

CAT CARE

YOUR BASIC GUIDE TO CARING
FOR CATS AND KITTENS



LONELY MIAOW

ASSOCIATION INC.



Photography by Sabine Kruekel

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CARING FOR YOUR CAT OR KITTEN

Cats are wonderful pets, providing warm and affectionate companionship. However, owning a cat or kitten means you must also accept long-term responsibility to care for them and provide a good quality of life. The following information is a beginner's guide to help you understand your pet's health and behaviour, as well as your responsibilities as an owner.



FEEDING

Make sure your cat or kitten always has access to fresh water. Cats thrive on a twice-daily feeding schedule as it simulates their natural urge to hunt and feed morning and evening. However, some cats prefer their food made available for them to graze on throughout the day.

Kittens should be fed kitten food until they are at least 9 months old, as these formulas contain the extra nutrition needed for healthy growth.

Elderly or very sedentary cats should be given senior food. Cats carrying any extra body weight may need to be placed on a calorie-controlled diet to prevent excessive weight gain.

KEY POINTS:

- Empty, rinse and refill water bowls with fresh water every day.
- Feed a quality diet that is appropriate for your cat's age and lifestyle. Do not feed human food or scraps as these can cause an upset stomach, diarrhoea or vomiting – human food contains much more salt and sugar as well as less protein than a cat's ideal diet.
- Cooked chicken bones and fish bones should be avoided as they can splinter in a cat's stomach and pierce the stomach lining.
- If changing your cat's diet, do so gradually over at least a week. Start with about 80% of the old diet mixed with 20% of the new food for a few days, then gradually increase the amount of new food over the week. Sudden change of diet can upset your cat's stomach and cause diarrhoea.

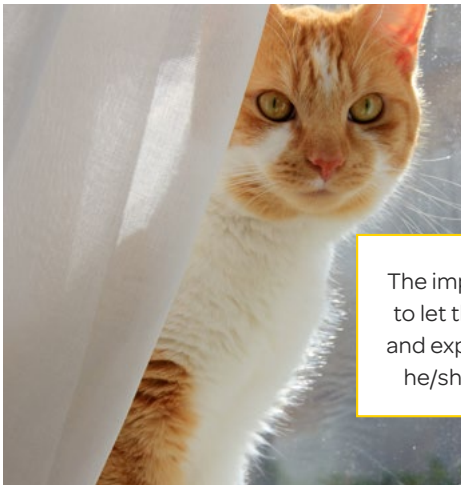


If you are considering switching to a raw food diet - please consult a qualified veterinary care professional to ensure the diet is meeting your cat's nutritional needs.

THE FIRST WEEK

Cats are territorial by nature, which means that having a place to call home is extremely important to their emotional wellbeing. Your new cat or kitten will be in a state of stress from being moved to a strange new place, and your goal is to help it feel comfortable as quickly as possible.

When you bring your new cat home, confine him or her to a single room with food, water and a litter tray for at least the first few days, to provide a “safe” space while they settle in before introducing more of the strange new environment. Some shy cats or kittens may hide under the bed for as long as a week or even more; others will be ready to come out into the house and go exploring after just a day.



The important thing is to let the cat emerge and explore whenever he/she feels ready.

You should spend as much time as possible in the room with the cat, try to coax them and encourage interaction but never force them out of hiding. If you have children, try to keep them quiet and seated on these visits, so they do not frighten the cat or kitten if they are not used to kids.

The cat or kitten will let you know when he or she is relaxed and ready to begin exploring more of the house. Be sure to leave fresh water out at all times, and make sure that your cat is eating and drinking. Even stressed cats like to eat, so no food for 24 hours or more is possibly a sign of illness and warrants a trip to the vet.

PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT

Lonely Miaow recommends new cats and kittens be kept inside for a minimum period of 2-4 weeks depending of the cat's confidence levels, to allow adjustment to the new environment and to give the cat time to learn where his/her new home is.

If you have adopted a young kitten or newly rescued cat, he/she should not be allowed outside at all until fully vaccinated, in order to minimise the risk of developing illness. Initial vaccination is a set of 2 vaccines given 3-4 weeks apart, followed by annual “boosters”.

Lonely Miaow cats and kittens are desexed prior to adoption, so there is no risk of producing kittens once allowed outside. However, young kittens should be supervised when they are first allowed outside, and should be encouraged to come inside at night to minimise the risk of fighting or accidents and your cat becoming injured.

