



**AnimalsAsia**

Foundation

亞洲動物基金



**How to care for  
your new best  
friend!**

# BASIC CAT CARE

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摯友...或佳餚?

**Friends...or Food?**

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狗醫生

**DoctorDog**

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There is nothing quite so reassuring or comforting than sharing your home with a cat. Medical evidence shows that those of us who live with dogs or cats are happier and healthier - and I am sure that this is true! Cats have a peaceful energy, interspersed with a delightful sense of mischief, which makes them perfect and irresistible companions in our every day lives. Together we can help this remarkable species by adopting those who are stray or abandoned, and by caring for them responsibly for the rest of their lives. Cats enrich our lives and make our world a happier and healthier one to enjoy. Together we can do the same for them too.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jill'.

**Jill Robinson MBE**  
**Founder & CEO**  
**Animals Asia Foundation**

## BEFORE YOU ADOPT

Although cats do not require as much 'hands-on' care as dogs, cat ownership is still a big responsibility that must be taken seriously. Cats typically live longer than dogs, sometimes up to 20 years. **Owning a cat is a lifelong commitment.** Even though cats don't need to be walked, you must be prepared to spend quality time with them each day, playing, grooming and cuddling.



**Adopt, don't buy.** Think about adopting a mixed breed cat from a shelter, such as the SPCA, instead of buying a purebred cat from a pet shop. Purebreds are generally more susceptible to genetic diseases and are often bred in inhumane conditions. Every year hundreds of cats are abandoned and euthanised in Hong Kong. By rescuing a mixed breed you'll save money and give a good cat a second chance at life. If you feel you must buy a purebred cat, only buy from a reputable breeder and always ask to see the mother and the father. Never buy your cat from a pet store, where it is almost guaranteed that the mother has been bred inhumanely.

**Make sure you can handle the cost.** According to a leading vet, keeping a cat in Hong Kong costs approximately HK\$2,000 per year, and this figure doesn't take emergencies into account. Food and other miscellaneous items such as toys, boarding and grooming supplies can cost \$8,000-\$10,000 per year.

Before taking your cat home, make sure she has the following characteristics:

- Bright, alert and responsive.
- Confident, relaxed and friendly.
- No signs of aggression.
- No signs of anxiety.
- Clear, bright eyes.
- Shiny, glossy and full coat.
- Good body condition and weight.
- No discharges from the eyes or nose.
- No signs of coughing or sneezing.
- No evidence of diarrhoea.

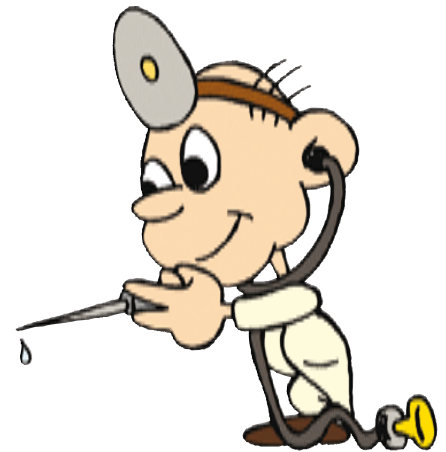


**If you have any doubts about the health of the cat, do not take her home.**

## VET CARE

**Proper vet care is one of the most essential responsibilities you have towards your cat.**

- **Always give your cat prompt veterinary care.** If you notice that your cat is unwell, even if the ailment looks minor, you should take her to the vet immediately. Do not wait to see if she gets better or attempt to treat the problem yourself. Cats can often be very independent, so the onus is on you to keep an eye out for problems. Do not give your cat human medicine (unless under the direct supervision of a vet), as some can be fatal.
- **Be sure that your cat has the necessary vaccinations.** Generally, kittens need to be vaccinated two or three times before 16 weeks of age and then annually for life. All cats should be vaccinated against “cat flu,” feline enteritis and parvovirus. Your vet may also recommend vaccinating against chlamydia psittaci and Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV).
- **Always take your cat for annual health checks.** Even if your cat is healthy, it is important to see your vet once a year, so that your cat’s health can be monitored and any signs of disease can be detected early.
- **Deworm your cat regularly.** Kittens can become infested with worms from their mother’s milk. It is advisable to deworm your kitten against roundworm and hookworm every 2-3 weeks until 12 weeks of age using paste, palatable drops or tablets. You may never see the worms but they will probably be there. For older cats, deworm against tapeworms, roundworms and hookworms every 3-6 months. If they are prolific hunters and eat their prey (rats, mice, birds insects, reptiles etc.), they should be dewormed at least every 3 months, as this is where they will catch worms.
- **Watch for fleas and ticks.** Both of these common external parasites are prevalent in tropical climates and favour warmth and humidity. There are a variety of different products available to treat the problem. It is important to concentrate on not only removing the adult fleas on your cat but also the eggs, larvae and immature adults in your household. Fleas are also involved in the life cycle of the tapeworm, *Dipylidium caninum*, so it is important to deworm your cat regularly also. If you live in an area where ticks are present, it is important to check for them daily, remove any found and use a preventative product to protect your cat. Always check the instructions of any products that you are using. Not all are safe for use in cats, especially kittens and pregnant or nursing mother cats. Your veterinarian will be able to recommend the most suitable products for your situation. To safely remove a tick, you should use a tissue and pinch at the point where the tick’s head and the cat’s skin meet. Make sure you remove the whole tick, as leaving the head can lead to painful infections. Do not try to burn the tick or use any other substances to smother it while it is attached to your cat.



