

CAT 1

Choosing the right cat



The charity dedicated to helping sick, injured and homeless pets since 1897.



Choosing the right cat

A cat can be one of the most rewarding of pets but, before you acquire one, please think first – is there really time for a cat in your home and your life? Do you know as much as you should before taking on this responsibility? Learn as much as you can by researching as many books as possible. Ask advice from as many different relevant sources as possible, such as Blue Cross or your local veterinary practice.

Cats can be wonderful companions. Although they may seem independent, caring for one demands as much commitment as with any other animal.

Cats often live for 20 years or more, so do not assume that it is always best to take on a kitten. An older cat has much to offer and may be better for owners who are out working, are elderly, or have families with young children.

Can I care for a cat?

To care for a cat you will need to:

- provide plenty of human companionship
- provide regular, suitable meals and a constant supply of clean drinking water
- provide outdoor access or be prepared to empty and clean a litter tray on a daily basis. Some cats may prefer to use a tray indoors as well as having access outdoors.
- ensure there is freedom to exercise in a safe place, such as a fenced garden away from busy roads and traffic
- provide a clean and comfortable bed
- groom your cat regularly – long-haired breeds require daily grooming to avoid matting
- vaccinate your cat against the major feline diseases regularly – your vet can advise you
- worm your cat regularly and provide treatment for fleas – seek advice from your vet

- be prepared to take your cat to the vet if required – pet insurance can help offset the cost of treatment, which can be expensive
- have time to play with your cat

Cats of all ages are appealing and it is easy to get carried away with the idea of taking one home without really thinking about the consequences. Bringing up a cat for around 15 years (perhaps longer) will take a lot of time, effort and money. You will be responsible for your cat's health and happiness – if you do not think you are able to provide lifelong care, you should not take on a cat.

In addition to looking after your cat's physical needs, you will be responsible for any behavioural problems which may have to be addressed. Unforeseen circumstances may mean you can no longer look after your cat and, if the pet is not well socialised, the cat's future could be uncertain. Blue Cross is available to give advice and support on animal behaviour issues.

There are many different breeds of cats but most pets are crossbred "moggies". Pedigree animals tend to be kept for showing, but can also make great pets. Short-haired breeds are easier to care for, as long-haired cats must be groomed regularly if they are not to become matted.

Kittens

All kittens are adorable and it can be tempting to take one home without thinking of the consequences. Remember that, just like children, they can be destructive and demanding. Taking on a kitten means that you are committing yourself to years of care, with some living well into their teens and twenties.

When choosing a kitten, ideally you should see the litter and consider the parents' health and temperament. By doing so, you can ensure the kittens are healthy and of the correct age when you take them home.

There will be occasions when this is not possible, such as when choosing a kitten from a rescue organisation like Blue Cross (if for instance the kitten was brought in or found as a stray). Always ask as many questions as possible before deciding to give a kitten a home. Our highly trained and dedicated staff will always be glad to assist you.

Beware of choosing kittens with eye and/or nose discharge, poor coat condition and those that look underweight. All are indicators of poor health.

When taken home, your kitten should have easy access to a litter tray at all times and, if you have children, ensure that they always handle your kitten with consideration and respect.

Kittens that have not been well socialised from an early age may not make ideal companions if there are young children in the family. These animals may be quite shy and afraid in a busy household. Similarly, farm kittens can also be quite a challenge and may need to be placed in an experienced household.

The optimum age for socialisation is between two and seven weeks of age. Ask what the breeder or rescue centre has done to ensure the kittens are well socialised and confident around people and other animals.

Choose only a kitten (of at least eight weeks of age), if someone will be at home for all or part of the day to give your cat the care and attention needed. Blue Cross rehoming centres always have cats of all ages needing good homes.

For further information, see the pet care leaflet, *Caring for your kitten (C2)*.





Elderly cats

With improved nutrition and veterinary care, cats are living to greater ages. Cats are generally considered to be middle aged at seven years. However, in America, over the past decade there has been a significant increase in the number of cats reaching the age of ten. This picture is likely to be mirrored here in Britain as, although cats over ten years of age are considered to be geriatric, many live into their late teens and early twenties.

Cat age	1	5	10	15	20
Equivalent in human years	15	36	56	76	96

For further information, see the pet care leaflet, Caring for the older cat (C4).

Checklist

- Be sure to understand the needs of the cat you are interested in. Your local Blue Cross centre or veterinary practice should be able to advise.
- Be prepared to wait – the right cat is worth waiting for. Every year, thousands of cats are abandoned or given up into the care of organisations like Blue Cross, often because the cat was wrong for the original home.
- Visit your chosen pet regularly between the time of choosing and collection and find out as much as you can, for example, what your cat has been fed on

- Ensure you ask for a copy of the vaccination certificate and record of worming at the time you take your cat home

If buying from a breeder:

- request a written agreement stating that purchase is subject to a satisfactory examination by your vet within 72 hours of purchase
- ask where your cat came from, should your chosen pet not originate from the place of purchase
- check if a pet insurance cover note is available to cover early unforeseen veterinary costs. Some rescue organisations, including Blue Cross, provide six weeks of free insurance cover at the time of adoption.

If you follow these principles and are prepared to spend time, energy and money on your cat, you will have a well behaved member of the family who will bring years of joy and companionship.

Happy, healthy pets

Blue Cross advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at www.bluecross.org.uk

Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
- pets needing new homes

Or you can join in the chat on our online communities. Find us on Twitter and Facebook – just search for Blue Cross.



Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

Please call us on 0300 777 1897 or visit www.bluecross.org.uk



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