

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for applying to bring a PAWS cat or kitten into your home. You are making a commitment to care for and love your cat/kitten as a member of your family for its natural lifetime. We hope that your entire family will share in the responsibility and the joy that comes with this commitment.

In this booklet, PAWS volunteers share information and helpful hints gathered through years of personal experience caring for their own cats and for those at PAWS and other shelters. Some of the information is common sense, the rest based upon observation, information our veterinarians have shared with us, anecdote, and trial and error. We hope you will find this to be a useful guide, and we invite you to share your experiences with us to add to our mutual understanding and respect for our feline companions.

GETTING READY

Prior to the day of adoption, make sure that you get everything you will need, and select one small room in your home that your cat can call his own during the adjustment period. Remember, your cat may have spent quite some time confined to a cage, or if a kitten, in close bond with his mother and siblings. He may be easily frightened or overwhelmed with the sights, sounds, and smells of his new surroundings, so start slowly and gently. Set up the room comfortably before you bring your cat home for the first time.

TRANSPORTING YOUR FELINE

There are many styles of cat carriers on the market. It is important that you buy one large enough so your cat doesn't outgrow it within a few months. You can buy a hard or soft-sided carrier, one with a single front door, one that is both front and top-loading, or a carrier with wheels that can be pulled like luggage. A top loader is the best choice when you need to get a resistant feline inside. Overall, make sure that your cat will be comfortable inside whatever carrier you choose.

SUPPLIES

If you are adopting a cat for the first time, there are many items that you'll need to have at home. More information about some of these will follow, but some necessities are:

Food and water bowls - choose ceramic or metal rather than plastic

High quality cat/kitten food - look for the AAFCO label which assures nutritionally balanced food

Litter boxes - provide one box per cat plus one extra; boxes should be large enough so that your cat can completely turn around them

Litter and scooper - clumping, unscented litter, and a sturdy scooper

Bedding - a soft cat bed or just a cardboard box with a clean folded blanket

Toys - check with your adoption counselor to see if the cat has preferred a particular type of toy
Scratcher(s) - vertical posts that are sisal or hemp covered, or ramps or flat scratchers with reversible/replaceable corrugated cardboard insert
Nail clippers designed specifically for cats - small scissor variety works well
Comb and brush
Collar and tag
Childproof locks for cabinet doors as needed

HOME AT LAST

When the big day arrives, you excitedly bring your cat home, and zoom...he bolts under the bed. Don't be surprised, and whatever you do, don't try to drag him out, although offering a treat may help to peak his interest!

Your cat will need time to adjust - to you, and to his new surroundings. The length of the adjustment period varies from cat to cat, from nearly instantaneous with some kittens to a few days or even a few weeks with an adult. The best way to help a cat feel safe and secure is to let him set the pace. Talk quietly to him for a short time; then leave the room and give him a little private time to explore on his own. Choose a name for your cat, and over the first few days, be prepared to just sit and talk to him, calling him by name. Eventually he'll come to you. Even if your cat doesn't go into hiding, don't handle him too much at first. As hard as it may be, urge children to restrain themselves and be patient. How the children interact with their new cat during the first few weeks can significantly impact whether your cat is ultimately "good with the kids" or "not so good with the kids."

When the time comes, teach children how to properly pick up and hold the cat: one hand under the chest, and one supporting his rear end and back legs behind the tail. Also make sure they understand that not all cats like to be picked up and carried around, and that many are frightened of heights. Children can still have fun playing with a cat on his own level - on the floor.

When the cat is ready (this is a judgment call), gradually, and under supervision, introduce him to the rest of the house and to other pets (see PAWS' handout on introducing a new cat to other cats). Allow him access to his safe place, and return him there at night and when no one is available to supervise. When the day comes that you allow your cat to have full access to the house unsupervised, make sure that he can return to his original room if he wants to, and make your first time away from home a few hours or less.

