

Cat and Kitten Care



“Congratulations on adopting a cat or kitten from the SPCA. Cats bring enormous joy into our lives and we wish you many years of happiness together.”

This guide has been developed to help answer some common questions about settling your new cat/kitten into your home. If you have any other questions or concerns after adoption, please call your local SPCA and they will be happy to assist.



Pet Insurance

The SPCA highly recommends buying pet insurance to cover the costs of unexpected illnesses and pet emergencies. When your dog or cat is sick or injured, it's a stressful time. Vet care can be expensive and you want what's best for your pet. We recommend Southern Cross Pet Insurance – they offer a great range of insurance plans and it's a brand you can trust. Go online to www.southerncrosspet.co.nz for more information.

Cat shopping list

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You will need some basic supplies before bringing your new cat home. Many SPCA centres have pet stores where you can purchase many of these items.

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When you buy from the SPCA, you receive quality products and expert advice. You also help support other animals in need as all revenue directly supports the SPCA.



The journey home

Getting a new cat is exciting. Please don't open the cat carrier on the journey home or try to play with your cat/kitten in the car. Your cat may be scared and unpredictable in the car and may try to escape. It's safer to wait until you are inside the house and in your cat's new room.

Checklist

- ☒ Cat carrier box
- ☐ Food and water bowls
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Brush or comb
- ☐ Litter tray and litter
- ☐ Scoop for litter tray
- ☐ Scratching post
- ☐ Toys – e.g. fish pole toy, mouse, ball
- ☐ Safety collar and bell
- ☐ Soft bed
- ☐ Flea and worm treatment

Essential information on arriving home

① Set up one room

- Keep your cat/kitten in one room for 2-3 days. A quiet room is ideal
- Ensure the room is secure and well-ventilated

② Make the room 'cat comfy'

- Set up the room with water, food, toys, litter tray, scratching post and somewhere to hide
- Provide a bed or comfy blanket to help your cat/kitten settle

③ Litter tray position

- Put the litter tray in a private area at least 1.5m away from food and bedding

④ Cat proofing

- Remove dangerous wires, curtain cords, or items your cat/kitten can chew or get tangled in
- Remove breakable or scratchable items
- Keep the toilet lid closed

⑤ Try not to scare your new cat

- Ask family members to try to keep quiet to avoid scaring your cat/kitten
- Don't worry if your cat hides for a few days. This is quite normal behaviour

⑥ Explore the house slowly

- After 2-3 days in one room, slowly introduce your cat/kitten to the rest of the house
- Do this room by room to avoid overwhelming them

⑦ Keep inside

- Keep your cat/kitten inside so they don't get lost or run away
- Adult cats – minimum 3-4 weeks
- Kittens – 6-8 weeks. Kittens should be supervised outside until they are old/big enough to protect themselves
- Keep all doors and windows closed





8 Meeting the family

- Don't force too much attention on your cat/kitten
- Avoid introducing the whole family at once
- Let your cat explore their new room and meet other family members gradually
- It's okay to offer a gentle stroke. Try not to overwhelm your cat/kitten with everyone offering attention and cuddles

9 Supervising children

- Always supervise young children with the cat/kitten
- Teach children to handle and pet your cat properly so they don't get hurt or scared

10 Introducing other pets

- Keep all other pets away from your new cat/kitten initially
- Read the essential advice on pages 9-11 about introducing other pets

FAQs

Why should I keep my cat/kitten in one room?

This helps them feel safe, secure and lets them establish their own territory. It's easier for toilet training and cleaning.

Why is my new cat/kitten hiding?

Don't be concerned. Cats find moving house and meeting new people stressful. Allow them time to settle in, and wait for them to come to you instead of forcing contact. Talk gently to them and sit nearby so they can relax. Let your cat approach you when they feel ready.

Why should I keep my cat/kitten inside?

If your cat goes outside too soon they may get lost or run away if scared. Older cats sometimes try to return to their old home. Keep them inside until they have learnt this is their new home.

When do I let my cat/kitten explore outdoors?

After 3-4 weeks for cats or 6-8 weeks for kittens (or once your cat has settled), introduce your cat to the garden in short supervised periods. Gradually get them used to this bigger territory before giving them free range. Kittens should be supervised outside to protect them against other cats, dogs or potential threats. It's best to keep cats inside at night to avoid injury or fights.

Settling in – advice and tips

Cat doors

Cats like to go in and out of the house when they want. A lockable cat door is convenient and easy. Pull a string or toy through it to encourage your cat/kitten or put food through the door. Be patient and don't force your cat to use it.

Toilet training

Cats/kittens adopted from the SPCA will already be trained to use a litter tray.

Start your cat in one small room. Be prepared for one or two 'accidents'. Never punish a cat that has soiled outside its litter tray; it doesn't work and will make things worse.