# BASIC CAT CARE

- **Make sure your cat is desexed.** Desexing can be done from the age of 5 months on and is extremely important to the health of your own cat and the greater cat population in Hong Kong, particularly if your cat is allowed to go outside regularly. It also has many health and behavioural advantages, including:
  - Less likely to exhibit territorial behaviour in house.
  - Less likely to wander in search of a mate.
  - Less likely to be aggressive towards other cats.
  - Dramatically less likely to suffer from cancer of the mammary glands, uterus, ovaries in female or prostate and testicular cancer in males.
  - Less likely to catch Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV or “cat AIDS), Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) or other sexually transmitted diseases.
  - Prevents unwanted kittens being born.

**Thousands of unwanted kittens are abandoned each year. Most will be destroyed. Don't add to the problem - desex your cat!**



- If you bought your cat from a pet shop or hawker, **be aware that kittens that come from pet shops or illegal hawkers often have very poor immunity and are highly susceptible to disease.** They are usually taken away from their mothers at too young an age, mixed with other kittens carrying disease and are usually stressed and immuno-compromised by the time they reach your home. Be on the look out for the following signs of ill health:
  - Discharge from eyes or nose.
  - Loss of appetite.
  - Coughing or sneezing.
  - Tiredness and lethargy.
  - Vomiting.
  - Diarrhoea (watery or with blood).
  - Fever.

If you see any of these signs, take your kitten to your veterinarian immediately. **DO NOT DELAY TREATMENT.** Do not allow your kitten to meet other cats or go to outside areas where stray or unhealthy cats may have been until she has completed a primary vaccination course.

# BASIC CAT CARE

- **You do not need to give up your cat if you become pregnant.** Many women give up their cats from fear of contracting toxoplasmosis, a disease that can cause birth defects in newborns. Although the disease can be found in cats who ingest raw meat, birds, mice or contaminated soil, there are some easy things you can do to completely and safely avoid risk of the disease:
  - Appoint a non-pregnant member of the family to clean the litterbox. If you must clean the litterbox, wear rubber gloves and clean it everyday. Toxoplasmosis takes anywhere from one to five days to develop in cat faeces, so by cleaning the litterbox daily, you will minimise or eliminate any disease risk.
  - Do not handle raw or uncooked meat.
  - Feed your cat only commercially prepared cat food.
  - Ask your doctor to test you for toxoplasmosis anti-bodies. Many women are already immune.
- **Do not abandon your cat when your baby arrives.** Most cats are very accepting of new members of the family, but it is still a good idea to ask your vet about the best ways to introduce your new baby to your cat. **In fact, pets deliver many benefits for children - including improved self confidence, a stronger immune system, and a greater sense of responsibility.**



## FEEDING YOUR CAT

- Feed only cat food, not dog or people food. It's your decision whether to feed wet or dry food, although some picky cats may make that decision for you! Kittens need specially formulated kitten food for the first year of their life, whilst older cats may need a special senior diet - your vet can advise on the correct one. Feed a reputable brand of cat food such as Purina, Hill's Science Diet, or Whiskas. If you decide to feed your cat wet food, be sure to leave some cat biscuits out so that your cat can snack throughout the day.
- Try not to overfeed or underfeed your cat. If your cat does become overweight, you can talk to your vet about feeding her a special diet designed for "less active" cats.
- Do not feed too much tuna fish, raw egg, or onion powder. These are low on nutrition and can contain substances that can hurt your cat. **Never give your cat chocolate, as it is highly toxic to them.** If you would like to give your cat treats, you should buy specially formulated cat treats - available in most reputable pet stores.
- Do not force your cat to be vegetarian. They are naturally carnivorous and must eat meat.