A cat will explore the neighbouring properties, but shouldn't wander too far from home if it is being properly cared for and knows where it's territory is. Ensure that time spent outside is built up gradually, so that your cat learns your routine and doesn't become distressed if you leave them out for the day. If for some reason your cat doesn't return home at the usual time, go for a walk around the neighbourhood calling them, and speak to your neighbours. Many cats get locked in sheds or garages so always check these.

NEVER chase a wandering or excited cat as he or she may run on to the road, instead try enticing them inside with their favourite treats, toys or wet food.



KEEP SAFE

We recommend that you do not let your cat out at night. Night time is more dangerous for cats – they are much more likely to be run over by a car when the streets are less busy, as they get surprised by the car and blinded by the headlights. Most cat fights occur at night which can result in injuries. There is also a greater risk of your cat being attacked at night by a roaming dog.



MOVING HOUSE

If you move house, keep your cat inside your new home for at least three weeks after you move, to allow them to learn where their new territory is. Cats have an incredible sense of direction, are fond of routine and may attempt to walk back to your old house, if they have not yet adjusted to the change.

We register the microchip of your new companion to the address you have given to us at time of adoption. If you move, please remember to update your address and contact details on the NZCAR website, animalregister.co.nz, or phone **0800 LOSTPET (0800 567873)**.

If your cat does go missing after the move, please refer to our “MISSING CATS” section.

REASSURING EXISTING CATS

Cats are like children in many ways, so it's not surprising that your existing pet may feel threatened by a new arrival. He/she may be fearful of losing territory or jealous of the attention the new pet receives. Extra love, attention and patience during this transition will help to reassure your existing pets that they are still loved! Be prepared for it to take from a week to a month before the resident cats accept the new cat.

Before bringing home your new cat, make sure that the resident cat is healthy and up to date with their vaccinations. Let your cat continue to have the run of the house while the new cat is confined, so that they understand they are not being pushed out of their territory.

Allow them to sniff or paw under the door with your new cat, and exchange items such as bedding to familiarise each animal with the other's smell.

Try feeding both cats in the same space without them crowding each other, so that they have positive associations with each other and learn that they are not in competition for food.

When the time comes for the two cats to meet face to face, try to give them short periods of contact, slowly increasing the time as they adapt to each other. Be sure to supervise their visits until you're sure they are okay alone, and be prepared for some hissing and growling, which is quite normal for cats that are getting to know one another. Do not yell at or discipline either cat for hissing or growling, and in the unlikely event of a fight breaking out, break it up with a spray from a water bottle or a thrown towel, not your hands.

Gradually decrease the distance between them at feeding times, and provide each with separate food and water bowls and litter trays - they'll probably use each other's eventually, but will appreciate having their own. Try keeping your resident cat's routine intact, and take every opportunity you can to pet and praise him/her. Above all, be patient, and allow them as much space from each other as they need while they adjust to each other.



INTRODUCING CATS & DOGS OR OTHER PETS

Much of the same advice applies to introducing a new cat to the family dog. Again, let the dog have the run of the house and sniff at the cat under the door, and exchange scented items during the first few days. You may wish to put up a baby gate in the doorway of the cat's room so the animals can see each other before they actually meet, and the cat has a space it feels safe in that it can retreat to. Make sure the first visits in the house are supervised, with the dog on a leash if you are unsure about how gentle or respectful it will be. Encourage your dog with gentle praise if he is friendly towards the cat. If the cat runs do not allow the dog to chase it, and don't force a cat that seems uncomfortable to be in the same room with the dog.

Keep the first visits brief, then extend them as the animals become familiar with each other. Be patient, give them time, and they'll soon learn their place with each other.

OTHER PETS

If you have birds, fish or smaller animals such as mice, guinea pigs or rabbits, make sure the cat or kitten is not able to get access to these pets.

YOUNG CHILDREN AND KITTENS

Young kittens and young children can be a challenging combination if not closely supervised. Even the best-behaved children don't always know what's appropriate or gentle enough for a fragile kitten. Kittens also don't always know what's appropriate – biting and scratching is natural behaviour for them, especially if they are playing, frightened or provoked.

Caring for an animal can teach a child compassion and responsibility, but this needs to be carefully monitored. Please don't leave a young child and a kitten together unattended. Teach your children how to be gentle with the cat or kitten and how to treat them as a member of the family. Kittens need lots of sleep so make sure the children understand that the kitten shouldn't be woken when it is sleeping.

Never let your children encourage a kitten to pounce on their fingers. It may seem cute at first, but kittens have very sharp little claws and teeth, and a fully grown cat jumping on and biting a hand in play can be very painful and result in injury.

Teach children how to properly hold a cat:
With one hand under the rump and one hand on the back,
held up against their bodies.



