SPCA

Cat and kitten care

Congratulations on adopting from SPCA!

Cats bring enormous joy into our lives and we wish you many years of happiness together.

This guide will help answer some common questions about settling your new cat into your home, and how best to care for them. If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact your local SPCA Centre (www.spca.nz/centres) - we're happy to assist.

The journey home

This is an exciting time for both your cat and family! However, please don't open the cat carrier in the car on your way home.

Your cat may be scared and unpredictable during the journey, so it's safer to wait until you are inside the house and in your cat's new room.

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Preparing for your new cat

Cat shopping list:

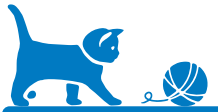
- Cat carrier
- Water and food bowls or puzzle feeder
- Food
- Brush and/or comb
- Scratching post
- Safety collar and bell
- Soft bed
- Toys
- Flea and worm treatment
- Litter tray and litter
- Scoop for litter tray

Pet Insurance

As a responsible and loving cat owner, we know how important it is to you that your new family member stays happy and healthy.

When your furry mate is sick or injured, it can be a stressful time. Pet insurance can help cover unexpected vet bills, giving you one less thing to worry about when your cat needs care.

We recommend exploring the pet insurance options available to find the right cover for you and your cat.



Don't forget, we have lots of useful information on our website. **Check out:** **www.spca.nz/catadvice**

Make a plan to keep your cat safe in a disaster. See here for tips: **www.mpi.govt.nz/getpetsthru**

Essential information on arriving home

Set up one room for your new cat

- Ensure the room is quiet, secure, a comfortable temperature, and well ventilated.

Make the room 'cat comfy'

- Set up the room with water, food, toys, litter tray, a scratching post and somewhere for the cat to hide.
- Cats like to be high up. Include some shelves or a cat tower so your cat feels safe.
- Provide a bed or comfy blanket to help your cat settle.

Cat proofing

- Remove any dangerous or breakable items, such as wires, curtain cords – anything a cat can get tangled in or chew through.
- If the room has a toilet in it, keep the toilet lid closed.
- Remove plants that are toxic to cats. Read more about keeping your home safe www.spca.nz/petsafe-home

Make sure that your new cat is not scared

- Ask anyone in the house to try to keep quiet to avoid scaring your new cat.
- Don't worry if your cat hides for a few days; this is normal behaviour as they settle into their new home. Read more for tips on helping your cat settle in www.spca.nz/timid-cats

Your cat's microchip

All SPCA cats are microchipped and registered on the NZ Companion Animal Register (NZCAR) before you adopt them.

It is essential (and free) to keep the microchip details on NZCAR up-to-date if you move house or your contact details change, in case your cat gets lost.

Check your local bylaws in case this is a requirement.

Update your microchip details at www.animalregister.co.nz

Let your cat explore the house slowly

- After 2-3 days in one room, slowly introduce your cat to the rest of the house.
- Do this room by room to avoid overwhelming them.

Keep your new cat at home

Cats can live happy and healthy lives whilst kept at home either indoors only or with access to an escape proof pen or garden.

- Make sure your home is a place where your cat can thrive. Provide your cat with enrichment and rotate toys to keep them active and entertained.
- Play with your cat each day. Short play sessions can help you bond with your cat and provide them exercise.
- Consider building a "catio" or cat-proofing your fences. For more information, see our guide www.spca.nz/stayathomecat
- Cats should not be allowed outside until they are desexed.
- If you plan to let your cat outside, make sure to keep them inside at first (adult cats – 4-6 weeks, kittens – 8-12 weeks).

Introducing your cat to the family and other pets

- Keep all other pets away from your new cat initially.
- Gradually introduce your new cat to other healthy, calm, fully vaccinated cats and dogs in the household.
- For advice on introducing your cat to other cats and dogs visit www.spca.nz/catadvice

Kids can learn how to care for cats and kittens at: www.spca.nz/kids-catcare

FAQs

Why should I keep my cat in one room initially?

This helps them feel safe and secure. It's also easier for toilet training and cleaning.

Should I socialise my kitten?

A socialised kitten grows into a well-adjusted, friendly cat. The most important time for socialising a kitten is between 2-7 weeks of age. However, it's still important to socialise them past this age. Kittens benefit from positive experiences with family members, other pets, visitors, grooming, veterinary visits, travel in cars, using the cat carrier, the vacuum cleaner, and other life experiences. See our socialisation checklist: www.spca.nz/kitten-socialisation for more information.

Why should I keep my cat on my property?

Cats that are allowed to roam face risks such as traffic accidents, getting trapped or lost, poisoning, injuries, and infectious diseases.