THE LITTER BOX

There are different types and styles of litter boxes - plain open ones, covered (or hooded ones), and self-sifting ones. Boxes with lower sides are best for small kittens and older cats. Although covered boxes are popular with owners for containing odors

and flyaway litter, and some cats like the privacy they offer, many cats prefer an open box that lets odors escape and allows a complete view of their surroundings. Consider buying one of each and see which type your cat prefers. Most covered boxes have a removable top, so if you decide to try one and your cat doesn't like it, just remove the top. Some cats find the working mechanism of self-sifting boxes intriguing, but others are frightened by it and will avoid the box.

Although most brands of litter are fine, scoopable (clumping) litter is preferable to clay. Litters of different kinds are available - pine, newsprint, etc. Generally the cats/kittens at PAWS are used to a fine-textured clumping litter and may reject something different. Many cats do not like perfumed litters, so choose something unscented. Choose a scooper with small slats - this will allow you to clean the box more thoroughly.

For cats, litter box use is almost instinctive. "Training" consists of showing the cat where the box is and rewarding him with verbal praise and perhaps a treat the first few times you see him use it. If you see him preparing to eliminate somewhere else, gently pick him up, put him in the box and reward him when he uses it.

Scoop the boxes at least once a day, preferably twice - cats prefer clean boxes! Add litter as needed to keep it at about one inch depth. Even though the instructions from some litter manufacturers say that you never have to completely change the litter in the box, you do! Plan to dump the old litter, wash and disinfect the box and completely refill it about once a month.

When picking a location for the litter boxes, choose spots where the cat can feel safe. In a multi-story house, at least one box should be on each level. Keep the box away from high traffic, noisy areas, or places where he could be ambushed by another cat or startled unintentionally by a family member. Distractions may discourage him from using the box.

When you want to move a box from its original location to a more permanent spot, put a second box in the new location and show your cat where it is. Keep the first box in the original location for a few days, and then move it part-way between the old and new locations. Continue to move the first box towards the new one until you're sure the cat is using the new box at least some of the time. Then move the original box to another floor of the house. Even with a single cat, having two boxes available is recommended. Stay with what works. If you've chosen litter boxes, litter and locations that are acceptable to your cat, don't change a thing! Not even a terrific sale on a different brand of litter is worth the risk of causing an accident.

If the cat is not consistent in using the box, it's possible that something might not be to his liking. Experiment until you find out what it is. If he *has* been consistent using his box and then suddenly refuses, or begins having periodic accidents, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian to see if there is any physical cause for the change in behavior. Litter box avoidance is often your cat's way of telling you that he's not feeling well. (Check the Cornell University website listed below for more information.)

OTHER SUPPLIES

Bedding: There are many soft “cuddle cup”, “teepee,” or flat beds available, but a clean folded blanket or comforter, perhaps placed in a cardboard box, will do just as well. Don’t be insulted if you buy a fancy bed and kitty decides to sleep somewhere else. Eventually he may discover the comforts of his own bed...more than likely, he’ll prefer yours!

Claw clippers: There are many nail trimmers on the market designed especially for cats. The “guillotine” style is probably hardest to use properly and is therefore not recommended. Small, scissor-like clippers for cats are easy to use and work very well. Do not use ordinary scissors.

Collar and tag: Even if you plan to keep your cat entirely indoors, there’s always a chance he may bolt out an open door, especially if he is frightened. Be safe and buy a collar and an ID tag that includes your name, address, and phone number. Your cat may not like wearing it at first, but he’ll get used to it. You may also want to consider having your cat micro-chipped.

Toys: Toys for your cat are limited only by your imagination! A cat will enjoy a wadded up piece of paper, an open paper bag for exploring, or a shoestring just as much as an expensive toy. Some type of interactive toy, such as a wand with a feather or pieces of rawhide attached to a long string, is a must. But don’t leave any string-type toy accessible to your cat or kitten when you aren’t playing with him. This could be hazardous to his health and well-being!

