

**mayhew**

for dogs, cats and communities



Our guide to  
**cat care**



[www.themayhew.org](http://www.themayhew.org)

**The Animal Welfare Act was introduced in 2006 and means that any person who owns or is responsible for an animal has a legal duty of care for that animal. The Act requires that you must provide for your animal's basic welfare needs:**

- A proper diet, including fresh water
- A suitable living environment
- The ability to express normal behaviour
- The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- Protection from, and treatment of, illness and injury



**Cats are the most popular pet in the UK, but many prospective cat owners underestimate the investment of time and money required. Your cat will live anything up to 20 years, depending on its size and general health. This is a long-term commitment, and you must be ready to provide your cat with a home for that duration.**

### **Are you ready for a cat?**

Cat ownership requires commitment and a responsible attitude, and should never be entered into lightly. It is important to remember that you will have full responsibility for your cat's care. Your cat will prove to be a fantastic companion only if you are prepared to give enough in return.

### **Cost of keeping a cat**

Please research the costs of being a pet owner. In addition to the initial cost of getting a cat, ongoing costs include food, veterinary fees, treatment and pet insurance.

You will also need to consider who will look after your cat when you are away, on holiday or if you become ill.



## Choosing a cat

Before you get a cat it's wise to consider seriously whether your new pet will suit your personality and lifestyle. Considerations should include:

- Does the cat you're considering suit your home, family, working hours etc?
- Can you make a lifelong commitment to your cat?
- If you live in rented accommodation, does your landlord allow pets?
- Are you prepared for house training and emptying a cat litter tray every day if needed?
- Cats that go outside catch birds and mice and may well bring in 'presents' for you. This is cat instinct, but you will be left to dispose of the present.
- Whether you'd like to get a male or female / kitten or adult.
- Will your new cat bond with other pets in the household?

- Cats can scratch furniture so you may need to train them and must provide a scratching post.
- Lastly, and most importantly, whether you can afford to keep a pet.

## Why not think about a rescue cat?

It is a common misconception that rescue cats have ended up in shelters through some fault of their own, such as bad behaviour – this is rarely the case. The vast majority of cats end up in rescues due to unexpected litters, a lack of commitment or a lifestyle change of their previous owners.

Benefits of getting a rescue cat from Mayhew:

- We can help you select the right cat for your lifestyle. If you work full-time, you should think about getting an adult cat rather than a kitten. A kitten needs a lot of attention and monitoring, very much like a small child, and should not be left alone for long periods.
- You will gain an understanding of the cat's established behaviour from our staff.

- The cat will be vet-assessed and you will be made aware of any existing conditions before you adopt. The cat will be neutered, wormed, defleaed and vaccinated before it goes home.
- We will give you the guidance you will need to become a great owner as well as ongoing advice and support.
- You will be giving a forever home to one of many cats who are stray and abandoned in the UK.

Beware of purchasing a kitten on a whim without any information or history. If you are getting a kitten, find out when it was taken away from its mother; it should be at least eight weeks old before being separated. A kitten taken away too early is more likely to develop behavioural problems, because it doesn't get the chance to be taught the basics by the mother cat during the first vital months; for example litter box training, hunting and cat life skills. It will also have a weaker immune system, due to coming off her milk too early and be more likely to have health problems.

## Collecting your cat

Once you've decided that you're going to get a cat, do a bit of planning so that your pet's first days in its new home are as easy and pleasurable as possible.

- Purchase a cat carrying basket to transport the cat or kitten home. Never, ever carry the cat or kitten in your arms, even if you have had the cat or kitten for a while. Cats and kittens become frightened easily and may jump out of your arms and run off, becoming lost or even knocked down by a passing car.
- Buy a litter tray and suitable litter for your cat's settling in period and then maintain as necessary.
- Get some cat food along with cat feeding bowls, although old saucers, plates and bowls make just as good alternatives.
- Provide a secure sleeping area and put a cat bed in a quiet place away from noise. Not all cats and kittens like a proper cat bed. A cardboard box with a blanket placed in the bottom can be just as good.



- Provide a collar with an identity tag, but please make sure it is a safety collar that will pull off easily if the cat becomes entangled.
- Supply a range of toys for your cat to play with.

## Arriving home

Before you open the carrier containing your cat, make sure all windows and doors are closed and any openings such as fireplaces are sealed off. Place the carrier in one secure room and open its door. Allow your cat to come out in his or her own time. Keep other animals and children away until your cat is feeling more confident. Place bedding, litter tray and food in the room and make sure your new cat knows where they are.