Keeping your cat on your property does not mean you have to keep your cat inside. Consider building a "catio" or cat-proofing your fences to provide your cat with the choice to go outdoors while keeping them safe. Cats can also be trained to accept a harness.

Cats need to have enough exercise and mental stimulation. The good news is there are lots of ways that you can enrich your cat's life. Read more on our website here: www.spca.nz/catenrichment

Should I have a vet yet?

Yes, check out local vet practices or get recommendations from other cat owners.

Settling in: advice and tips

Cat doors

If your cat is going to spend time outdoors, consider installing a cat door. Teach your cat to use the door by pulling a string or toy through it or lure them with food through the door.

Initially, you might need to hold the door open until they learn that it needs to be pushed. You can also prop the door open for a few days until they have learned to use it.

Litter tray setup

- Cats like their litter tray to be at least 1.5m away from their food, water and bed.
- We recommend having as many litter boxes as there are cats in the home, plus one spare.
- Most cats prefer a litter tray with a deep litter similar in consistency to sand that they can scratch around in – you can use newspaper to line the tray.
- Avoid using clumping litter until your kitten is 4 months old as ingesting this could cause stomach problems.
- Make sure you provide litter your cat will use. Some cats prefer unscented litter.
- Any changes in litter type should be gradual.

Keep it clean

- Remove soiled litter at least once a day. Dispose of soiled litter and faeces in rubbish cans- do not flush, even if the product label says you can.
- Once a week or every few weeks (depending on the litter system you use) wash the trays. Avoid strong smelling cleaners and rinse well after washing.

Litter tray accidents

- Cats adopted from SPCA are trained to use a litter tray. However, moving to a new house can sometimes cause a few accidents.
- We recommend confining your cat to one room until they are reliably using their litter tray. This reduces the risk of them developing unwanted toileting habits.
- If you see your cat about to toilet somewhere other than the litter tray, distract them and quickly move them to the tray. Never yell at or hit your cat for toileting outside their litter tray.
- Praise them if they use the tray.
- Use an enzymatic cleaner to clean up after accidents. Other cleaners do not remove the odours, and may encourage your cat to use the same place to toilet again.
- Your cat may have accidents because the litter tray is dirty or too small, the tray has moved or changed, or a new cat moves into the neighbourhood.
- For more advice visit www.spca.nz/cat-behaviour

Changes in toileting behaviour or blood in the urine can be a sign of an illness. If a cat squats to urinate but passes only a small amount or nothing at all, this can indicate a blockage in the urinary tract which is a medical emergency. **Take your cat to your vet immediately.**

Food and water

Feed your cat a complete and balanced diet

- Cats need a complete and balanced diet for all round good health and happiness. Cats adopted from SPCA have been fed PurinaOne – we recommend that you continue with this.
- Kittens need special food to help them grow, but once they reach a year old they can move onto an adult diet.
- Cats with health problems may need specific kinds of foods; discuss the best diet for your cat with your vet.

Foods to avoid

- Dog food.
- Human food; this usually has salt, spices or other ingredients which can be harmful or fattening.
- Raw meat and fish can carry harmful bacteria, so consult with your vet before feeding. Bones can splinter and get stuck in a cat's throat or gut. Provide only cooked meat and fish.
- Milk and other dairy products: many cats are lactose intolerant and will get diarrhoea if they consume dairy products.

Introducing a new food

- Introduce any new food gradually over one or two weeks to avoid causing your cat stomach upsets.
- Mix in the new food with the old, slowly changing the proportions.

Choosing a location

- Provide a quiet feeding location, and give each cat their own bowl or puzzle feeder.
- Always have fresh water available and keep the bowls clean! Offer water and food in separate locations.

Health advice

Desexing

Desexing is one of the most important ways to prevent unplanned litters being born. All cats and kittens are desexed at our centres before being adopted. Desexing also helps prevent certain cancers and infections of the reproductive organs.

Vaccinations

When you adopt an SPCA cat, they will be up-to-date with current vaccinations. However, be sure to check their health booklet for the due date of future vaccinations and arrange these with your vet.

Young kittens may not have completed their full course of all vaccinations when they are adopted (as they might be too young to have finished the full course), but we will alert you to this.

Fleas

Flea prevention and treatment are essential. Check their health booklet to see when their next treatment is due.

How do I tell if my cat has fleas?

- Your cat may be itching and scratching a lot or grooming excessively.
- You may see fleas or flea dirt in your cat's coat.

How do I get rid of fleas?

