naturally clean creatures. Teaching them to use the litter box encourages this inherent instinct. Most kittens and cats easily learn to use their litter box ... and they will usually continue to use it unless it gets too dirty. Here are a few tips to help your kitty along:

- Place the litter box in a clean, relatively quiet and accessible location. Keep it away from high-traffic areas and be sure your cat has access to it any time she needs it. Be sure to keep the litter box out of reach of children as well as the other animals in the household.
- Show kitty where it is. Place her in the box and let her sniff. Some people have found it useful to rake their fingers through the litter to show their cat what they want her to do.
- If you have more than one cat, consider a separate litter box for each. Cats generally don't like to eliminate in the same place as other cats.
- Keep the litter box clean. Scoop out soiled litter daily, and change the entire box every week, putting in fresh litter. You can wash out the box with a solution of water and vinegar to help reduce the odor, and then add a little baking soda to the litter itself. An inch and a half of fresh litter is usual plenty.
- Don't place her litter box near her food and water. Cats don't like to eliminate

where they eat.

- Clean any accidents immediately. If kitty does have an accident, clean the area right away with a half and half solution of white vinegar and water. This will help to eliminate the odor and hopefully prevent kitty from returning to that spot.
- Never punish your cat for having an accident. Do not strike her or rub her nose in the mess; instead, firmly say "No!", then place her in her litter box and praise her there.

If your kitty is not using her litter box, try to find out why. [Click here](#) for a few suggestions on what might be wrong.

Why won't kitty use her little box:

Cats are naturally clean creatures. If your cat is not using her litter box, it may be because:

- Her litter is too dirty. This is the most common reason. Clean out her litter more often and see if this helps.
- Stress. Perhaps your feline is anxious about a move, new furniture or carpeting, a new person or animal in the house ...
- She is attracted to a previously soiled location. If your cat keeps returning to one spot, it may be a spot where another pet previously soiled. Make this spot less attractive to your pet by:
 - Put her food bowl there. Cats do not like to eliminate at the same place they eat.
 - Neutralize odor. A half and half solution of white vinegar and water will help to rid the area of any smell.
 - Cover the area with a plastic sheet. This will make it unpleasant to your kitty and discourage her from eliminating there.
- Your kitty may not like her brand of litter. Cats can be finicky; if you have recently changed the type of litter used, change it back. If not, experiment with other brands until you find one that kitty likes.
- Your cat may not know where her litter box is. Especially common with young kittens or after a move. Place the litter box in a clean, accessible, and relatively quiet location and show your cat where it is. You may want to put the box on the same floor as the cat to begin with.
- Your cat is marking his territory. Male cats sometimes spray urine to mark their territory; this is yet another good reason to be sure you neuter your pet (neutered males are less likely to spray).

If your cat has always used her litter box and has recently started to "mess", consider taking her to the vet to rule out any medical conditions.

Fostering a good relationship between cats and kids:

Growing up with pets is a marvelous experience. Kids can learn to treat animals with respect, something they can carry with them to adulthood. Here are a few tips to help promote a positive relationship between children and cats.

- Teach children how to properly handle a cat. Cats should not be picked up by the scruff of the neck; instead, support the cats hindquarters in one hand

- and use the other to support its chest. Hold the cat gently but securely close to your body.
- Supervise kids and cats. This is especially important with a new pet, who may still be nervous. Teach kids to respect the cat, and do not allow them to chase or corner the cat even in play. The cat may bite if it feels threatened. Encourage calm, unthreatening interactions between kids and cats.
 - Do not allow children to disturb a sleeping or eating cat. Also give kitty some space when she is using her litter box.
 - Do not allow rough play. Rough play encourages your cat to use its teeth and claws on you. Instead, play with your cat using cat toys (commercial or those of your own making ... for example, my own cat loves to play in a simple paper bag).
 - Do not allow children to tease the cat. Teach them the difference between teasing and playing.
 - Teach children how important it is to keep your cat indoors. Ensure that they understand the importance of making sure kitty does not accidentally run out the door. Indoor cats live much safer, healthier lives.
- Share the responsibility of caring for your cat with your children.

Killers and company:

There is a fascinating creature living amongst us; a violent vicious hunter which kills with impunity. There are millions living in and around the world's cities and their numbers are growing at an exponential rate. Pound for pound they are one of the most efficient predators on the planet, and even now they are prowling the streets of your neighborhood searching out prey to add to their long list of victims.

They are cats, the closest most people will ever come to living with a real wild animal. But how well do we actually know our feline friends?

Only by studying their design and observing their habits and mannerisms can we get some inkling into their often secret lives.

The first tamed cats were used for pest control in Egypt around 3000 BC and were a species known as the North African Wildcat-a hardy member of the cat family, which later became loved as a household companion and worshipped as a god. Domesticated cats later spread to Italy and then to the rest of Europe where they became highly prized possessions.