Litter tray setup

Cats like their litter tray to be in a quiet area away from their food and bed. Keep the tray in the same place, so your cat/kitten knows where it is. You will need more than one tray if you have a large house. For multiple cats, you will need one tray per cat plus one extra, all in different areas.

Line the litter tray with newspaper and a few cups of litter. Do not fill it up; provide just enough litter to scratch in, not to bury their waste.



It is better to use a small amount of litter and change it frequently. Cats do not like dirty litter trays – keep it clean to avoid problems.

Wash it in hot, soapy water or 50:50 water and white vinegar. Rinse well and avoid strong smelling detergents.

Litter tray training

Place the cat/kitten in the tray after eating or drinking, and randomly throughout the day. Give a gentle pat if they use the tray and/or give a little treat. Take care not to interrupt them though; wait until they have finished.

If you see your cat preparing to toilet elsewhere, distract them and quickly take them to their tray. If the cat has started toileting outside the tray,

wait until they have finished and then take them to the tray, praising them if they make any signs of scratching in there. Do not pick up the cat while yelling, or throw or push them into their tray, or they will associate the tray with punishment and avoid it.

Teach your cat to use the garden

Add a few handfuls of earth to the litter to get your cat used to the smells and textures. Make it easy for your cat by digging up a patch of earth close to your door. Praise your cat if they go to the toilet there. Later, you can provide different patches around your garden. Keep a litter tray inside, too.

Reasons cats may soil in the house

- The litter tray is wrongly positioned
- The tray is dirty. Cats are very clean animals, and may feel the tray is dirty after one use
- You have changed the litter type. Cats must be eased into any changes
- Multi-cat households or when a new cat moves in to the neighbourhood

- Sometimes this can be a sign of an illness, such as cystitis or bladder stones, especially if in bath tubs, sinks, laundry baskets or tiles, and there is blood in the urine. If a sudden change in toileting habits occurs, take your cat to your vet immediately.

Persistent problems

Occasionally a cat may persistently toilet in places other than their litter tray.

This may be where the smell of the owner is especially strong, such as on beds, when the owner is on holiday, or if a new person moves in and your cat is stressed/anxious.

After eliminating physical or psychological causes, prevent access to the favoured areas. Make them unattractive by covering with a plastic sheet or aluminium foil (cats don't like the feel of these), or by placing food there. Try alternative litter types and tray locations. Use of a Feliway spray or diffuser may help.

If a cat squats repeatedly as though trying to urinate but passes only a small amount or nothing at all, this can indicate a blockage. Take your cat to the vet urgently, especially male cats.

Food and water

Provide your cat with a safe, familiar feeding location, and give each cat its own bowl. Always have fresh clean water available inside and outside. Wash food and water bowls daily.

Feed your cat premium dry food

Cats need a premium food for energy, health and happiness. The SPCA recommends a premium quality dry biscuit, occasionally giving soft food as a treat. Biscuits clean the cat's teeth and have higher nutrients than soft foods.

Milk

Do not give your cat milk. Most are lactose intolerant and will get diarrhoea.

Foods to avoid

- Dog food is not suitable for cats
- Avoid human food – this usually has salt, spices or additives which can be harmful or fattening
- Bones and raw fish – bones can splinter and get stuck in their throat or gut. Only ever provide cooked fish and remove all bones
- Tuna – can be an occasional treat

Choose food for the age of your cat

Kittens need a special high-energy kitten food for bone growth and a healthy immune system. After 12 months, change to an adult cat food. Cats over seven years old need a senior cat diet with reduced calories, lower proteins and elements to support bone structure.

Introducing a new food

Introduce any new food gradually over one or two weeks to avoid stomach upsets. Mix in new biscuits with the old, slowly changing the proportions.

How much and how often?

Kittens need to graze through the day and night. They need to 'refuel' often so always have food available. Some adult cats are grazers while others need to be limited.

If your cat is slim, you can let it graze. If they start gaining weight, limit them to two meals a day. See the daily feeding guide on your packet and calculate this on the cat's ideal weight, not their current weight. If the problem persists, put your cat on a 'light' formula, and ensure your neighbours are not feeding your cat.

Overweight cats face the same health problems as humans. Please talk to your vet for assistance.



Meeting resident cats

Be patient, it may take a few weeks or months for them to settle in and get on.

Here are some guidelines to help:

❶ Confine your new cat to one room with their litter box, food, water and a bed.

❷ Feed existing pets and the newcomer on opposite sides of the door to this room, so they associate something enjoyable (eating) with each other's smells. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets eat calmly while standing directly on either side of the door.

❸ Swap the sleeping blankets or beds so they become used to the other cats' scents.

❹ Let your new cat explore the house on their own while you confine your other animals to the new cat's room. They can experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. The new cat can become familiar with the house without being frightened.

