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GETTING A CAT AS A PET

Thinking of getting a cat?

Cats are quite independent animals and each cat will have it's own personality!

What do cats need?

- Opportunities for plenty of human companionship. Cats can fit into busy, modern lifestyles more easily than dogs, but still need human interaction and opportunities for play.
- A suitable diet. Cats are carnivores, and cannot survive on a vegetarian diet. A cat with outdoor access may hunt birds and small mammals.
- A clean, comfortable bed. Cats often like places that are high up and places that they can hide.
- Outdoor access or a litter tray that will need to be emptied and cleaned regularly. In multiple cat households there should be a litter tray for each cat, plus a spare one.
- Long-haired cats need to be regularly groomed.
- Many cats will scratch furniture, wall-paper or carpets even when provided with scratching posts. Some cats will need their nails clipping, especially when they get older.
- Many cats will live well into their teens, so they are a long-term commitment.
- Cats should be neutered by 6 months old. We advise spaying female cats before they are allowed outside.
- We advise micro-chipping your cat so that it is easier to reunite it with you should it go missing.
- All cats should be vaccinated against the major feline diseases, both as kittens and then with annual boosters for most cats. They should also be regularly treated for fleas and worms. Our Complete Care Club can help spread the cost of routine treatments using a monthly direct debit. We can advise about the costs of routine treatments before you buy a cat.
- Other vets costs will include unexpected illnesses and injuries. Pet insurance, paid by a monthly premium, can help cover the costs of the unexpected (see our pet insurance fact-sheet for more information).

Can I keep a cat indoors?

It is possible to keep a cat indoors, but you need to ensure it has plenty of stimulation and enrichment. There are risks outside for cats, but you need to balance these with the very positive aspects of physical and mental stimulation and an outlet for natural behaviour. Neutering and vaccinating your cat will protect it against some of these risks. For advice about creating the ideal environment for your cat visit the International Cat Care website (www.icatcare.org).

Can I have a cat with a baby or young children?

Yes, you can have a cat or a kitten if you have children. It is important to teach children to treat the

cat(s) kindly. If you are pregnant there is no need to get rid of the cat - simple and basic hygiene precautions and common sense while you are pregnant and while the baby is small can ensure everyone stays safe and happy. For further advice about babies and cats and Toxoplasmosis (a disease risk to pregnant women) visit the International Cat Care website (www.icatcare.org).

Can I have a cat if I have a dog?

You can have a dog and a cat, but care needs to be taken that introductions are done carefully and that the needs of both individuals are met.

How many cats can I keep together?

Cats are solitary creatures by nature and although they can live in groups these are usually families or individuals that have chosen to live with each other. The best way to have two compatible cats is to choose siblings. If you have multiple cats it is important they can each access resources e.g. food, water, hiding places and litter trays at all times.

What type of cat should I get?

- *Adult cat or kitten* - kittens are very cute, but they soon become adult cats! Kittens require a lot of attention when young. There are many adult cats in re-homing centres. A reputable centre will be able to give you a good indication of the cat's personality and the sort of home it will settle best in. Nervous adults will take longer to adjust to a new home, but can generally be left alone without getting themselves into mischief.
- *Male or female* – this is largely personal preference. We advise neutering by 6 months of age, before any behaviours such as spraying in male cats and seasons in female cats start. We can check the sex of your kitten if you are not sure.
- *Pedigree or moggie* – most cats are domestic short or long hair cats i.e. moggies. You can buy pedigree cats in which case it is worth looking into any specific health or welfare problems or care requirements of the breed. Some pedigree cats are very interactive and may require more attention than a moggie. There is more information about pedigree cat breeds on the International Cat Care website (www.icatcare.org).

Where should I get a cat from?

This is an important consideration as the environment from which you get the cat, and the experiences it has received will have a lasting effect on its behaviour and possibly its health.

Many people get a kitten almost accidentally e.g. a neighbour's female cat has an unplanned litter and the kittens need to find homes. You can also go to a breeder for a pedigree kitten or to a re-homing organisation to get a kitten or an adult cat.

Rescue organisations

Many charities and re-homing centres are very well run and professional, but unfortunately there are some where the cats are not kept in ideal conditions even if the owner of the centre means well. For advice check out the International Cat Care website (www.icatcare.org).

Pedigree kitten breeders

A good breeder will be knowledgeable, have a small number of breeding cats and ensure that kittens are well handled and socialised. Unfortunately some breeders try and produce lots of kittens as quickly as possible, and this can lead to overcrowding, poor socialisation and the spread of disease.

You should be looking for a home similar to your own. The environment should be clean and the

mother cat should be healthy looking with healthy, playful kittens. If there are lots of kittens of different ages and breeds, or rooms full of cats, this is unlikely to be conducive to good health and care.

Pet shops

It is always best to see a kitten with its mother in the place where it was bred. This gives you a great deal of information about its health and welfare and the temperament of the mother. This cannot happen in a pet shop, so it is not ideal to get a kitten from a pet shop, even a well run one.

Advertisements

There are many advertisements in newspapers, local stores or on the internet that offer kittens for sale. Assess the environment and mother of the cat in the same way you would a breeder – the mum and kittens should be healthy and well socialised and the environment clean.

Choosing a particular cat or kitten

A cat's personality is determined very early on in life. Learning to enjoy human company is best achieved when a kitten is only 3-8 weeks old, and this is also the time when kittens are best able to get used to other experiences e.g. dogs, noise. If cats do not experience these things when young they may be fearful and avoid interaction or hide from people. The importance of this depends on what kind of cat you want – there is a big difference between wanting a lap cat and wanting a semi-feral cat who needs to earn its keep mousing!

When visiting the kitten check it for signs of ill-health e.g. runny eyes and nose and look at the other kittens and mum as well. Handle the kitten and check that it is friendly. Kittens should be re-homed around 8 weeks of age or older; find out if it has had any vaccinations or any worm/flea treatment.

As difficult as it is, avoid choosing a kitten because you feel sorry for it or want to rescue it from a poor-quality environment. You may end up with a kitten with long-term health problems and may inadvertently encourage bad breeding practice by financially supporting a poor breeder.

The International Cat Care website (www.icatcare.org.uk) has a wealth of further information on cat health and welfare.

Once you have bought your kitten or new cat we can register them on our system. This can be done by phone, in person or online. We can then get them booked in to see the vet for a health check, vaccinations and advice about worming and flea control. Your kitten can also visit us for free weight checks and cuddles with the nurses.

Our vets and nurses are happy to advise by phone or in an appointment, just get in touch.