FEEDING YOUR CAT

There are high quality canned and dry foods available for your cat. Look for the AAFCO label which assures that the food is nutritionally balanced and meets all of your cat’s dietary needs. Avoid foods that contain large amounts of red and yellow dyes. You can often tell that a food is heavy on dyes just by the picture on the box. Pet supply stores carry a variety of quality cat foods, and store personnel typically are quite knowledgeable about the products they sell. As a rule, look for chicken, turkey, beef, etc., as the first ingredient, rather than “meat by-products” or corn meal. You may spend a few cents more per day to feed your cat, but the health benefits are worth it. If you purchase your cat’s food in a grocery store, check the ingredients label closely. Chicken or beef may not be the first ingredient, but if it’s too far down the list, choose something else.

Dry foods help maintain your cat’s dental health and are high in carbohydrates. Canned foods help maintain hydration and are high in protein. You might consider feeding some of both. If you choose to feed dry foods only, make sure that your cat has plenty of water available and that he actually drinks it. If he doesn’t, try adding a little water or broth to his food to be sure he’s getting adequate moisture. Some cats are

attracted to “moving” water, so an electrically powered fountain might encourage him to drink more. Many cats prefer to have bowls of water in several locations in your home; this will often encourage them to drink more water.

If you want to switch brands or types of food, do it gradually in order to avoid gastrointestinal upset. Mix a little of the new food with the old food, gradually increasing the amount of new food over a period of four-five days. Once you find a food or combination of foods that your cat likes, it’s probably best not to change his diet unless it becomes medically necessary. (As with all issues that affect the health of your cat, it’s wise to discuss appropriate feeding with your veterinarian.)

When purchasing food and water bowls, choose ceramic or metal rather than plastic. Plastic bowls may cause chin acne in some cats.

AMOUNT OF FOOD AND FEEDING SCHEDULES

Your options are to leave dry (not moist) food out all the time, allowing your cat to “graze” at will, or to put him on a feeding schedule. If you feed both canned and dry food, have a scheduled feeding for the canned food and, if you choose, leave dry food out for grazing. Canned food should be returned to the refrigerator if not eaten within an hour or so. However you choose to feed your cat, be sure he has fresh water at all times. If you have more than one cat, consider scheduled feeding and separate feeding stations. This can be especially helpful if one of the cats must be switched to a special diet or have medication mixed with his food. Other feeding tips:

Don’t over-feed your cat! Obesity in animals, as with humans, may pose serious health risks! Most PAWS cats are given ¼ C. of dry food twice a day, and if given canned food, only a small spoonful twice a day. Obviously larger cats, or cats who get a lot of exercise, may need a little more, but be conservative. If you adopt a kitten, check with your vet about when to switch to adult cat food.

Do not give your cat milk. Milk is hard on a cat’s digestive system and may cause diarrhea.

Resist feeding table scraps. You never know how your cat will react to “people” food - and you’ll only turn your kitty into a beggar.

Wash your cat’s dishes daily. Cat saliva will leave a distinctive “pet odor” in your home.

Foods which are harmful to cats: (source: healthypet.com)

Alcoholic drinks and tobacco products

Chocolate

Coffee

Grapes and raisins

Moldy or spoiled food
Onions, garlic and chives
Bones
Tomato plants
Unripe fruit
Yeast dough
Many houseplants are poisonous. (check Cornell University website p. 8)

CLAWS AND SCRATCHING

Cats are born with claws and scratching is a natural cat behavior. Claws aid in balance and serve as a first line of defense in times of trouble. Scratching removes the dead husks from the claws, stretches the cat's muscles, and allows your cat to mark his territory, both visually and with scent from the glands in his paws.

Claw trimming is essential and should be done every 2-4 weeks. Ask your vet or a PAWS volunteer to show you how to properly trim your cat's claws. Gently rubbing your cat's paws and extending the claws during quiet times not associated with trimming may lessen his objection to having his paws touched when the "deed" must be done. Make it a habit from the beginning, rewarding your cat with praise and a small treat when finished, and he will get used to it over time. It may be a two-person job at first (and maybe forever), so make sure you have an able assistant.

