Keeping your cat safe and happy at home





Contents

4 Keep me Close & Safe at Home

6 How do I keep my cat at home?

10 Is your home somewhere your cat wants to be?

14 Can your cat hang out with you on their terms?



Keep me Close & Safe at Home

Thank you for providing a loving home for your new feline friend! Whether you've just adopted a new cat or kitten, or are considering how best to care for your existing cat, this guide can help you keep your cat at home in a way that works best for your cat and your family.

Keeping your cat at home means preventing them from leaving your property at all times. Many owners now provide a home that is safe and where their cat can thrive all day, every day.

Keeping your cat safe and happy at home requires meeting their physical, health, and behavioural needs and also ensuring they feel good. This will require forward thinking, a little imagination, and commitment. But you needn't go it alone: we're here to help so that you and your cat can live together in harmony at home.





Why should I keep my cat at home?

Your 'stay at home' cat is more likely to enjoy a longer, healthier life. This includes spending more quality time with you, keeping them safe from road traffic, avoiding problems with your neighbours, and reducing the risk they will harm or kill other animals.

Keeping your cat at home will also reduce the risk of other harms including:

- becoming lost, stolen, or abused.
- fighting with other neighbourhood cats leading to injury.
- accidental or intentional poisoning or trapping.
- being attacked by a dog.
- acquiring infections or disease that can be fatal or have life-long consequences.
- exposure to parasites, such as worms or fleas, and acquiring related illnesses.

Will my cat be happy staying at home?

Your cat is more likely to settle into an at-home lifestyle if you start early and provide many choices for what to do at home. Kittens can adapt well if they are kept at home from a young age. Newly-adopted cats should be kept at home when you first bring them home, as they may run away or become lost if allowed outside.

If your cat currently leaves your property, gradually introduce an at-home lifestyle. To help encourage your cat to spend more time at home, they may need more toys, places to hide and sleep, scratch, climb, and perch. It helps to spend time with your cat (e.g., playing, grooming). If you want to keep them inside more, start at night and gradually increase the time they are indoors during the day.

No matter how you keep your cat at home, they should have a registered microchip, and wear a collar with tags. It is also important that your cat is desexed to prevent unplanned litters of kittens.

How do I keep my cat at home?

You can keep your cat at home with an escape-proof outdoor area, a combination of indoors and a secure outdoor enclosure, or keeping your cat fully indoors.

Option 1: Access to an outdoor area with an escape-proof fence

You can give your cat a mix of indoor and outdoor living, by making your backyard escape-proof.

> Before you make changes to your backyard, check with your local council for consent requirements about the height of your fence.

How to escape-proof your backyard:

> You can erect a new solid continuous fence or modify the top of an existing one with rolling cylinders, smooth metal or plastic sheeting, or inward-inclined wire.

> To keep other cats from coming into your outdoor area, install modifications to both sides of the fence.

> Close off gaps around gates and buildings, and trim overhanging trees near the fence.

> To keep cats from climbing trees near the fence, fix a smooth metal or plastic band around the trunk at least 1.8 metres off the ground.

> To reduce the risk of your cat harming wildlife in your backyard, use cat collars designed to reduce predation success (e.g., clown collars, collars with bells), and remove plants, food, or water sources that may attract wildlife to your backyard.

> Regularly check to make sure your fencing remains safe and secure.



An existing fence, increased in height to more than 1.8 metres with a rolling attachment.



A cat-proof rolling bar attached to a fence prevents cats from getting in and out of the yard.

Option 2: Access to an outdoor enclosure – ‘catios’

A secure outdoor area attached to your cat’s indoor space via a window or cat flap, or a free-standing enclosure.

> An outdoor area linked to the inside of your home allows your cat to choose where they spend their time.

> The enclosure should be safe from dogs and other cats.

> Include a variety of platforms at different heights, hiding places and scratching posts, food, water, litter trays, and protection from the weather (e.g. sun, rain, wind) and extremes of heat and cold.

> Provide hiding places so your cat will feel safe and secure.





Cat-proofing a balcony or porch allows access to fresh air, sunshine, and all the outdoor sights and smells that interest your cat.

How to turn your balcony or porch into a 'catio':

- Use rigid netting if the top of the balcony is escape proofed or fully enclosed with a roof. Otherwise, use floppy netting (but not stretchy) to discourage climbing.
- If netting is added to an existing fence, it should be at least 1.8 metres in height.
- To prevent your cat getting caught in the netting, the netting holes should be about 50mm wide. Young kittens should be kept away from netting until they are close to adult size.
- Keep the netting in good condition and well-reinforced. Regularly check to make sure it remains safe and secure.