❺ Introduce your animals slowly, always monitor first meetings and separate immediately if it does not go well. Never raise your voice if confrontation occurs. You can expect a mild protest, but don't allow these behaviours to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them and start the process again.

❻ Don't intervene if small spats occur (hissing, growling, or posturing). Give them a chance to calm down before reintroducing them. Speaking gently and staying calm eases tension and diverts attention.

❼ Provide at least one litter tray per cat plus one extra tray in separate locations. Each cat will also need their own food bowl and safe hiding place.

❽ Give your existing pets plenty of attention. It's your resident pet's life that has been disrupted. They may lose its favourite sleeping spot. Give them all the attention they have received in the past.

Cats are territorial and need to be introduced to other animals slowly so they can get used to each other before a face-to-face meeting. This helps prevent fear and aggression.

Meeting resident dogs

Always finish meetings on a good note so that both pets remember it as a positive, not a negative experience.

Cats and dogs can be great friends but this takes time and extreme care. A dog can seriously injure or even kill a cat, even if only playing. Some dogs have such a high prey drive that they should never be left alone with a cat. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive.

Before bringing your cat/kitten home

- Teach your dog basic commands – ensure your dog knows and responds to the commands ‘sit’, ‘down’, ‘come’ and ‘stay’
- Observe your dog around other cat/kittens – watch your dog’s reactions to cats while out for a walk

Introducing your cat/kitten and dog

Follow steps 1-4 of the process for introducing cats to other cats.

❶ Let your pets see each other through a glass door or a partially opened door before a face-to-face meeting. They can get used to each other while feeling safe.

❷ Hold a controlled face-to-face meeting – once your cat/kitten and dog have become

comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door and have been exposed to each other’s scents, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction.

- Put your dog’s leash on and have them either sit or lie down and stay
- Have a second person offer your cat/kitten some special pieces of food
- At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room
- Allow your cat/kitten some freedom to explore your dog, with the dog on leash and under control. Keep giving your dog treats and praise for calm behaviour. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you’re moving too fast. Go back to the previous steps
- Never do introductions with your cat/kitten in a cage
- Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Repeat this step several times until both pets are tolerating each other’s presence without fear or aggression
- Muzzle your dog if you have concerns about initial aggression towards your cat

3 Teach your dog that chasing or rough play is unacceptable. Also teach and reward your dog for good behaviour, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down. If your dog is always punished and never has ‘good things’ happen in the cat’s presence, they may redirect aggression toward the cat. Never allow the dog to chase as once this starts it changes from play to hunting.

4 Keep your dog at your side and on a leash during the introduction process.

5 Ensure your cat/kitten has an escape route and a place to hide. Cats like to be able to climb higher than your dog. Until you’re certain your cat will be safe, be sure to keep them separated when you aren’t home.

6 Kittens are in more danger of being injured or killed and will need to be kept separate from an energetic dog until fully grown, except for periods of supervised interaction to enable the animals to get to know each other.

7 When introductions don’t go well, seek professional advice immediately. Consult a vet or animal behaviour specialist. Animals can be severely injured in fights. The longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Punishment won’t work and could make things worse. Most conflicts can be resolved with professional guidance.



Cat behavioural advice and training

Cats cannot be physically forced or manipulated to do what you want.
Cats are not pack animals and don't respond to punishment.

Never smack or swat a cat, shake them or rub their nose in their urine or faeces if they toilet inappropriately. This is cruel, and will only teach your cat to avoid doing this around you. Your cat will become stressed and scared of you, which will make the problem worse.

Teach your cat good behaviour

Regularly talking to your cat/kitten helps to establish a bond and good behaviour. Teach your cat to do the right thing and reward them for good behaviour. For example, teach them to use a scratching post by dragging a string up the side of the post for the cat/kitten to follow. Reward and praise profusely.

Confine your cat while training

It is best to confine your cat/kitten to one quiet room until trained. If you leave the cat alone to roam your house they may develop unwanted toilet and scratching habits.

Teach basic commands

Many cats can be trained using treats and other positive encouragement. You can also teach your cat/kitten to respond to simple commands such as 'no'.

Biting and scratching

Cats rarely bite or get rough out of anger; it's usually out of fear. You need to eliminate the cause of the fear. Be patient, and don't force your cat/kitten into cuddles. Contact an animal behaviourist if the problem persists.

Kittens often bite for sheer playfulness. Never use your hands for playing. If your kitten gets rough, correct this the way their mother would. Utter a high pitched yelp – this will make your kitten freeze and you can then pull your hand away and immediately stop playing. Don't resume play for at least three minutes. Sometimes cats give warning signs before play biting such as a twitch of the tail, a look in their eye or position of the head. Always try to end contact before the play bite. Visit our website for more information about cat aggression.

