

What to Expect When You're Adopting a Cat



So, you've found the cat of your dreams. You're excited about bringing a new family member into your life. What can you expect when your new cat moves in, and how can you be prepared for the new arrival?

Essential Supplies

Food - Cats can be picky eaters, and some would rather starve than eat something they don't like. Stick with what the foster home knows she likes, at least in the beginning.

You can gradually switch them over to what you choose as they get to know and trust you. You should ALWAYS switch animals over to new foods very gradually, over a two week period, to avoid stomach upsets.

*****Look for a statement that the food meets AAFCO Food Trial testing standards to ensure that the pet food you buy contains adequate nutrients. AAFCO is an organization which sets standards for pet foods. Most good quality foods will have this statement on their label. It is at least a good start in ensuring that your pet's diet is adequate.*****

First, make sure the food you are feeding states that it is 100% nutritionally complete. Second, avoid foods with dyes, but make sure the food contains Taurine. Cats need taurine to avoid many severe health issues (blindness, heart problems). Feed cats plenty of wet food, contrary to old myths. Cats by nature do not drink enough water and most wet foods contain at least 33% water, some even as much as 85% water! To keep their teeth clean, if you are not into actually brushing them, give them hard crunchy dry food (avoid soft foods & treats with dyes and sugars!). Feed your cat a nutritionally balanced diet and provide fresh water 24/7. Educate yourself on your cat's nutritional needs, or ask your veterinarian for advice on what and how often to feed your pet. Cats should generally have a high protein (unless they have kidney issues), low fat, low calorie and high fiber diets. Dry is more fattening (obese cats can develop diseases) and should be fed mostly canned food with dry food crunchies to help keep their teeth clean.

Food & Water Dishes - It is usually best to use glass or ceramic bowls because some animals, especially cats, have allergies to plastic and metals. You may not even notice a reaction, but your poor cat will! A reaction is often seen in the form of "feline acne" or ulcers on the chin, but can include breathing problems. Bowls should be cleaned often to avoid harmful bacteria building up in them. If it looks like something you would not eat or drink out of – provide with clean food and water.

Litter Box - Find a private spot, out of foot traffic, for the litter box so your cat can maintain her dignity. Some cats like covered boxes and some do not. Your cat should be able to easily turn around in her litter box, without hanging over or touching the sides. It is best to have one litter box per cat. We have found that our cats prefer Tidy Cat Scoopable with the blue lid. It clumps great, has little or no dust, and smells pleasant! Remember if it is too heavily scented it will hurt their sensitive nose and they will go elsewhere.

Some people want to put the litter box in a strange place because of visitors, the smell, or just so they won't see it. If you make it extremely difficult or scary to get to the litter box, she just might make her own spot somewhere else in the house. Remember, the litter box should work for your cat first and you second if you want to avoid potential behavioral problems.

Keep the litter box clean! Cats are naturally fastidious, and most will instinctively use a litter box; you just have to show yours where it is; don't place your cat in the box and make little scratching motions with his front paws. This will likely upset your cat and make him leery of the box. Scoop the box at least once daily and periodically wash it with hot water and dish soap. Cats are creatures of habit and if you suddenly switch to another litter or don't keep the box clean, he may not use it. Remember that you do not want to sit on a toilet that hasn't been flushed – do not expect your cat to use a litter box that hasn't been scooped.

Carrier - You will need this to keep your cat safe whenever you take her somewhere, like the Vet's office. It is best to buy a carrier that is "Airline Approved" - look for this in the advertising before you buy. This will keep your pet safe while traveling in car, train or plane! Your cat should be able to safely stand up, turn around, and lie down without being cramped or touching the top or sides. Many pets are killed, injured or lost during travel due to accidents and open windows - don't let your pet be one of them!

Toys - Cats like to play, and toys are fun for you and your cat! Nothing helps to bond you and your cat more than a good toy! You can make a safe toy out of many household items, but you need to know your cat or kitten well enough first. For example, you can give them your empty toilet paper rolls or inexpensive toys like ping-pong balls and opened paper bags (remove handles) for great fun.

Make time to play and provide entertainment. Cats often entertain themselves, but regular play sessions with your pet will provide him with the physical and mental stimulation he needs and strengthen the bond you share. The two best things you can provide your cat with are love and playtime.