Option 3: Exclusive indoor living

A exclusive indoor lifestyle can work for some cats and families.

- Provide enough space and areas for toileting, sleeping, hiding, scratching, climbing, perching, and playing, and access to food and water.
- Use the vertical space in your home as much as you can for perching and climbing areas.
- Ensure your indoor cat gets plenty of exercise each day. Toys designed for chasing and jumping work great.
- Your indoor cat can enjoy outdoor sights, smells, and sounds with a cat-proof fly/security screen which prevent them escaping from open windows and doors.



Is your home somewhere your cat wants to be?

For a healthy and happy ‘stay at home’ cat, they need to feel your home is their home too, somewhere they can thrive. You will need to provide them with choices and opportunities to ensure they feel good and to meet their physical, health, and behavioural needs.

What to provide your cat:

- Separate places for food and water bowl/source.
- Toileting areas (litter trays).
- Resting and hiding places.
- Places to climb and perch.
- Places to scratch and mark.
- Opportunities for mental and physical stimulation through toys and exercise.

For more information on providing food, water, and litter trays for your cat please refer our Cat and Kitten Care Guide: www.spca.nz/cat-care

Offer more than one choice for each resource. Provide one cat with at least two litter trays, two feed stations, two water bowls, and multiple types of scratching surfaces and resting/hiding places in different locations. For every additional cat you have, you will need to provide additional resources.