If you don't want your cat to claw your furniture or other household items, buy something to attract his scratches. Scratchers come in a variety of models - vertical posts, ramps, flat on the floor - and with a choice of surfaces, e.g., carpet, sisal or hemp or corrugated cardboard. An old tree stump or small log may do just fine. If you choose a carpet-covered scratcher, be aware that your cat may not be able to tell which carpet is okay to scratch and which is not! It may take a little experimentation to find out which device your cat likes best, and maybe you'll need to invest in two or three different types. Whatever you buy, make sure that the scratcher is sturdy enough that your cat won't knock it over or simply push it along the floor.

Rubbing catnip on any style scratcher is a good way to attract your cat to it. Train him by playing with him at the scratcher. Wand toys are perfect for this and, of course, you'll want to reward him verbally and with a treat when he begins to vigorously scratch the device. Do this several times, and within a few days your cat will know where scratching is acceptable. If you catch your cat scratching something "unauthorized", move the scratcher next to where he's scratching, gently move him to the scratcher, and proceed with training in that location. Eventually, you'll be able to move the scratcher (perhaps in stages) to where you want it. There are also a variety of deterrents you can spray, tack or place on forbidden surfaces. Bitter Apple spray, available in pet supply stores, often works. Sticky Paws strips (double-sided tape), or strips of foil are other options. Although cats may avoid these "turn-offs", we find that, in general, they respond more quickly to positives (teaching and praising for using acceptable scratchers) than to negatives.

TO DECLAW OR NOT TO DECLAW

So instead of worrying about scratchers and training your cat to scratch where you want him to, why not just have the cat declawed? Declawing is a highly controversial topic among cat owners, shelter workers, and veterinarians in the United States. Some vets actively promote declawing as part of the package of services offered to new cat owners. In Great Britain and many other countries, the declawing of cats is illegal!

Declawing is of absolutely no benefit to your cat, so the decision to put him through this surgery should not be made without fully understanding the procedure, its possible complications and long-term effects. Many people believe that declawing is simply the removal of the cat's claws. In fact, declawing is a surgical amputation of the cat's toes at the last joint. Claws, tendons, and portions of bone are removed. Recovery can be extremely painful, and complications such as infection and hemorrhage are not uncommon. Although the use of a laser to perform the surgery has reportedly reduced post-surgical complications and may be less painful for the cat, the end result is the same.

Although the opinions of individual PAWS volunteers differ on the subject, PAWS policy is this: a cat will be adopted to someone who plans to have him declawed only if the cat is younger than 2 yrs., weighs less than 10 lbs., and has no known health or behavioral history that may be aggravated by declawing. Cats that have tested positive for the feline leukemia (FeLV) or feline immunodeficiency (FIV) virus are not eligible for declawing. PAWS will not place a cat with an adopter who plans to have him declawed on all 4 paws.

Most PAWS volunteers and increasing numbers of people in the national veterinary community have come to view declawing as a very last resort. If adopters consider declawing a must, for whatever reason, we strongly urge them to adopt a cat that already has been declawed. If adopters are planning to declaw a kitten that has not yet been spayed or neutered, the two procedures should be combined to avoid having the kitten put under anesthesia twice.

INDOOR/OUTDOOR

PAWS seeks to adopt cats as family companions and, therefore, will not adopt to someone who plans to keep the cat entirely outdoors or who will allow the cat to come and go at will. But what about some amount of outdoor time during the day?

Like declawing, this is a controversial topic among cat owners and shelter volunteers. Many people believe that cats should remain strictly indoors. Others believe that cats need outdoor time and that an indoor-only cat will end up being bored, stressed and overweight. While neither of these positions is absolutely right or wrong, there are many things to consider.