# BASIC CAT CARE

- Contrary to popular belief, cats should not drink milk, as it can harm their digestive system. Provide your cat with clean, fresh water at all times. You should change your cat's water at least once per day.
- Do not feed your cat animal bones, especially chicken bones as these can splinter and get caught in your cat's throat and cause her to choke, or puncture her oesophagus.
- Cats should be fed and watered in accessible, easy-to-clean bowls that are kept away from their litterbox. Discard any leftover food at the end of the day.
- Any change to your cat's feeding routine should be done gradually.

## GROOMING

- Gently brush your cat regularly if she enjoys it. This is particularly important for long-haired cats who are more susceptible to problems like matting. It's also a good opportunity for some quality bonding with your cat.
- Shedding is normal. Do not adopt a cat if you are not prepared for at least some hair to appear in your house!
- Do not bathe your cat. Most cats hate water and find the bathing process highly stressful. They have their own system for cleaning themselves and do not need you to do it for them.
- When picking your cat up, support her from underneath and keep her close to your chest. Most cats do not like to be cradled like a baby, because this position leaves them defenseless. NEVER pick your cat up by the scruff of the neck, ears or legs, as this is painful and can damage their body.
- **Do not declaw your cat.** Although this practice has become regrettably routine for housecats in many countries, many vets still consider it cruel and unnatural, particularly if your cat ever has to go outside. Declawing makes the cat utterly defenseless and unable to hunt for food or climb up a tree if they are chased. It can also be very painful for your cat. If your cat enjoys scratching, provide her with designated scratch poles and fabric covered toys to keep her occupied. Scratching is natural and to be expected. By providing your cat with scratching posts, you will minimise the temptation to scratch your furniture and climb on your curtains. Your cat, however, will probably still have a go at the sofa at some point, so do not adopt a cat if you cannot deal with this fact.



# BASIC CAT CARE

- If your cat goes outside and you want her to wear a collar with an ID tag, make sure the collar is designed to break in case it snags on something and ends up strangling your cat. You can also talk to your vet about microchipping your cat as another form of ID.
- **NEVER put your cat in a cage.**
- You should provide your cat with a comfortable place to rest, ideally a cat bed or cardboard box with blankets. Cats prefer to be high up where they feel safe, so you may like to think about placing your cat's bed on top of a cupboard, which has easy access.
- If you go away on holiday you must leave your cat in capable hands. You can have a friend or pet sitter visit twice a day to feed her, play with her and change the litter box. Alternatively you can board your cats with your vet or boarding kennels. Your vet should be able to recommend somewhere suitable.

## TOILET TRAINING

- Your cat should have no problem with toilet training if she is provided with a clean tray at least 14" wide x 18" long x 4" high filled with 1.5" of a reputable brand of cat litter. There should be enough room for the cat to dig and turn around. To train a kitten to use the litter, place her inside the litter box and encourage her to dig around. Praise good behaviour.
- Clean the tray with a scoop at least once per day. If you allow the litter to build up, your cat will no longer find the litter tray pleasant and will do her business in other parts of the house in protest. The litter should be changed completely once per week.
- The litter tray should be in a quiet, private spot away from your cat's food and water.

## BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

Many common behavioural problems are treatable and with time, understanding, correct methods and consistency. Common behavioural problems include:

- Urine spraying - the most common problem (easily fixed by neutering in most cases).
- Urination and defecation in inappropriate places in the home.
- Excessive vocalisation.
- Obsessive/compulsive/excessive grooming and licking.
- Aggression.
- Destruction of the home, e.g. scratching furniture, ripping curtains.



There are many reasons for these and other behavioural problems. Some of the more common reasons for behavioural problems are:

- Lack of exercise and attention / boredom (this is the number one cause of problems).
- Underlying medical problem, e.g. hormonal imbalance, pain or disease.
- Lack of appropriate training (it is never too late to train your cat!)
- Bad experience in a previous home (if a rehomed cat).
- Breed or genetic predisposition.
- Change of environment, e.g. loss of family member, recently moved house, new pet in household, divorce or separation of human “parents”.

