

# Caring for Your Cat: The Top Essentials

Although your cat may act independent and be litter-trained, he still counts on you to provide him with food, water, safe shelter, regular veterinary care, companionship, and more. Take care of these ten essentials, and you'll be guaranteed to develop a rewarding relationship with your feline companion.

- Outfit your cat with a collar and ID tag that includes your name, address, and telephone number. No matter how careful you are, there's a chance your companion may slip out the door—an ID tag greatly increases the chance that your cat will be returned home safely.
- Follow local cat registration laws. Licensing, a registration and identification system administered by some local governments, protects both cats and people in the community.
- Keep your cat indoors. Keeping your cat safely confined at all times is best for you, your pet, and your community.
- Take your cat to the veterinarian for regular check-ups. If you do not have a veterinarian, ask your local animal shelter or a pet-owning friend for a referral.
- Spay or neuter your pet. This will keep her healthier and will reduce the problem of cat overpopulation.
- Give your cat a nutritionally balanced diet, including constant access to fresh water. Ask your veterinarian for advice on what and how often to feed your pet.
- Train your cat to refrain from undesirable behaviors such as scratching furniture and jumping on countertops. Contrary to popular belief, cats can be trained with a bit of patience, effort, and understanding on your part.
- Groom your cat often to keep her coat healthy, soft, and shiny. Although it is especially important to brush long-haired cats to prevent their hair from matting, even short-haired felines need to be groomed to remove as much loose hair as possible. When cats groom themselves, they ingest a great deal of hair, which often leads to hairballs.
- Set aside time to play with your cat. While cats do not need the same level of exercise that dogs do, enjoying regular play sessions with your pet will provide him with the physical exercise and mental stimulation he needs, as well as strengthen the bond you share.
- Be loyal to and patient with your cat. Make sure the expectations you have of your companion are reasonable and remember that the vast majority of behavior problems can be solved. If you are struggling with your pet's behavior, contact your veterinarian or local animal shelter for advice, and check out the HSUS's Pets for Life campaign information.



## FEEDING YOUR CAT

Wondering what to feed your feline friend? High-quality commercially prepared cat foods have been developed to give your cat the correct balance of nutrients and calories.

Need some guidance? Your local animal shelter or veterinarian will be able to recommend the best diet to keep your cat healthy.

## Quality Counts

Buy the highest-quality food you can afford. Lower-quality foods may cost you less today, but they can increase your cat's chances of developing costly health problems in the future.

## Quantity Counts, Too

Obesity is a serious health problem in cats. Ask your veterinarian to help you determine the ideal body weight for your cat, and adjust your cat's diet to attain and maintain that weight according to your veterinarian's suggestions.

## Variety is the Spice of Cat Food

A word about food boredom: It's not uncommon for cats to tire of the same old thing day in and day out. Provide variety in the form of different flavors and textures. Always gradually introduce any new brand of food to prevent digestive upset.

## The Essentials and Non-Essentials

Never feed your cat human foods that may be poisonous to them, like bones or high-fat meats. Contrary to popular myth, milk is not necessary for cats and may cause digestive upset. Meat, however, is necessary for cats because it produces essential metabolites; placing your feline on a low-meat or no-meat diet is never recommended.

Taking precautions against hazards that threaten the typical feline will help keep your household calm and your cat safe.

## COMMON CAT HAZARDS

**Unplug dangling cords.** Some cats like to chew on cords. Until you know for a fact that your cat isn't one of them, it's best not to risk electric shock. Also, be alert to potential fire hazards—lamps can tip over while you are out of the room, causing the shade to ignite and start a fire.

**Beware poisonous plants.** Many common houseplants, like Easter lilies and philodendrons, are toxic to cats and can kill them if consumed. Follow the link at the bottom of this page for a more complete listing of toxic plants.

**Remove tablecloths from unattended tables.** New kittens will be especially curious about what's up there on the table and will try to use the tablecloth to climb up. The result could be broken china and crystal and an emergency trip to the vet.

**Cover garbage disposal switches.** Natural climbers, cats usually find their way to the kitchen sink sooner or later. Many have been known to play with electric switches such as the one for a garbage disposal. Special covers are available at hardware stores to help avoid disaster.

**Keep drapery cords out of reach.** It's a good idea to use childproofing devices to wind up dangling cords—cats can strangle themselves by catching their necks in the loops.

**Close the dryer door.** Cats love to explore, especially dark, quiet places. Always check inside large appliances before closing their doors to make sure your cat is not inside.

**Make sure your screen door has a securing latch.** Cats are safe indoors; they are not safe outdoors. Don't run the risk that your cat could slip out unnoticed.

**Pack away precious breakables.** Cats in a new home will explore. They will jump on tables, cabinets, sideboards, and bookshelves to investigate their strange domain, and they may accidentally knock over or break fragile items and knickknacks.

**Cover your furniture.** If you don't want cat hair on your upholstery, put an old sheet on your most enticing sofas and chairs. That way your cat can enjoy the furniture along with you without shedding fur all over it. Simply remove the sheet when guests arrive.

If you need further assistance go to [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org),  
[www.mobilespca.org](http://www.mobilespca.org) or email the Mobile SPCA  
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*Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.*

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