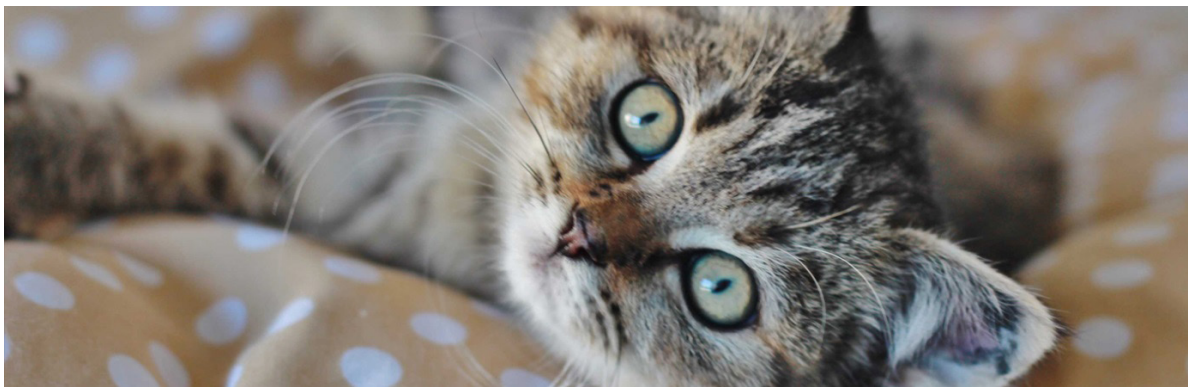


Cat Care

Cats have been our companions for centuries, as evidenced by mummified cats in the tombs of ancient Egypt. Since this time, human and feline interaction has continued to develop, along with our understanding of their needs and the benefits of forging a cat-human relationship.



Health is wealth, both for our feline friends and their two-legged owners, who can be spared eyebrow-raising veterinary expenses with annual check-ups, proper exercise and diet.

Owning a cat can be one of the most rewarding experiences you have during your entire lifetime. To make this time enjoyable for both you and your cat you need to ensure you have the knowledge and ability to care for it properly.

Housing

The RSPCA and Council advocates keeping cats indoors. Indoor cats are less likely to:

- wander into unfriendly territory
- encounter risks
- be exposed to cruelty
- sustain injuries from fighting
- catch diseases from fighting with other cats
- be injured in car accidents.

How to keep your indoor cat happy:

- provide plenty of toys to keep your cat amused
- cardboard boxes with holes cut into them are great for hide and seek games
- your cat's favourite games will be the ones that involve you, using their instinctive pouncing behaviour and releasing pent up energy by chasing

- make sure your cat has a scratching post to distract from sharpening claws on your furniture
- provide plants such as cat grass to interest your cat and distract from your pot plants
- cats love to bask in the sun; make sure your cat has a nice sunny spot to lie in (however, sun can be dangerous for white cats so be sure to check with your vet).

For those cats that live both indoors and outdoors, one management strategy is to keep them inside from dusk until dawn.

Cats need access to the outside or a litter tray, which will then need to be cleaned regularly. They need to be fed a balanced diet daily and have fresh water freely available at all times. Cats can be very independent but many pet cats enjoy company and playtime.

Identification

In NSW, you are legally required to have your pet microchipped and registered. Costs for registration vary according to whether your cat is desexed or not. Check with Council for further details.

If you move, it is important to update your details with the local council.

It is also a requirement to have a tag on your cat's collar with your contact details, and a bell to warn birds and native animals that your cat is near.

Veterinary Care

Your cat will require annual visits to the vet for vaccinations, boosters and general health checks. Some commonly found plants, such as lillies, are toxic to cats and it is important that you familiarise yourself with these and remove them from your garden and house.

All cats need regular health checks and need to keep their vaccinations up to date. Minimum health care should include regular worming, flea control and something to clean their teeth. There are lots of treats and some dry foods that clean teeth. Any changes in eating, drinking, urination, defecation or weight loss or gain should be checked out with a visit to the vet. These days there are treatments available for many problems ranging from diabetes to arthritis.

Caution is needed when tackling fleas in cats as they are much more susceptible to insecticide toxicity than dogs. You cannot use dog products on cats or kittens. Please be sure to read the label to confirm that it is a safe preparation for cats and that you are using it at the recommended dilution.

Nutrition

Cats are obligate or true carnivores, meaning that they need a source of animal protein to survive. Feed your cat a high quality premium commercial food that is appropriate for the life stage and health status of your cat.

This includes:

- fresh raw meat
- raw meaty bones

Choose human-grade raw meat and raw meaty bones because pet meat/pet mince/pet rolls/pet meat and bone products can contain preservatives that can be detrimental to the cat's health (e.g. sulphite preservative induced thiamine deficiency can be fatal). However avoid sausages, sausage meat and cooked manufactured meats as they can contain sulphites.

Many human foods cause illness, so avoid:

- cooked bones
- chocolate
- garlic
- avocado
- grapes
- onions



Adult cats tend to graze and prefer to eat several smaller meals throughout the day/night. Food that takes a while to chew is a good idea, such as raw chicken wings.

Ensure that your cat always has an adequate supply of fresh, clean water.

Being true carnivores they have a specific need for high quantities of animal based proteins and fats. They have unique dietary requirements for certain vitamins, fatty acids and also certain amino acids such as taurine, which can only be supplied by animal tissue (meat) – these requirements must be included to provide a balanced diet.

There are many balanced dry and moist foods on the market. Although rich in iron, Liver can become addictive and because of its high Vitamin A causes disease. Feeding fish exclusively can induce dietary deficiencies unless supplemented with the correct fatty acids.

Kittens should be fed special kitten formulas four times daily until eight weeks of age, three times daily from eight weeks to three months and twice daily from three to six months of age.

Grooming

Regular grooming is essential. If you establish this habit early in your cat's life:

- grooming will be an enjoyable activity
- provide bonding time
- become part of a routine.

Long haired cats will require grooming at all times of the year to avoid:

- hair becoming matted
- furniture and clothing being covered.

While your cat is grooming themselves, they can ingest fur resulting in fur balls in the stomach.

Short haired cats need no brushing and, given a place to sharpen their nails, can take care of their grooming needs themselves. Longer haired breeds usually need daily grooming and some of the flatter faced cats need their faces cleaned a little too. Not all long haired cats will allow themselves to be brushed and so these may have to be sedated for clipping. If you need to groom your cat it is a very good idea to start doing so when they are young.

Further Information

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Rangers

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Information sourced from NSW RSPCA website November 2014