Scratching furniture

Scratching is natural to sharpen cats' claws. It is also good for scent-marking and exercising.



It's easy to get a cat/kitten to use a scratch post by placing the scratch pole near where they want to scratch.

Use the string idea mentioned earlier, or wait until your cat/kitten is close to the post and scratch with your nails. The sound will encourage your cat.

Other undesirable behaviour

Other behaviour such as chewing and digging up pot plants, or pushing objects off tables is usually caused by boredom. It is common in indoor cats that don't get a lot of stimulation or exercise, and is easier to prevent than to correct.

You can help by playing with your cat at least twice a day, using different toys to get them running, leaping and pouncing to the point of exhaustion. Also leave some independent toys (such as table tennis balls) out for your cat to amuse themselves during the day. Get two kittens instead of one, to keep each other company and provide play opportunities.

Spraying

Spraying is usually done by non-desexed cats but sometimes desexed cats also spray to mark territory. The cat will direct a small amount of urine onto objects such as trees or walls.

Your cat should have no need to spray indoors as the house is their accepted den. Spraying might happen if your cat feels insecure or threatened, e.g with the arrival of a new pet, new human or in a multi-cat household. Sometimes an increased challenge from a cat outdoors can start the problem. Cats may spray door mats if your shoes have brought in the scent of a strange cat.

If spraying occurs, clean, eliminate causes and retrain your cat. If your cat sprays due to an outside threat, such as the neighbour's cat, board up cat flaps to reassure your cat the house is safe.

A repeat or problematic sprayer can be confined to one room, preferably a warm room where they can sleep next to a source of heat, such as a radiator. The cat will probably feel secure in this room and so will not spray. Use of a Feliway spray or diffuser may help. If spraying ceases, your cat can be allowed into other rooms gradually, under supervision. See our website for more enrichment ideas.

If spraying continues, speak to your vet.

Health advice

Vaccinations

Vaccinations against disease are critical throughout your cat's life. Your SPCA cat/kitten will be up-to-date with current vaccinations but you will need to check your cat's health card for the due date of future vaccinations and arrange these with your vet.

Fleas

Flea and worm prevention and treatment are essential. Fleas become worse in warm weather. Check your cat's health card for when their next flea and worm treatment is due or talk to your vet. Prevention is better than cure. If allowed to develop, fleas can spread to your home.

How do I tell if my cat has fleas?

- Your cat may be itching and scratching a lot or grooming excessively
- You may see fleas or flea dirt in your cat's coat

How do I get rid of fleas?

You can get a quality product and advice from the SPCA or your vet.

Worms

Cats can get intestinal worms. These live in the gut and feed off your cat's food, making your cat

tired, their coat dull and causing a pot-bellied appearance. Young kittens can die from a severe case.

Check your cat's health card for when their next worm treatment is due or talk to your vet. You can get a quality product from the SPCA or your vet. It is very important to regularly worm your cat.

Regular vet visits

Contact your vet if you are concerned about the health or well-being of your cat. It is important to take your cat to the vet for a check-up at least once a year to allow for early detection of health problems.

NEVER give a cat human medicine such as Panadol or Aspirin as these can be harmful or even fatal.

**Pregnant women
are strongly advised
not to handle soiled
litter. Please seek
medical advice from
your doctor.**

Your cat's microchip

All SPCA cats/kittens are microchipped. It is ESSENTIAL to keep the microchip details up-to-date if you move house or your contact numbers change. The SPCA receives many lost cats that we cannot reunite with their owner because the microchip details have not been updated.

Update your microchip details at:

www.animalregister.co.nz

Lost cats

If your cat is missing we recommend the following:

- Microchip – make sure your contact details are up-to-date on the microchip register. The microchip number will be linked to your contact details on the national database, which you can access on www.animalregister.co.nz. Vets and the SPCA will scan any incoming found cats and get in touch with the owner
- Pets on the Net – check the ‘found’ listings and create a ‘lost’ listing at www.petsonthenet.co.nz. This is a national database and the key website we recommend everyone use
- Flyers – create a flyer with a clear picture and description and distribute in your neighbourhood, on noticeboards, mailbox drop, community centres, etc.
- Vets – check with local vets
- SPCA – contact the SPCA and email us a photo
- Moved house – if you have moved house, check with your old neighbour. Some cats return to their old home no matter how far away that is

YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS TO CARE FOR YOUR CAT

Under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, you are legally required to provide the following:

- Proper and sufficient food and water
- Adequate shelter
- The opportunity to display normal patterns of behaviour
- Protection from, and rapid diagnosis of, any significant injury or distress
- Protection from distress and pain

It is an offence under the act to abandon a cat.

For detailed information on legal obligations, please refer to the Code of Welfare for Cats. The code is accessible on the Ministry for Primary Industries website.



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