You can get a quality product that can treat fleas and advice from your local SPCA Centre, your vet or pet stores.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

SPCA does not routinely test for FIV. To find out more see www.spca.nz/FIV

Fact:

A female kitten can get pregnant from **just 14 weeks old.**

Kittens can be desexed safely from as young as 8-10 weeks old or 1kg.

Cat flu

Stress, such as moving to a new home, can cause some cats to show signs of cat flu. To find out more see www.spca.nz/catflu

We recommend all cat owners read this information even if your cat is not showing signs.

Worms

In large numbers, worms may cause life-threatening problems, particularly in kittens and older cats. Common signs include:

- A pot-bellied appearance
- Abdominal discomfort
- Lack of appetite
- Vomiting and diarrhoea
- Poor growth

Kittens and adult cats with small numbers of worms, may not show obvious signs of infection.

Some types of worms can be spread to humans. You can get safe, effective worm treatment from some SPCA Centres, your vet or pet stores.

Teeth

Problems with your cat's mouth or teeth may cause pain, discomfort or difficulty eating.

Signs that there may be a problem include:

- Smelly breath
- Obvious tartar
- A broken tooth
- Reduced appetite and difficulty eating

Many cats can have dental disease without showing obvious signs.

Ears

Just like people, cats can get ear infections.

Signs of ear problems include:

- A head tilt
- Discharge
- Excessive shaking/scratching of their head.

If left untreated, ear problems can cause permanent damage, so seek vet treatment as soon as possible if you are concerned.

Grooming

Regular grooming is a good way to bond with your cat and is a great way to keep an eye on their health. Some cats will also need their claws clipped, particularly older or less active cats.

It is good to start grooming from a young age so that they become used to it.

You can pick up suitable combs and brushes and nail clippers for grooming from some SPCA Centres or pet store.

Regular vet visits

By taking your cat for yearly check-ups, the vet can keep an eye on their health and spot any issues early.

Cats often hide signs of illness, so it is important to pay close attention to any changes in their behaviour or general health.

Remember: Never give a cat human medicine (e.g. Panadol), as our medications can be harmful or even fatal to cats. If you are concerned about their health, head straight to the vets.

Behavioural advice and training

Training basics

Did you know that cats can be trained using reward-based training? Reward them with treats when they do something you want – the more you do this, the quicker they'll learn. This can help keep your cat mentally stimulated and improve your bond.

Keep training sessions short – no more than five minutes and always end on a positive note. It is a great idea to train your cat to enter their carrier.

Leave the carrier out at all times so it is a familiar item, not a scary predictor of a trip to the vet! Put bedding inside to make it comfortable and reward with treats when they go inside.

Cats don't respond well to punishment. Never smack or swat at cats, yell at them or shake them. This is cruel, and your cat will become scared of you, making the problem worse.

Scratching

Scratching is a natural behaviour for cats.

- You can teach your cat to use a scratching post by dragging a string up the side of the post for them to follow, or scratch the post with your nails.
- The scratching post should be taller than them when they are stretched out.
- To redirect your cat from scratching other surfaces (like your furniture) try double-sided sticky tape to make these surfaces less appealing.

Spraying

- Spraying differs from urination.
- When spraying, cats typically knead their back paws and tremble their tail while spraying urine on a vertical surface.
- When urinating, cats typically squat and urinate a large volume on a horizontal surface.

Why do cats spray?

- Spraying can be related to your cat feeling insecure or threatened (e.g. arrival of a new pet, new human or in a multi-cat household).
- Spraying near windows or door ways is sometimes due to a new outdoor cat.

What should I do?

- Take steps to reduce stress; make sure you are providing enough litter trays, hiding places, scratching posts, toys and vantage points. Try a pheromone spray (e.g. Feliway).
- Use an enzymatic cleaner and limit access to areas where your cat marks.
- If spraying continues, speak to your vet or a behaviour consultant.

For more tips and advice on inappropriately toileting, visit our website: **www.spca.nz/catadvice**

Biting and scratching

- Kittens often bite due to playfulness, but may also do so if afraid.
- Avoid using your hands for playing. Use a toy instead - wand toys are great for playing while keeping your hands out of reach!
- If your kitten gets too rough, freeze and utter a high pitched yelp; this should make your kitten freeze and then once they release your hand, swap for an appropriate toy.
- Some adult cats can also play rough – the same advice as above can be applied.
- Never punish your cat for biting or scratching. Playful cats may interpret the reaction as a game, while fearful or aggressive cats may think they are being attacked and bite harder.

Warning signs

Sometimes cats give warning signs before play biting or grabbing you with their paws (sometimes with claws painfully out!).

This could be:

- A twitch of the tail
- A look in their eye
- Ears being slightly swiveled backwards
- Whiskers angling forward
- A change in the position of their head

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