PREVENTING BAD HABITS

A little training when your cat first comes home will help to prevent any bad habits from becoming established. If you try to “think like a cat” to discover why they perform a certain unwanted behaviour, you can help to establish more acceptable routines. Here are some tips on the three most common bad habits:

SCRATCHING

Scratching is a normal cat behaviour used to leave scent on their territory, get exercise, and maintain their claws.

Most cats will leave your expensive furniture alone if you redirect their scratching instincts to an acceptable spot. Invest in a cat scratching post big enough for your cat to stretch out on, and if you see them scratching, take them to the post. You can use catnip on a scratching post to enhance its appeal, and put double-sided sellotape down the edges of your sofa during the training period as a deterrent. If your cat is very persistent and these methods aren't working, invest in a small water pistol to deter your cat when it scratches the furniture.



JUMPING UP ON THE KITCHEN BENCH & TABLE

Cats love high places, so the kitchen bench strikes them as a great place to watch the world go by. If your cat also finds food up there, they've just had reinforcement for this 'bad' habit. Best solution: Find another high spot where it's okay for your cat to sit, like the top of a scratching post or bookshelf. Then persistently move your cat there every time it jumps on the counter. Repetition and consistency are key here, and eventually your cat will get the idea.

LITTER BOX TRAINING

Cats and kittens instinctively seek a place to neatly deposit and bury their waste. Select a large, plastic litter box with sides low enough for a kitten to climb in and out. Avoid litters and litter additives with heavy deodorisers or perfumes which can offend your cat's sensitive nose and cause rejection of the litter box. We use Pine Pellets as cat litter in Lonely Miaow foster homes, it is an excellent natural deodoriser.



DON'T use fine clumping litter for a young kitten – it can inhale or ingest the particles.

Cover the bottom of the box with a layer of cat litter. Too much litter will just be wasted and may actually frighten a cat or kitten when its feet sink into the litter.

Keep the litter box clean by removing wastes at least once or twice every day. At least once a week, dump the litter into a strong rubbish bag and dispose of it. Wash the box with hot soapy water, rinse and dry it well, and add fresh litter.

Place the litter box in a private, easily accessible location. Avoid places in high traffic areas or too near your cat's food or bed. Cats prefer privacy in the litter box.

Lonely Miaow foster homes ensure your cat or kitten is litter trained before they are placed up for adoption. Praise and pet your cat or kitten for using the box or even just for digging to reinforce this training. If a kitten appears confused or nervous, make light digging motions in the litter with your fingers.

NEVER scold or force the cat or kitten to remain in the box. If they associate the litter box with negative frightening experiences – loud noises and voices, they may avoid the litter box entirely.



If you have a kitten, be sure he or she actually remembers where the litter box is! Sometimes in a big house a small kitten can get lost, in which case it will look for the nearest unobtrusive corner to go. If your cat or kitten is not using the litter box, try crating them with their litter box, or keep them in a small room or bathroom until they are consistently using their litter box. You can then gradually increase your cat or kitten's access to your home. If litter box avoidance continues despite this training exercise, have your cat checked by your vet to rule out any health issues such as an urinary tract infection. You can also try changing the type of litter, as many cats have their own preference or are sensitive to particular litters. Try unscented litters, removing lids from hooded litter trays, moving the box to a more private location, or cleaning the litter more often. Provide multiple boxes in multiple cat households.



PLAY TIME

It is important to spend time interacting with and handling a cat or kitten so that they become confident and friendly. This is especially important for kittens up to 12 weeks of age as this is the crucial time to learn behaviour patterns. Two cats or kittens that get along well will provide company and entertainment for each other, but the added cost and responsibility of owning multiple pets must be carefully considered.



Give your cat or kitten lots of toys to play with when you're not there and keep it varied, as kittens get bored of the same toys. These don't need to be expensive – ping pong balls, boxes and scrunched up pieces of paper provide hours of entertainment.

DO NOT give your kitten wool or string to play with – they can get tangled in long pieces, and if they start to swallow it the barbs on their tongue will not let them spit it out and they can suffocate or cause internal injuries.



HOLIDAYS

When you go away on holiday, you have the option of boarding your cat in a cattery, or having a cat-sitter come to your home to feed and look after your cat. Many things can happen while you are away, and the next door neighbour may not be as watchful or as careful as you would be. Be aware that your absence can be distressing to your cat which can cause them to wander, so keeping them confined indoors for at least the first week of your holiday is advised.