Indoor-only – The only sure way to keep a cat safe from outdoor perils is to keep him strictly indoors. An indoor cat will not be struck by a car, will not be molested by other animals, domestic or wild, and will not risk accidental poisoning from yard and garden or other chemicals, anti-freeze, plants or catching “critters” which have ingested poison. An indoor cat will not annoy your neighbors by leaving waste on their property or killing the birds they enjoy watching at their feeders. You will be in compliance with leash laws that may exist in your community and you will never have to wonder where your cat is. Remember, though, that there are indoor hazards as well, e.g., household chemicals, plants poisonous to cats, electrical wires, so be prepared to install childproof locks on cabinets, cover electrical wires with plastic tubing, or give up some of your favorite plants if these precautions become necessary.

To avoid kitty boredom and stress, provide an opportunity for him to enjoy the outdoors from indoors....wide windowsills, window seats, cat climbers positioned with a window view, access to a sun porch. Just be sure windows are closed or, if opened, that screens are tightly secured! Provide playtime for him for both fun and exercise. Feather wand toys are great and many cats can be taught to fetch or play “baseball” with a rolled up wad of paper. There are cat “puzzles” on the market which will keep kitty busy trying to “solve the puzzle.” Indoor cats can be perfectly happy and content, but they need your time, attention and thoughtful creativity to help keep them alert and active.

Indoor-outdoor – Before you consider letting your cat outdoors, check to see whether your community has a leash ordinance. Most of these ordinances apply to cats as well as dogs and the fines for violating them can be stiff. Think about where you live. Traffic is the major consideration, but heavily wooded areas and even some common garden flowers and plants harbor dangers as well. Remember, it takes only one car or one wild animal on the prowl to bring your cat’s life to a horrific and untimely end. If you do decide to allow your cat some outdoor time, keep him entirely indoors long enough that he is well-adjusted, comfortable and knows where home is! A general guideline is three months at a minimum, but if you adopt during the fall or winter months, keep him warm and safe indoors until spring. A PAWS cat adopted in the winter will have been living indoors and therefore does not have an adequate coat thickness for being outside for periods of time. Kitty’s early ventures into the “great outdoors” must be closely supervised and should be short.

You might consider leash training, either allowing your cat outside only for walks on a leash OR as a means to teach him acceptable boundaries. PAWS volunteers have detailed information available on safe types of harnesses and leash training. Some cats take to leash training better than others, but consistency in training is critically important. This process requires patience and a strong commitment on your part. If you decide to forego the leash, you need to stay with your cat at all times when he is outside or find other ways to successfully teach him appropriate boundaries.

What works varies from cat to cat, but try walking with him for a distance, then pick him up and head back to the house. Put him down, give him one or two treats and repeat

the process over and over. Some cats will respond to your call, a clap of your hands, even hand signals (again, reinforce with a treat)...some to a squirt or two of water or a noisemaker when they “cross the line”. If you squirt water or make noise, be sure you position yourself so that you’re directing your cat back into his proscribed territory and not the other way! Cats are creatures of routine, so once your cat knows the routine, you have a fair chance that he will be content to stay within his boundaries. Like leash training, however, this takes time and requires perseverance and close vigilance on your part. Keep outdoor times short and if you eventually allow your cat outside unsupervised, check on him regularly. Even a well-trained cat can be frightened by a loud noise, another animal or an unexpected visitor, so be sure he has an escape route back into the house, e.g., a cat door that allows him to come in but is locked down on the inside so he can’t use it to go out at will. Always be sure your cat is indoors before you leave home and never, ever leave him outside at night.

If your best efforts at training don’t succeed and you still want your cat to be able to enjoy the outdoors, think about fencing all or a portion of your yard and mounting a “cat fence” on top, e.g., www.catfencein.com, or purchasing one of the many outdoor cat enclosures available in pet supply catalogs and in some pet supply stores. Building your own is limited only by your imagination and skill!

