

# Your Cat—Indoors or Out

Ever wonder what goes on behind closed doors? Healthy, safe cats live out their entire lives, for one thing. If you want your cat to live to a ripe old age, the best thing you can do for her is keep her inside. Allowing your cat to wander around on her own, without your supervision, makes her susceptible to any of the following life-shortening—and often painful—tragedies:

- Being hit by a car
- Ingesting a deadly poison like antifreeze or a pesticide
- Being trapped by an unhappy neighbor
- Being attacked by a roaming dog, cat, or wild animal
- Contracting a disease from another animal
- Becoming lost and unable to find her way home
- Being stolen
- Encountering an adult or child with cruel intentions

Some people believe there are good reasons to allow their cat to be outdoors without their supervision, so we've included a number of these objections along with our comments and suggestions.

## ***"But I have a six-foot fence."***

Unless you have special fencing that's designed to prevent a cat from climbing out, your cat will be able to scale your fence and escape the confines of your yard. If you do have special fencing, make sure that it can keep other cats or animals from getting into your yard to injure your cat. Some companies manufacture ready-made cat fences and backyard enclosures.

## ***"But my last cat went outdoors and he loved it."***

Your cat may enjoy being outdoors, but by allowing him to go outside unsupervised, you're putting him at risk for a shortened life span. The expected lifespan of an indoor-outdoor cat will depend on several factors, including the type of neighborhood you live in and sheer luck. But, on average, cats who are allowed to roam outdoors often don't live to see age five. Cats who are always kept safely confined can live to be 18 to 20 years old.

## ***"But my cat's litter box smells."***

Scoop your cat's litter box on a daily basis. How often you actually replace (change) the litter depends on the number of cats in your home, the number of litter boxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may need to change it every other day or once a week. Wash the litter box with soap and water every time you change the litter; the use of strong-smelling chemicals and cleansers may cause your cat to avoid the box.



## ***"But my cat likes to sun herself."***

® Your cat can safely sun herself indoors by

lying near a window. If you're really intent on letting your cat outdoors, put her on a harness and leash and stay with her while she's taking in the rays.



## ***"But I can't keep him in."***

Keep your windows closed or install screens. Remember to always keep your doors closed and teach your children the importance of keeping the doors closed, too. It may take a few days or a few weeks, but if there are enough interesting things for your cat to play with indoors, he'll come to enjoy being indoors. Be sure to provide him with a scratching post and safe toys to bat or carry around.

## ***"But we've always let her out."***

You can change your cat's behavior. It will take time and patience, but it might save her life. When you implement your "closed door" policy, give her a lot of extra attention and entertainment. At first she may cry, but don't give in—more often than not, she'll soon be happy to stay indoors with you.

## ***"But my cat knows to avoid cars."***

Even if this were true, all it would take is another cat, a dog, or a shiny object to lure your cat into the street and into the path of traffic. Also keep in mind that not everyone will swerve to miss a cat in the road.

## ***"But my cat needs exercise and likes to play with other cats."***

Stray cats could spread viruses such as feline leukemia and other fatal diseases. If your cat needs a friend, adopt another cat who's healthy and disease-free. Cats kept safely confined do need extra attention and exercise inside, so be sure to play with your cats regularly using a variety of toys and chase games.

## ***"But my cat yowls and acts like he really needs to go outside."***

Your cat may be feeling the physiological need to mate. If this is the case, make sure your cat is spayed or neutered. Sterilized cats don't have the natural need to breed, and therefore, won't be anxious to go out to find a mate.

Transforming a cat who is allowed roam freely outside into a safe cat will take time, effort, and patience; some cats will adapt more quickly than others. And many cat owners report that keeping cats inside actually fosters the bond between feline and human. If, despite your best efforts, your cat simply cannot make the transition, then vow to keep your next cat safely confined from the start.

## Keeping Your Cat Happy Indoors

While many cats enjoy being outside where they can hunt prey and explore their surroundings, it's a myth that going outside is a requirement for feline happiness. Playing regularly with a cat easily satisfies her stalking instinct, keeps her stimulated, and provides the exercise she needs to stay healthy and happy. In fact, the indoor cat who gets lots of attention and playtime is likely happier than the indoor-outdoor cat who is generally ignored by her human companions.

Here are some tips for safely confining your cat and making the great indoors an interesting, feline-friendly environment that meets all of your cat's needs.

- Start young. Kittens who are kept indoors usually show no desire to venture outside when they grow up.
- Provide a screened porch or other safe way for your cat to experience the outdoors. Consider building or purchasing a "cat fence" or similar enclosure. Such an enclosure can allow your cat to experience all the pleasures of the great outdoors without the risks. However, a fence may not prevent animals from entering your yard, so you should always be present when you allow your cat outside. And be sure to cat-proof the yard by checking that the fence has no escape routes and by making toxic plants, garden chemicals, and other dangerous objects inaccessible.
- If you live in a peaceful neighborhood in which you can walk without encountering loose dogs, consider buying a harness and training your cat to walk on a leash. This training takes time and patience, for both you and the cat, and it's easiest when your cat is young. Some cats can even be trained to sit on your lap while you are on the deck or patio, or harnessed and tied to a stationary object to enjoy the outdoors while you are gardening nearby (but be sure to never leave your cat alone while she is tied to a stationary object).
- Install a perch near a sunny window; padded perches can be purchased at many pet supply stores or through catalog retailers. Another option is an enclosure that sits in a window frame (much like an air conditioning unit) and provides a secure space in which your kitty can "hang out." Larger options are available that attach to the side of a house or ground-floor apartment patio. It's best to allow your cat access to these when someone is home to supervise.

- Buy a ready-made cat tree (often called a "kitty condo"), or make your own. A cat tree may stretch from floor-to-ceiling or be shorter. It provides great climbing opportunities and, in multi-cat households, creates more play and rest areas by taking advantage of vertical space.
- Play with your cat each day. Try different types of toys that recreate "fishing," "chasing," and "flying" prey. And leave "toys" such as paper bags and cardboard boxes out when you are not home.
- Give your cat a feline friend—they can provide one another with companionship and entertainment.
- Plant cat grass (available from pet supply stores) in indoor pots so your feline can graze.
- Clean the litter box regularly.

Even cats who are protected from roaming free should still be outfitted with a collar and visible identification. The occasional open window (make sure your windows have secure screens) or door offers a tempting opportunity for your cat to explore the outdoors. And your cat may become frightened and make her way outside if strangers come to work on your house or if there is a fire or similar disaster. The collar and visible ID could help someone get your pet back to you. For extra insurance, consider having your cat microchipped. If you do lose your cat, contact your local animal shelter immediately to file a report. Shelter workers can give you tips on getting your pet back home safely. Also read our tips for finding a lost pet.

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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This material is brought to you by the Maddie's Fund,<sup>®</sup> the Maddie's Pet Rescue Project in Mobile.

Maddie's Fund,<sup>®</sup> The Pet Rescue Foundation, ([www.maddiesfund.org](http://www.maddiesfund.org)) is a family foundation funded by PeopleSoft and Workday Founder Dave Duffield, and his wife, Cheryl, to help create a no-kill nation. The first step is to help develop programs that guarantee loving homes for all healthy shelter dogs and cats throughout the country. The next step is to save the sick, injured and poorly behaved pets in animal shelters nationwide. Maddie's Fund is named after the family's beloved Miniature Schnauzer who passed away in 1997.