Introductions should be made slowly and in a controlled way to reduce stress for your cat. Make sure small children are made aware that cats are not toys and are living animals who may be frightened. Encourage children to sit on the floor and wait for the cat to approach them. Do not allow children to pick up the cat or disturb him or her if they are asleep. Cats may play-bite or scratch so ensure children are supervised at all times.

Dogs or other cats in the household should be introduced very carefully. NEVER leave your new cat alone or unsupervised with another pet until you are absolutely sure that they are both confident with each other.

## Letting your cat outside

Your cat will need to be kept inside for at least three weeks and kittens for 8-12 weeks (until they are at least five months old) to give sufficient time to bond with the people and other animals in the house. The cat should regard your house as a secure place before being let out or you may find the cat does not return when you open the door.

Cats must have completed their vaccinations and be neutered before being allowed outside. Cats can get pregnant from the age of four months.

If possible, choose a warm, dry day to encourage your cat out for the first time. Establish a feeding routine while settling your cat in and let your cat out one hour before the next set meal time so it will become hungry. Take your cat outside and let it walk around but stay in attendance, eventually taking the cat back inside to be fed.

Once confident, the cat will start to go out and about for longer periods and eventually you can give free access via a cat flap. Try to keep your cat in at dusk and dawn as these are the times that cats are at most risk of being run over and also when they present the greatest risk to wildlife such as birds.

## Feeding your cat

The easiest way to provide a balanced diet is to feed a premium quality complete wet cat food as well as dry food. Wet food is especially important for males as they are more prone to urinary tract infections, and the hydration they get from wet food helps to prevent these. Never feed dog food as cats and dogs have different nutritional needs.

Adult cats should be fed wet food twice a day and dry food once a day. Also, a controlled amount of dry food should be made available to snack on throughout the day. However, if your cat starts to lose or gain weight, seek vet advice about adjusting their diet and to check for underlying medical issues.

Cats' feeding requirements change according to their lifestage, with kittens, adults and senior cats all having different nutritional requirements.

Whatever you feed your cat, it is essential that there is an ample supply of fresh, clean drinking water constantly available. Cats have no need for milk after they have left their mother – in fact, milk is not tolerated well by many cats and can cause diarrhoea.

Be sure to research food and household items that can be toxic to your cat.



## Toys and scratching posts

Play is an essential part of your cat's life and will encourage a bond between you as well as helping to keep your cat fit and healthy.

Many different cat toys are available from pet shops but most cats will play with anything that is light and small. Toys filled with catnip hold a special attraction for many cats, although kittens generally do not respond to catnip until they have reached the adult stage. You can also make cheap cat toys using boxes, string, paper bags and anything else that is safe and encourages them to play.

A scratching post inside the house is helpful in protecting your furniture, even if your cat is able to go outside. These should be covered in material that is not found anywhere else in the house (for example, string rather than carpet) so that your cat does not learn to scratch other items such as your carpet.

## Grooming and handling

Groom and handle your cat regularly. This keeps fur and skin in good condition, enables you to check for any signs of ill health, and helps build the relationship between you.

Long-haired cats need to be groomed thoroughly every day to remove all tangles, otherwise they will quickly become matted. If your cat is not used to being groomed, this activity needs to be introduced gradually. Keep the sessions short until the cat begins to accept it. Start with areas of the body where the cat enjoys being stroked and give food rewards for good behaviour.

There is no reason to bathe your cat as this will cause distress and also may damage the coat. Occasionally your vet may recommend a shampoo to treat specific skin problems – if you need to use a prescription shampoo, follow the vet's advice carefully and use it only as frequently as recommended.



## Identification

We advise that as a cat owner you ensure your cat has visible identification in the form of a releasable collar and tag with your contact details on.

We strongly recommend microchipping as a more permanent and inexpensive way of identifying cats. It is a simple procedure that is over in seconds for a lifetime of peace of mind. A microchip about the size of a grain of rice is inserted under the skin at the base of the cat's neck. Each chip has its own unique number held on a central database. If your cat gets lost, it can then be scanned to find your details. Remember to update the microchip contact details if you move home or change phone numbers.

All of our adopted cats are microchipped.

## Register your cat

You will need to register your cat with a vet that is local to you. You will be able to take your cat to your vet for any treatments and vaccinations. It is important to have the contact details of an out-of-hours emergency vet service. Ask your vet for more details.

## Pet insurance

We also advise taking out pet insurance for your new companion as soon as possible, as veterinary treatment can be very expensive. We recommend taking a policy with lifetime cover and look for one that covers all potential elements, such as dental care.

## Neutering

Neutering is the name for a veterinary procedure that offers animals a permanent solution for birth control. It may also be known as spaying, castrating, desexing, fixing or sterilising. It is one of the hallmarks of responsible pet ownership.

