

CAT 3

Caring for your **adult cat**



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CROSS

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homeless pets since 1897.



Caring for your adult cat

Although considered independent pets, cats are reliant on their owners for food, shelter, veterinary care and companionship. They can live for more than 20 years, so before you decide to give a home to a cat, please think about whether you are prepared for this commitment.

Settling in

For the first two days, keep your new cat in one room. This gives the security the cat needs and helps the animal get used to you and your home more quickly. When you go into the room, sit still and talk gently to the cat, but do not force yourself on the pet – allow the cat to come and investigate you so there are no feelings of being threatened. Make sure the cat has food, water and a litter tray, and allow time to settle in.

After a few days, begin to introduce your cat to the rest of the house slowly, one room at a time. Bolder cats will come out at once and immediately start exploring, whereas the more timid ones will take longer. During this time make sure doors and windows are kept closed as cats can get through the smallest gaps!

For further information, see the pet care leaflets, *Moving house and travelling with cats* (C22) and *Introducing your cat to other pets* (C23).

Diet

There is a huge variety of cat food available in pet shops and supermarkets. The easiest way to provide a balanced diet is to feed a premium quality complete dry cat food. Never feed dog food, as cats and dogs have different nutritional needs.

Adult cats should be fed twice a day or, if you are feeding dry food, you may

leave food available at all times. This is fine for cats that do not overeat, but if your cat starts to gain weight you will need to restrict their access to food.

Whatever you feed your cat, it is essential that there is an ample supply of fresh, clean drinking water constantly available. Cats have no need for milk after they have left their mother – in fact, milk is not tolerated well by many cats and can cause diarrhoea.

For further information, see the pet care leaflet, *Staying in shape* (C7).

When to let your cat go outside

Your cat will need to be kept inside for at least three weeks to give sufficient time to bond with the people and other animals in the house. The cat should regard your house as a secure place before being let out, or you may find the cat does not return when you open the door.

Cats must have completed their vaccinations before being allowed outside, and kittens should not go outside until neutered (approximately five to six months of age).

If possible, choose a warm dry day to encourage your cat out for the first time and ensure the animal is hungry by delaying meal time by a few hours. Take outside and let the cat walk around but stay in attendance, eventually taking the cat back inside to be fed.



Once confident, the cat will start to go off for longer periods and eventually you can give free access via a cat flap. Try to keep your cat in at dusk and dawn as these are the times that cats are at most risk of being run over and also when they present the greatest risk to wildlife such as birds. If you put a collar on your cat, make sure it is a safety collar that will pull off easily if the cat becomes entangled.

A microchip is a good way of permanently identifying your cat. This is injected under the skin and contains a unique number registered on a database. If your cat is lost and handed in as a stray, the chip can be read with a special scanner and the cat returned to you quickly.

Toys and scratching posts

Play is an essential part of your cat's life and will encourage a bond between you as well as helping to keep your cat fit and healthy.

Many different cat toys are available from pet shops but most cats will play with anything that is light and small. Toys filled with "catnip" hold a special attraction for many cats.

A scratching-post inside the house is helpful in protecting your furniture, even if your cat is able to go outside.

These should be covered in material that is not found anywhere else in the house (for example, string rather than carpet) so that your cat does not learn to scratch other items such as your carpet.

For further information, see the pet care leaflet, *Staying in shape* (C7).

Cats that live permanently indoors

It is not really appropriate to keep a cat only indoors when the cat has previously been able to go outside. However, some cats with disabilities may need to remain inside for their own safety.

Indoor cats will require less food than a cat which has outdoor access. You will also need to encourage the cat to exercise more by playing with your cat.

If you have a garden, you could provide the cat with a large enclosed run where the cat can exercise. This may also be a useful option if you own a timid cat that will not go outside through fear of encountering the other cats in your neighbourhood.

Scratching-posts are essential to the indoor cat, otherwise the cat will use your furniture to clean and sharpen its claws. You should also ask your vet to check if the cat's claws need clipping.

Grooming

All cats need to be groomed regularly. This keeps fur and skin in good condition, enables you to check for any signs of ill health, and helps build the relationship between you.

Long-haired cats need to be groomed thoroughly every day to remove all tangles, otherwise they will quickly become matted. If your cat is not used to being groomed, this activity needs to be introduced gradually. Keep the sessions short until the cat begins to accept it. Start with areas of the body where the cat enjoys being stroked and give food rewards for good behaviour.

There is no reason to routinely bathe your cat as this will cause distress and also may damage the coat. Occasionally your vet may recommend a shampoo to treat specific skin problems – if you need to use a prescription shampoo, follow the vet's advice carefully and use it only as frequently as recommended.

Veterinary insurance

Animal welfare charities receive calls every day from people who cannot afford to pay their vets' fees and who are asking for help. Charities have only a limited budget with which to provide that help.

It is easy to suddenly find yourself with a large and unexpected bill if your cat is involved in an accident or requires an operation. It is advisable, therefore, to take out veterinary insurance before your cat becomes ill.



Vaccinations

The three diseases that your cat should be vaccinated against are cat flu, feline enteritis and feline leukaemia. Your vet will advise you on when these vaccinations should be done, and how frequently your cat needs boosters.

Worming

Roundworms and tapeworms are the most common types of worms found in cats. Routine treatment against these worms is essential to keep your cat healthy. Do not be tempted to buy pet shop worming treatments. Instead, always consult your vet for advice.

Fleas

Prevention is better than cure where fleas are concerned, so consult your vet about routine treatments to keep your cat healthy and free from fleas. Many owners find products to dab on are easier and less stressful to administer than sprays. Shampoos to tackle fleas are not particularly effective and should be avoided unless prescribed by your vet.

If your cat has fleas, you will also need to treat your home to remove flea eggs and prevent new fleas hatching. The cat's bedding should be thoroughly washed or replaced and the floors and carpets of the house should be treated too. Your vet can provide you with a spray for use around the house.





Ear mites

Ear mites are common in cats and can cause intense irritation, although often there are no symptoms. In severe cases the ear canal can become blocked and infection follows. The mites can also be passed on to other cats or dogs in your household so, if you have a dog persistently troubled by ear mites, your vet may want to check your cat's ears as the potential source of the mites.

Neutering

A male kitten can be castrated from the age of five months. This is necessary because a mature tomcat will spray your house (his territory) with strong smelling

urine to mark his boundaries. He will also get into fights and could be injured or become bitten and scarred. During long periods of time away from home your cat is likely to father many litters of unwanted kittens and is at risk of being injured on the roads whilst out looking for a mate.

A female kitten will need to be spayed at five to six months of age to prevent her from having kittens of her own. There is nothing to be gained from letting your cat have one litter of kittens before she is spayed. If you do so, not only will you have the worry of finding kind and caring homes for the offspring, but you will also be adding to the already massive problem of unwanted kittens and cats.

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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Registered charity no: 224392 (England and Wales), SC040154 (Scotland)