VET VISITS

Make an appointment with your veterinarian within two weeks of adoption, taking the PAWS medical record for your cat along with you, after making a copy for yourself. You will receive the medical record at the time of adoption along with a certificate for a free visit to a Centre County vet.

If your cat has not been spayed/neutered prior to adoption from PAWS, you will receive a Spay/Neuter Agreement to sign at the time you adopt. On it will be a date indicating the time by which your cat should have the surgery. You should discuss that date with your veterinarian at the first visit and ask what he/she recommends as the best time for spaying/neutering. Following the surgery, be sure to return the verification form to PAWS that you will be given at the time of adoption. This will also allow you to request the return of your spay/neuter deposit or to designate it as a donation to PAWS.

An annual exam is very important, even if your cat is not sick. This allows for early detection of long-term medical problems and will help to maintain your cat’s good health. Most veterinary practices send reminders by email and/or regular mail when your cat’s annual exam is due. If not, keep a calendar noting when the exam is due.

Dental check-ups should be included with your annual exam and dental cleaning will be required from time to time. Regular home dental care is being practiced successfully by some owners. Ask your vet to show you how to do this. Also giving your cat treats that promote good dental health may be helpful. There are a variety of healthy treats that can be found in pet supply and grocery stores.

VACCINATIONS

Your cat's vaccination schedule can coincide with his annual exam and should be discussed with your veterinarian. A rabies vaccination is required by Pennsylvania Commonwealth Law even if your cat remains entirely indoors. The first vaccination is given between three and four months of age, with a booster given one year later. From then on, boosters are needed every one or three years, depending on vaccine type and vet recommendation.

All cats leave PAWS with at least their first FVRCP (also known as Distemper) vaccination. Kittens need a booster three to four weeks following the initial vaccination and again 1 year later. Follow your vet's recommendation for boosters after the first year. This important vaccine provides protection against some of the most common, and serious, cat illnesses: Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia. Other vaccinations will depend on your cat's lifestyle. For example, vaccination against feline leukemia is important if your cat will be allowed outdoors. Consult your veterinarian to determine what's best for your cat.

WHEN TO CALL THE VET

My cat's not behaving as he usually does. Is he sick? How do I know when to call the vet? There are times when your cat may look and act like he's very sick, and not be. The opposite may also be true. Like humans, some cats endure not feeling well more stoically than others. In addition to easily recognized emergencies, call your veterinarian if you observe any of the following:

Refusal to eat for more than 24 hours accompanied by other signs of illness, for example vomiting or lethargy

Vomiting or diarrhea lasting more than 48 hours

Straining to urinate - inability to urinate at all is a serious emergency. Call the vet at once!

Drinking or urinating excessively

Noticeable weight loss or gain over a month's time

Lethargy, dull, glassy eyes, signs of fever (warm ears, nose and paws)

Respiratory difficulties, e.g. shortness of breath, pale gums, persistent coughing (coughing may be as benign as a hairball, but you'll quickly learn to recognize that type of cough)

Signs of infection (e.g. eye or nasal discharge that is yellow or greenish in color)

DISCIPLINE

Cats respond to positive encouragement more readily than they do to discipline, but there are times when discipline is in order. Sociable cats don't like to be isolated from the family, so a brief "time out" in a room by himself may calm a particularly unruly cat. Cats like to jump on tables, counters, or other places where they don't belong. A squirt or two of water from a spray bottle will teach them where they're allowed to be and

where they aren't. As an alternative, shake a can of coins or use any other noisemaker that will startle and divert him from what he's doing. It's best to keep the noisemaker behind your back so the cat doesn't associate the frightening noise with you. Never physically discipline a cat - this will only cause your cat to fear you and may destroy any pet/owner relationship you have developed.

CONCLUSION

Although this is by no means a comprehensive guide to responsible cat care, it should provide a good start. If you follow these tips and consult with PAWS volunteers and your veterinarian, you will lay the foundation for a long, loving relationship with your cat.

FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://www.centrecountypaws.org/>
<http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/>
<http://pets.webmd.com/>

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