Always monitor your cat or kitten while at play and don't leave them alone with toys! Many toys we make or buy can be harmful to your baby in ways you could never imagine! Toys with long strings or items that can come off, such as eyes or jingle bells, can be very harmful if swallowed or tangled around a leg or neck! A toy called Flutter Balls is one of our foster cats' favorite toys, but you have to watch them or they could get a feather caught in their throat! Use the same rules you would with a human child. Toys are fun and safe - *when you are there to watch and play with them!*

Scratching Post - Your new cat or kitten has a great need to scratch. Be sure to understand why, how and what cats are likely to scratch. If you want to avoid having torn up furniture - get educated and get prepared! Cats love to scratch items in the house for several reasons, but the main one is because they want to bond with you and mark their territory. If you do not provide them with a **sturdy** post or tree then they will go after your furniture because it doesn't move. They have scent glands in their paws and face. In a sense, your new cat is saying "Hey, this is my home, my person and I'm leaving my calling card for everyone else to be clear on the subject!" so take it as a compliment and let them know where to leave their scent.

A good place to start is a sturdy, carpeted and sisal (cats love to scratch rough material) scratching post (with a heavy base so it won't tip over on them), kitty condo or cat tree. Cats love to climb, stretch and hide in kitty trees. Rub honeysuckle or catnip into it, and tie an old shirt of yours at the bottom. Be sure to use something that has your smell on it. Another great choice is sold under many names and is fairly inexpensive - it's a long box with corrugated cardboard or the scratcher that is called the wave. First they rub all over it, then they attack it, and finally they sit on it and scratch it. It is fun to watch, easy to refill with honeysuckle or catnip and 100% recyclable. See <http://www.catscratching.com/> to educate yourself on scratching, nail trimming, and soft paws

Kitty Proofing - Even if your cat is an adult, curiosity can get the better of her. Make sure your home is a safe place for her by putting yourself in her paws. Crawl around on the floor and check out any potential dangers. Electrical cords, poisonous houseplants, and any item small enough to swallow are just a few of the things that should be out of her reach. Cats love hiding places, so make sure she can't get into something dangerous, like the clothes dryer. Close all your windows, and put the toilet lid down. Also be careful of anything she can pull on top of her, like an iron.

A common item removed from a sick or dying kitten is a penny! Be sure to keep your coins and other small items, such as screws, nails, paperclips, and rubberbands out of reach in a closed container. These items can block and/or puncture their intestines; they can even be the cause of zinc toxicity! Keep all medications out of reach and in closed containers as well - prescriptions bottles sound and look fun to cats. Be sure to put up blankets with lots of fringe (anything with strings) because their nails get caught in them, a leg or neck can become trapped in them, and they even try to eat them. Many surgeries have been done on cats who played with a frilly blanket, tried to eat the strings and got them tangled down their tongue, throat and intestines. A string can be so far back on their prickly tongue that a vet can't even see it during an exam. Only an x-ray or

exploratory surgery will reveal they have an obstruction. As you can see, this can kill them before you even know something is wrong!

Provide your cat with some basic training to help him get along in your home – It's true that cats usually have their own ideas about how to do things. Even so, most cats can be taught not to scratch the couch, eat plants, or jump up on the kitchen counter. With repeated, gentle and consistent training (as you would with a toddler), your cat will learn the house rules. **NEVER** yell, hit or water spray him.

Remember to provide a suitable alternative to meet his needs, for example, a scratching post, cat grass, and a kitty condo. If you need additional help with an issue please contact your adoption agency. They have many years of experience with certain safe and effective training products available such as scat mats.

Groom your cat often – All cats, whether long or short haired, should be brushed regularly to keep their coats and skin healthy, prevent matting, and reduce shedding and hairballs. They also need to have their claws clipped to keep them from growing into their pads on the bottom of their paws. Grooming is a good opportunity to discover any lumps, fleas, injuries, etc., and bond with your kitty.

Keep your cat safe by keeping him indoors safely confined – Provide your cat with safety and security. Always use a cat carrier when transporting your pet. Protect him by making certain that all windows are securely screened. Keep the washer and dryer lids closed and check inside before each use. (Some cats like to climb in these appliances if they're left open.) Get into the habit of ensuring that drawers, closets, and cupboards are uninhabited before you close them – a kitty may be lurking inside.

Take your cat to the veterinarian for regular check-ups – If you do not have a veterinarian, ask the rescue group for a referral. Medical care is as essential for your cat as it is for you. If you already have dogs or cats at home, make sure they are in good general health before introducing your new cat. Remember that all veterinarians are not created equal, as it is with human doctors. Make sure your vet is good at diagnostics for cats.

A Final Note

Be loyal to, and patient with your cat. Make sure your expectations of your companion are reasonable, and remember that most problems have a solution. If you are struggling with your pet's behavior, learn how to solve problems with humane and effective techniques.

Contact Paws Animal Rescue at anytime for possible remedies to problems or for ANY questions you may have. Paws' Cat Director has gone to great lengths studying felines and their medical and behavioral issues. Please contact us immediately with any questions and/or concerns at paws@oplink.net.