



Keeping your cat safe and happy at home



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Safe at Home, Don't let me Roam

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 you and your cat.

Keeping your cat at home means preventing them leaving your property at all times. Many owners now provide a safe and enriching environment for their cat at home all day, every day.

Keeping your cat safe and happy at home requires meeting their physical, health, behavioural, mental, and emotional needs. 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.
- > 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 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. 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 unwanted 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 indoors.

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

You can give your cat the best of indoor and outdoor living, while still being safe, 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, 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 – ‘cattios’

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 cat-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 avoid your cat getting caught in the netting, the openings 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

You can meet all your cat's needs with an exclusive indoor lifestyle.

- > Provide enough space and areas for toileting, sleeping, hiding, scratching, and playing, and access to food and water.
- > 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.



Can your cat make your home theirs too?

For a healthy and happy 'stay at home' cat, they need to feel your home is their home too. You will need to provide them with choices and opportunities to meet their physical, health, and behavioural needs.

Your cat's needs

- > Food and separate 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.



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. One cat will need at least two litter trays, two feed stations, two water bowls, three different types of scratching surfaces and three 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.
- > Long vertical posts allow your cat to enjoy a full body stretch.
- > 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.



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:

Safe cat, safe wildlife: safecatsafewildlife.org.nz

Indoor Pet Initiative: indoorpet.osu.edu

International Cat Care: icatcare.org

Cat Friendly Homes: catfriendly.com

Food puzzles for cats: foodpuzzlesforcats.com

DIY enrichment: www.sPCA.nz/thingstomake

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