The cat's fortunes changed, however, during the Middle Ages as the Christian church, aware of the animal's connection with paganism and witchcraft, often killed cats by burning them alive. The myth that the black cat solely was considered the witches familiar is wrong, and cats of all colors were killed.

The cat became popular again only when its usefulness for reducing vermin populations became recognized; a popularity and respect which has remained to the present day.

The domestic feline is a physiological marvel of nature, a creature known to be endowed with lightning speed and reflexes. As a hunter the parts of the cat's

brain associated with movement and the senses are very well developed. The spine is extremely flexible also, allowing it to squeeze through the tiniest of gaps and for the same reason it lacks a collarbone which would broaden the chest. As runners they are short distance specialists; when a cat runs, all its legs are in the air for a time allowing it to accelerate up to 30mph for short bursts. The strong hind quarters and back provide amazing jumping capabilities - 6 feet of fence or tree proves little problem and the human equivalent would be a person capable of jumping onto the roof of a house.

They have a better sense of balance than humans, mainly because they have a tail which they use in the same way that a tightrope walker uses a pole. Contrary to many people's belief, cats cannot see in the dark any better than we can, but their eyes are more specialized and are useful for gathering every scrap of light. Their vision works best at dawn and dusk, perhaps because this is the time when their prey are either waking up or retiring and so are not at their most alert. In addition cats have a wider field of vision than man and so are able to see more movement on their periphery.

Hearing, too, is an advanced design of the cat allowing it to hear sounds up to two octaves higher than the highest note we can hear and surprisingly it hears higher notes than its arch enemy, the dog.

So with these features in their arsenal domestic cats are built as natural hunters but unlike their wild "cousins" like tigers and cheetahs they don't often hunt to satisfy hunger, although they do occasionally eat their catch. Basically they are in it for the sport, perhaps instinctively seeing it as entertainment or a form of exercise. The way a cat toys with its prey may seem quit cruel to us, as the victim is rarely killed immediately. this is simply another way for a cat to polish its hunting skills. If it can bounce a sparrow into the air and catch it in its claws it has a better chance of success when it must pluck one of the air to satisfy hunger. Similarly, kittens usually start with household spiders and flies, honing their own skills before progressing to feather and fur.

The domestic cat's hunting style is made up of several distinct stages. Stalking is used as soon as the prey has been located. It begins to approach cautiously using all available cover. The cat then travels forward rapidly in a movement known as the slink run with its belly pressed low to the ground. The second stage is the pause, during which the slink run is interrupted so the cat can observe the target. The pause and slink run may be repeated several times until the distance to the target is reduced for the next stage which is the ambush. During the ambush stage the cats feet begin to make trading motions and the tail tip twitches in anticipation. The attack stage is quick. It leaves its cover and shoots forward leaping on the prey with the front paws in the air and the mouse, bird or whatever is then pinned to the ground. The final stage is the death bite which may or may not be immediate depending on whether or not the cat wishes to toy with the victim.

Despite its gruesome habits, the cat is quite a social animal, and if it goes outside regularly will become part of a feline community in the neighborhood.

A kind of association with a built in hierarchy, rules and rituals where all cats are allocated their own positions in the group. New members must fight in order to be accepted, females included; but it is the "toms" who are more often subjected to

trial by strength.

In a neighborhood cat community there is, rather like the mafia, a godfather or "top cat" who has shown by example that he is the roughest and toughest. His position remains at the top of the ladder until he is overthrown by perhaps a stronger junior. Such switches in power are occasional however and a strong leader can remain at the top for years. Unlike many other types of social animal the cat leader is not necessarily entitled to the choicest females and priority may well be given to a tom cat well down the hierarchy pyramid. Neutered toms have no place in this association and will generally descend the social ladder rung by rung until they reach the bottom.

Outdoors, every cat, whatever its position in the community, will possess some territory. Females and neutered toms have only a small patch but will usually defend the little they have more fiercely than a tom with vast territory. A dominant tom cat may have 50 acres or more in an area with a low cat population, this would include several gardens including its own, tracts of wasteland, farmland and the tops of fences and sheds.

But all cats are allowed the use of communal walkways where they can pass freely through another cat's territory with no risk of attack or confrontation.

And then of course there are communal meeting areas where they can get together under the cover of darkness to choose a mate.

After all this excitement it is little wonder that a cat will snuggle up on a chair or human lap and sleep for most of the day. Cats take great delight in rest and relaxation, sleeping through half their lives. A warm, cozy place is preferred where they will usually spend 70 percent in light sleep (cat napping) and the remainder in a deeper sleep which is similar to our own. Even in deep sleep however, they are still taking in external sounds and would be awake in a split second if any danger was detected.

So the next time your cat comes in from a "night on the tiles" try to remember that it is not just a friendly, purring, ball of fluff; it is also a four legged killing machine of the highest order; one of nature's design classics which would put most other predators on the planet to shame.