MISSING CAT

If your cat is missing you need to act quickly to locate them before they wander further:

- Call on your neighbours to ask if they have seen your cat, and if you can check in their garage or shed.
- Walk around the neighbourhood calling your cat - you can also rattle a food or treat bag if they normally come running to this sound.
- Prepare a flyer with a colour photo of your cat, your name, address, contact details, and date when last seen. Deliver as many as you can around the neighbourhood, and put up the flyer at your local shops and vet clinics.
- Advertise your missing cat on:
trademe.co.nz
animalregister.co.nz
lostpet.co.nz
- Flag your cat's microchip as lost by visiting **animalregister.co.nz** Your pet's microchip is linked to the email address you provided at the time of adoption.
- Contact your local SPCA and ask them to list your missing cat in their lost pet database.
- Leave food and biscuits outside at night in case it returns while you are asleep.

EQUIPMENT

- **Carry cage** – A metal or plastic cage is best as cardboard boxes are not secure enough to contain a wriggling kitten or a strong adult cat. Top-opening carriers allow more airflow and visualisation, and are ideal if your cat likes to keep an eye on it's surroundings or doesn't like entering an enclosed carrier, while a front-opening carrier provides a better sense of security for less-confident cats when travelling.
- **Food and water bowls** – A straight sided water bowl is ideal, as it is not as easily spilled.
- **Litter box and a suitable cat litter.**
- **Bedding** – Old towels or blankets are sufficient but make sure all bedding materials are machine washable.
- **Scratching pole** – This will save your expensive furniture and can be purchased or are relatively easily made out of a few pieces of wood nailed together and wrapped in some sisal or old carpet (avoid the looped variety).
- **Toys** – Ping pong balls, small soft toys, scrunched up pieces of paper or toys on a string.
- **Grooming brushes**



ONGOING COSTS

- **Food** – Both dry and wet food.
- **Cat litter** – Available in large bags of 15-30L from supermarkets or pet shops.
- **Worming tablets** – Every three months for an adult cat.
- **Flea treatment** – Every month for a kitten or adult cat.
- **Veterinary visits** – Annual check-up and vaccination, and treatment for any other medical problems.
- **Pet Insurance (Optional)** – There are a variety of insurance companies that will insure your pet, which can be financially helpful when emergency treatments are required.

Owning a cat can be an expensive venture – make sure you put aside enough for the daily necessities and the unexpected emergencies



GENERAL HEALTH

If you notice your cat or kitten has diarrhoea, is vomiting or appears unwell please take it to a veterinarian as soon as possible. A kitten can deteriorate very quickly from dehydration caused by diarrhoea or vomiting. Any change in your cat or kitten's character, especially if they suddenly become very lethargic, is a sign that they are sick. Please don't delay – if necessary visit an after hours vet clinic.

Desexing – All Lonely Miaow cats and kittens are desexed before going to their new homes. Not only does desexing make a healthier, better behaved cat, it will also prolong their lifespan. Desexing helps Lonely Miaow in our efforts to control Auckland's cat population, a problem that causes hundreds of thousands of strays in Auckland to suffer needlessly every day.

Worming – Your kitten needs worming every two weeks until 12 weeks old, then every month until six months old, then every three months thereafter. We recommend a veterinary-grade all-wormer product such as Drontal, Milbemax or Profender.

Flea treatment – Fleas affect cats and kittens all year round, and they need flea treatment every month to keep the product at sufficient levels to protect them. We recommend a veterinary-grade flea treatment such as Advantage or Frontline.

Ears – Look inside the ears to check they are clean. Extremely dirty ears may be an indication of an infection or ear mites. Excessive scratching of the ears may also indicate problems.

Eyes – Check there is no discharge or blinking/squinting of the eyes as this can indicate ill-health.

Teeth – Your cats gums should be pink and the teeth should be clean and sharp. If they are red, swollen or dirty then they will need to be checked by a vet to prevent a more severe infection.

General checks – Check paw pads for cuts, and the body and face for any abrasions or abnormalities. If you have any doubts about your cat's health, phone or visit your veterinarian. They should be able to advise you on the seriousness of your find and what to do about it.

OUR MISSION

Founded in 1995, The Lonely Miaow Association is an incorporated, non-profit organisation dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and rehoming of stray and abandoned cats and kittens in the greater Auckland area. The cats and kittens we rescue all receive a thorough health assessment and ongoing care which is undertaken by one of our supporting vets. Our cats and kittens are cared for in volunteer foster homes and when ready, adopted out to their very own loving, forever home.

For more information, general enquiries, or to find out how to support our life-saving work, visit our website: **lonelymiaow.co.nz**