If you're having trouble with behavioural problems and can't solve them yourself, call your vet. Your vet will be able to offer advice, support and treatment if necessary or refer you to an animal behaviour specialist, or a recommended cat trainer to get rid of bad habits, and hopefully reinforce good ones. It takes time and patience to achieve results.

Here are a few tips, which may help with some common problems:

- **True incontinence.** This is a medical problem and it is imperative that you consult a veterinarian.
- **Urine spraying and inappropriate urination.** Your cat may be behaving in a territorial manner or may be anxious or stressed. Neutering significantly reduces this behaviour although a small percentage of cats will continue (95% successful in females, 90% successful in males).

Here are some things you can try to solve these problems:

- Address any recent change, e.g. new baby or pet, new cat in neighbourhood, moving to a new house or loss of a family member.
- Check to see if a strange cat is entering your house or garden and trying to dominate your cat.
- Make the litter tray more accessible and attractive while doing the opposite for the area the cat wants to use.
- Provide more litter trays and clean them regularly (at least once daily).
- Put the litter tray in the cat's chosen site and once the cat starts to use it, gradually move the litter tray nearer to your designated site.
- Try different types of litter (gradually changing brands).
- Try covering the litter tray with an opaque plastic hood to provide more privacy.
- Place the cat's food bowls or bedding near the soiled areas.
- Do not use bleach or ammonia to clean the soiled areas (as these often just reinforce the smell of urine). Instead try to neutralise the smell (various products are available – ask your vet) and use 90% alcohol to further reduce odour.
- Confine your cat to smaller unsoiled area and gradually allow more access to the house once spraying diminishes.
- Devote some time EVERY day to play with your cat and groom her.
- Provide some “cat-friendly” plants in the house, e.g. catnip or catmint.

# BASIC CAT CARE

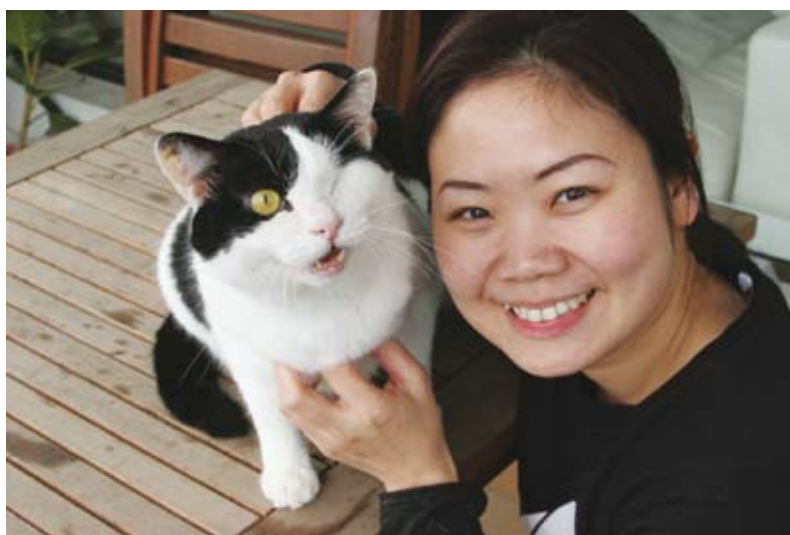
- Try using pheromone sprays on the soiled areas
- **Never shout at or smack your cat**
- Discuss this problem with your vet

Here are some other methods you can try to solve this problem:

- Place rocks at base of house plant to make digging more difficult and consider using soil in the litter tray for a while.
- Soak used tea bags in Eucalyptus or citrus oils and place them around the plant.
- Cover the area with plastic or aluminum foil - cats hate the feeling beneath their paws!
- Always leave an inch or so of water in the bath or sink - cats do not usually like to get their feet wet.
- Provide litter trays in the areas where your cat is choosing to defaecate.
- If you catch your cat in the act, pick her up and place her in the litter tray and praise after correct usage.

## CONCLUSION

Cats cannot take care of themselves and it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure that your cat receives the proper care and attention she deserves. Delivering the best care possible is one of the most essential things you can do for your new best friend and the more time you spend with your cat, the more rich and rewarding your friendship will be.



## RECOMMENDED READING

The Complete Illustrated Guide to Cat Care by Bruce Fogle

ASPCA Complete Cat Care Manual by Andrew Edney

Ultimate Encyclopedia of Cats, Cat Breeds, and Cat Care by Alan Edwards

Cats for Dummies by Gina Spadafori

Think Like a Cat: How to Raise a Well-adjusted Cat - not a Sour Puss by Pam Johnson-Bennett