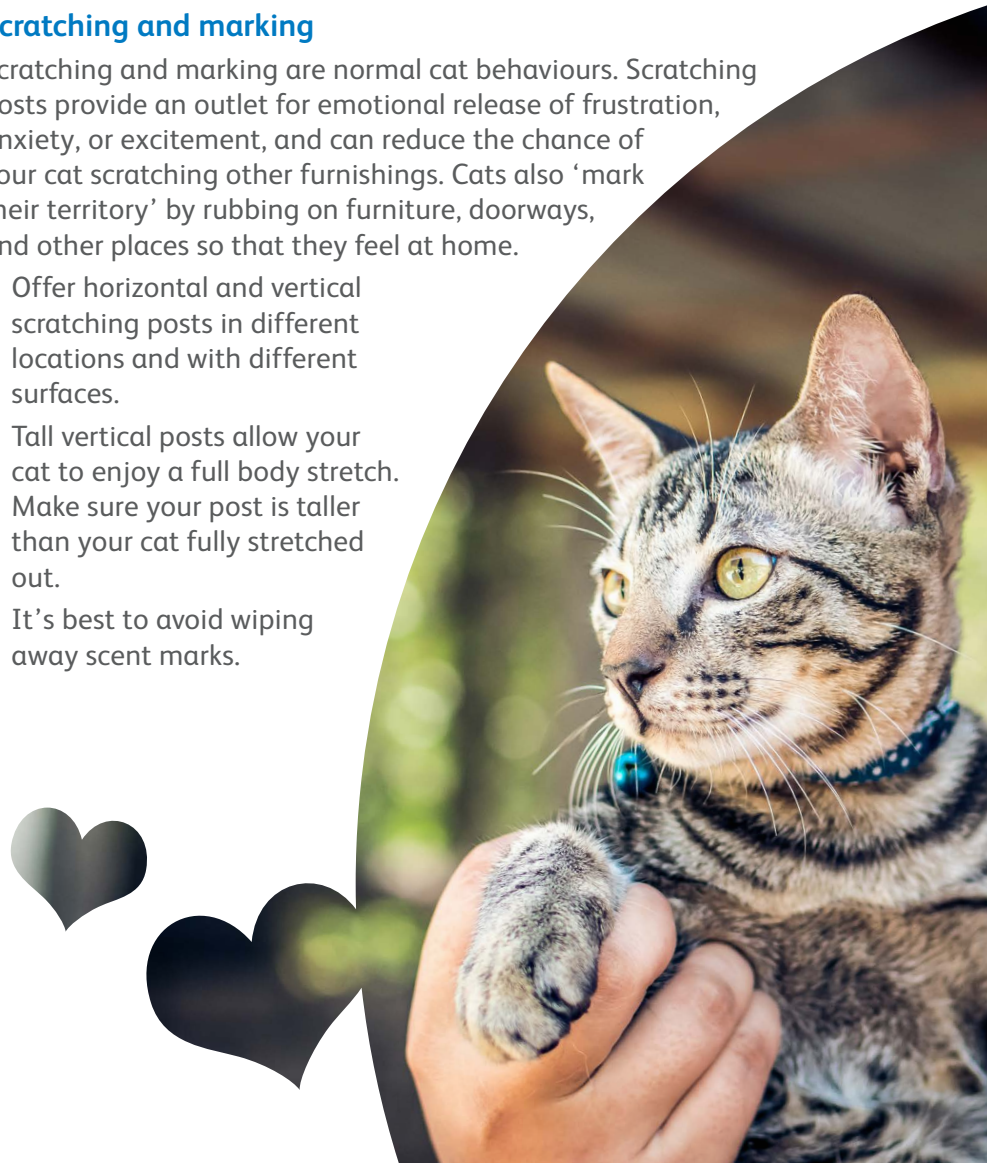
Resting and hiding places

- Cats love to hide in cupboards, wardrobes, or underneath beds.
- A cat carrier left open or wooden, plastic, or cardboard boxes make great hiding places.
- Offer your cat elevated spots for jumping, climbing and perching.
- To create multiple levels, consider making DIY modifications to your house or buying cat furniture.

Scratching and marking

Scratching and marking are normal cat behaviours. Scratching posts provide an outlet for emotional release of frustration, anxiety, or excitement, and can reduce the chance of your cat scratching other furnishings. Cats also ‘mark their territory’ by rubbing on furniture, doorways, and other places so that they feel at home.

- Offer horizontal and vertical scratching posts in different locations and with different surfaces.
- Tall vertical posts allow your cat to enjoy a full body stretch. Make sure your post is taller than your cat fully stretched out.
- It’s best to avoid wiping away scent marks.



Mental and physical stimulation

Cats need to exercise their bodies and minds. Cats are motivated to perform behaviours such as stalking, chasing, and pouncing. It's easy to provide cats with substitutes for hunting behaviours and other ways to keep them active.

Food games

Food games provide your cat with new and engaging activities during feeding times.

- Hide food in different locations for your cat to search for and find.
- Offer a food ball or a puzzle feeder so your cat has to play to obtain the food.
- Toss individual pieces of dry food for your cat to chase.
- Train your cat to perform tricks for treats. Training provides your cat mental and physical exercise and is also an excellent way to bond with your cat.

Playtime

Some cats prefer to jump, others prefer to run, some prefer bird-like toys, and others mouse or insect-like toys. Learn your cat's preferred style of play and find the best toys and activities to match it.

- Let your cat catch the toy occasionally to give satisfaction.
- Occasionally reward a 'capture' with a treat.
- Rotate toys to encourage stimulation and prevent boredom.
- Make sure to play with your cat each day. Play is good for exercise and for bonding with you!





Potential problems

Following our advice should set you on the right track for a happy and healthy future with your stay at home cat. However, things may not always go according to plan, especially when cats enter a new home.

Problem behaviours

You might encounter one of these common problems:

- Yowling
- Toileting in an inappropriate place
- Scratching furniture
- Being aggressive towards other cats or humans

Prevent poisoning

Ensure there are no toxic plants (such as lilies) in your home or backyard.

For a list of toxic plants to cats see ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's Toxic and Non-Toxic Plants List (https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants).

For more information on these problems, please refer to our Cat and Kitten Care Guide: www.spca.nz/cat-care

Can your cat hang out with you on their terms?

Hanging out with your cat should happen on their terms where they choose the interactions and feel comfortable and secure. Your cat may approach you and rub against your legs, but may object if you try to pick them up. That's okay – your cat will let you know how they prefer to interact. Respecting their preferences builds trust between you and your cat.

Living in harmony

Enjoy some daily 'cat time'. Always allow your cat to initiate and guide the type of contact.

Keeping your cat happy and healthy without leaving home, will help ensure harmony for everyone – you, your cat, neighbours, and local wildlife.





Useful resources:

SPCA tips: spca.nz/safe-at-home
Safe cat, safe wildlife: safecatsafewildlife.org.nz
SPCA Kids Portal: spca.nz/kids-cat-care
DIY enrichment: www.spca.nz/thingstomake
Indoor Pet Initiative: indoorpet.osu.edu
International Cat Care: icatcare.org
Cat Friendly Homes: catfriendly.com
Food puzzles for cats: foodpuzzlesforcats.com

Acknowledgements

This SPCA guide is modelled on RSPCA Australia's Cat Containment Guide. SPCA gratefully acknowledges RSPCA Australia for allowing this content to be modified for the New Zealand environment.

We are also grateful to BC SPCA for their permission to use their photos.



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Updated: May 2026