

# Caring for your Cat

[www.OpenPaws.org](http://www.OpenPaws.org)

*Although considered independent pets, cats are reliant on their owners for food, shelter, veterinary care and companionship. They can live for 20 years! So before you decide to give a home to a cat, think about the commitment and learn how to care for your cat.*

***There is reward for kindness to all living things—Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.)***

## 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. Make sure the cat has food, water and a litter tray in its room and allow it time to settle in.

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. Children must be taught that the cat or kitten is not a toy, and they should not chase the kitten to pick it up, they should let it go if it doesn't want to be played with and allow it to sleep undisturbed when it needs rest. (We can provide special information on how to introduce a new cat to other pets too -to avoid trouble, please ask before you get the new pet.

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!

## Diet

Cats are carnivores - they are meat eaters - so they don't need fruit or vegetables like us. Naturally they would hunt and eat their prey whole: bones, feathers, skin and insides too. So, it's not nutritionally balanced or a natural diet to feed cats *just* meat e.g. of a cow, sheep or a tuna. Our food, with salt, spices or sugars are not healthy for cats either. Neither is dog food, because cats and dogs have different nutritional needs to dogs.

The easiest way to provide a balanced diet is to feed a premium quality, complete dry cat food. Wet food is ok, but much more expensive and doesn't keep their teeth in good shape.

Kittens need a special diet – because they have a lot of growing to do - they need more energy and protein for that. Kittens also need to be fed more regularly because their tummies' are only small. If using dry food, you can allow them access all day, or give several small meals during the day.



Adult cats can 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 a constant supply of fresh, clean drinking water available. Cats have no need for milk after they have left their mother – in fact, milk can cause diarrhoea.

## Toys and scratching posts

Play is an essential part of your cat's life and will encourage a bond with you as well as helping to keep your cat fit, healthy, mentally active and better behaved.



Many different cat toys are available from pet shops but most cats will play with anything that is light and small – you can make your own out of ping-pong balls, paper bows etc. Toys filled with “catnip” hold a special attraction for many cats. A cardboard box is great; cut “paw-sized” holes and play with a ribbon or paper ball!

A scratching-post inside the house is helpful in protecting your furniture, even if your cat is able to go outside. And essential (get a few!!) if your cat stays indoors. These should be covered in material that is not found anywhere else in the house (e.g. string rather than carpet) so that your cat learns not to scratch other furniture.



## When to let your cat go outside

Your new cat will need to be kept inside for 2-3 weeks to establish a bond with the house, the people and other pets. The cat should think of your house as a safe, happy place - if not, it may run away when you open the door!

If you live in a residential compound or villa that is safe for cats to play outside you may decide it's good for the extra exercise and mental stimulation. But if you live where Pest Control are hunting cats, many street cats or a road with busy traffic, it may be safer for your cat to live indoors.

Vaccinations should be done before being allowed outside, to protect them from disease. And kittens or new cats should be neutered before going out – or they may get pregnant to street cats, catch other diseases or get lost while looking for – or being chased by – a mate!

To introduce your cat to your garden for the first time, choose a calm day - not too hot or cold. And make sure it's hungry – ready to come home to eat (just delay meal-time by a few hours). Let the cat walk through the door and explore a little - 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 from dusk until dawn as night is when cats are at most risk of being hit by cars, in fights with other cats or harmed by Pest Control. If you put a collar on your cat, make sure it's a safety collar so kitty can't get hooked up by it.



## Cats that live permanently indoors

It is not really appropriate to keep a cat only indoors when it's been used to living outside. However, some cats with disabilities may need to remain in for their own safety and some, who have grown up as indoor cats, do very well if their owners provide them with things to do

Indoor cats will require less food than a cat which has access to more exercise area out doors.

You will also need to encourage the cat to exercise by playing and provide things to keep it occupied- because cats are smart, they can get bored too.

Scratching-posts are essential for 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. It is not acceptable to de-claw cats - this is actually cutting off their toes so they can't scratch at all. It is illegal, as an act of cruelty, in all developed countries - except the USA. De-clawed cats are actually 30% more likely to have other behavioural problems (e.g. biting, urine marking, litter box avoidance etc) than normal cats. All pets (and people too) need to learn good behaviour but careful teaching is a better and kinder way to achieve it.



## Grooming

All cats need to be groomed regularly. This keeps fur and skin in good condition and many short haired cats find it easy to look after their own coat. But brushing and grooming by you also builds a relationship between you and your pet - in the same way a mother cat bonds by grooming her young. Grooming time is also provides a good opportunity to check your cat for any signs of ill health, or injury.