Neutering improves your cat's health by reducing or eliminating the risk of certain cancers and other diseases.

Your cat is also less likely to develop unwanted behaviours such as the need to escape, roam, or fight with other cats.

Cats can be neutered from nine weeks old. Talk to your vet about this procedure on your first visit.



## Vaccinations

It is essential to vaccinate your cat or kitten every year against common feline illnesses, some of which can be fatal. The main diseases vaccinated against are cat flu, feline enteritis and feline leukaemia.

Kittens can be vaccinated from nine weeks of age; it is a simple course of two vaccinations three to four weeks apart, followed by annual boosters.

A cat that has not been vaccinated or one that has lapsed will follow the same course of vaccinations.

## Worming

Worms are internal parasites that can be a serious health risk to kittens and cats if left untreated and may potentially infect and cause disease in humans. Roundworms and tapeworms are the most common ones to infest cats, although it isn't always easy to tell if your cat has worms as there may not be any noticeable symptoms.

Your vet will be able to advise you on appropriate worming products.

## Fleas

Most cats suffer from a flea infestation at some point in their lives and while there may be no symptoms at all, the most common symptom to look out for is scratching or chewing, most commonly at the tail-base and lower back.

The adult fleas you may see on your pet are only the tip of the iceberg – 95% of the problem exists as eggs, larvae and pupae in the home.

Many owners find products that dab on are easier and less stressful to administer than sprays or shampoos. It is important to note that flea medication for dogs can be toxic to cats so make sure you have a flea medication specifically for cats.

Your vet will be able to advise you on an effective approach to flea control.

We recommend that you do not buy off-the-shelf worming and flea treatments as they are ineffective and dangerous if not suitable. Your vet will be able to prescribe the most suitable and effective treatments for your cat.

## Ongoing health checks

Your vet will carry out a 'nose to tail' MOT when your cat is given its annual booster vaccinations. But you can play a key role too by keeping an eye on your cat's health and helping him to stay in tip top condition and live a long and healthy life:

- Look out for changes in your cat's food consumption, drinking and toilet habits. Does your cat have a change in behaviour or energy levels? Monitor your cat's faeces for colour, consistency and signs of worms.
- Rub your hands over your cat's body including the head, legs and paws to check for any lumps or bumps or anything stuck in his paw pads.
- Keep your eyes open for evidence of fleas, ticks and other parasites. Check your cat's coat quality and whether any dandruff or hair loss is evident. Is your cat scratching, chewing or biting excessively?
- Check your cat's eyes and ears for any abnormalities or discharge. The corners of his eyes should be free of discharge and his ears should be clean.
- Regularly examine your cat's mouth for signs of disease such as bad breath, reddened, bleeding or swollen gums and build up of tartar.
- If it looks like your cat is losing weight or is overweight, it's advisable to see the vet.

In bringing a cat into your family, you are taking on a lifelong commitment, so make sure you are ready for it.

## Vet services provided by Mayhew

Before a cat leaves Mayhew to go to their new home, they will be fully vet-checked in our Community Vet Clinic and will have received the following treatments/procedures:

- Neutering.
- Microchipping.
- Flea and worm treatment.

- First set of vaccinations (we will also provide the second set of vaccinations if they are still in our care at that time).
- A final vet check before they leave Mayhew.

If a cat has existing medical conditions, we will offer advice on how best to manage them. Mayhew offers affordable veterinary preventative care at our Vet Clinic. You will still need to register with your own vet for other treatments.

## Nurse Clinics

Mayhew's Community Vet Clinic holds weekly Nurse Clinics.

A registered veterinary nurse can provide the following services:

- Microchipping.
- Flea and worm treatments (provided the cat has been seen by one of our vets during a vaccination appointment within the last year).
- Basic grooming such as brushing to remove matted fur.
- Ear cleaning.
- Nail clipping.
- Weight loss advice.
- Dental care advice.
- Senior health screens.
- General health checks.

Visit [www.themayhew.org/nurseclinics](http://www.themayhew.org/nurseclinics) to check dates and times to make an appointment.

## Contact the Vet Clinic

Tel: 020 8962 8017

Web: [www.themayhew.org/vetclinic](http://www.themayhew.org/vetclinic)

Email: [vetclinic@mayhewanimalhome.org](mailto:vetclinic@mayhewanimalhome.org)

[www.themayhew.org](http://www.themayhew.org)

**mayhew**

@ [info@mayhewanimalhome.org](mailto:info@mayhewanimalhome.org)

☎ 020 8962 8000

✉ Trenmar Gardens, Kensal Green, London, NW10 6BJ



Registered charity no. 1077588