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 it enjoys being stroked and give treats for good behaviour.

### Washing cats?

There is NO reason to routinely bathe your cat. Occasionally your vet may recommend a shampoo to treat specific skin problems with a medicated shampoo.

Beware! Shampooing is often used by some Pet Shops as an excuse to make money- in fact it is not natural for your cat to bathe - it can be distressing to the cat and actually damage its coat and dry out the delicate skin. Think about it- would a fashion designer recommend you wash a fur coat?



## Health and Veterinary Care.

### Vaccinations

The 3 diseases that your cat should be vaccinated against are cat flu, feline enteritis and rabies. Your vet will advise you on when these vaccinations should be done, and how frequently your cat needs boosters. If your cat lives only indoors it may not need rabies vaccinations (until it needs to get a pet passport to leave the kingdom). Some clinics also offer vaccines against Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) - this is only necessary if the cat goes outdoors and as yet we at Paws have not seen evidence of the disease being present in the kingdom.

### De-Worming

Cats should be treated against parasitic worms to keep your cat and family healthy. All kittens are born with worms passed from their mother, so get advice from your vet about treating kittens as they grow. Adult cats who live outdoors are particularly susceptible to worms – because they get them from hunting and from insects who live outside.

**Ear mites** are common in cats especially cats that go outdoors. But once the mites affect pets inside the house, the other pets need to be checked too – dogs included.

**Fleas and Ticks** both are not common in Riyadh so there's no real need to routinely expose your cat to the chemicals in flea collars or insect powders or sprays. If you think you see ticks or fleas, ask your vet, or us, for advice, correct treatment should remove them easily.

## Neutering for cats

There is an enormous over population of cats in the city. Most of the street cats you see are abandoned pets or their kittens and kittens or their kittens. Too many people allow their pets to breed without considering the consequences.

Cats do not think like people – about choosing a husband / wife and raising a family.

When domesticated animals are kept in an artificial environment – i.e. our homes – we have a responsibility to make sure their numbers and their health are looked after.

**There are NO medical, physical or psychological benefits to letting your cat breed.**

Pregnancy, birth and feeding the babies are all very demanding to the mother cat

– especially if she is also young. Tom cats are at greater risk of contracting disease or start urine marking in the house if they are left un-neutered.

**By contrast, neutered animals live longer, healthier lives.**

They have fewer behavioural problems, are protected from reproductive tract diseases and even some cancers. And – importantly - neutered pets don't contribute to the overpopulation problem we already have.

At Paws, we neuter cats from just 8 weeks old. The younger age means they recover quickly and the operation is easier too. It means you can have kittens neutered before they go to new homes. But it's ok to leave the operation until they are about 3-4 months for girls or 6 months for boys – only, don't delay, we have seen cats pregnant at 4 months old and once your male cat wanders for a mate – he could be lost forever.

## Going on Holiday or Exit Only.

Pet cats are domesticated animals – *they rely on people* for food, water, shelter and care.

If you are going on vacation, never leave your cat to look after itself – many can't and those who can may move out altogether. Make sure you have someone reliable to check on your pet every day or arrange a place where it can stay safely until you get back.

If you are leaving the kingdom you will need to decide whether you can find a new home or take your pet with you.

Some countries are easy for cats to move to e.g. the USA or South Africa. Others, like Australia, don't accept cats directly from Saudi Arabia at all and some like the UK require a quarantine period.

New homes or travel arrangements are sometimes time consuming to arrange. Don't let it put you off giving a loving home to a cat while you are here but **be responsible for those furry friends who rely on us.**

## "There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you"

(Qur'an 6:38)

According to the learned commentators of the Qur'an Majeed, animals all live a life - individual and social - like members of a human community. They are living creatures of Allah in their own right and as such we must respect them.

Keeping an animal as a pet can have great benefits for both them and us. But it is also a great responsibility. Respecting animals, and caring for them well, is expected in Islam. The Prophet himself was reprimanded by Allah for once neglecting his horse, so Allah will judge our actions too.

Learn about animals, what they need and how to look after them so you can treat them well.

For it is written: "A good deed done to a beast, is as valid as doing good to a person. While cruelty to a beast is as serious as cruelty to a person."  
(narrated by Bukhari and Muslim).

Salams.



**Helping Hands for Companion Animals**