

What to Expect When You're Expecting (a Cat)

So, you've found the cat of your dreams. You're excited about bringing a new family member into your life. What can you expect when your new cat moves in, and how can you be prepared for the new arrival?



Essential Supplies

Food - Cats can be picky eaters, and some would rather starve than eat something they don't like. Stick with what the Center knows she likes, at least in the beginning. You can gradually switch them over to what you choose as they get to know and trust you. You should ALWAYS switch animals over to new foods very gradually, over a two week period, to avoid stomach upsets.

*****Look for a statement that the food meets AAFCO Food Trial testing standards to ensure that the pet food you buy contains adequate nutrients. AAFCO is an organization which sets standards for pet foods. Most good quality foods will have this statement on their label. It is at least a good start in ensuring that your pet's diet is adequate. *****

Food & Water Dishes - It is usually best to use glass or ceramic bowls because some animals, especially cats, have allergies to plastic. You may not even notice a reaction, but your poor cat will! A reaction is often seen in the form of "feline acne" or ulcers on the chin, but can include breathing problems. Bowls should be disinfected often to avoid harmful bacteria building up in them.

Litter Box - Find a private spot, out of foot traffic, for the litter box so your cat can maintain her dignity. Some cats like covered boxes and some do not. Your cat should be able to easily turn around in her litter box, without hanging over or touching the sides. It is best to have one litter box per cat and you should clean it daily. You may need to try several types of litter before you find the one that works best for your kitty and you. Some types of litter don't clump as well as others, some don't keep odor down, some are too dusty, and some just don't feel good on their feet or yours! It can be very frustrating and confusing. Trial and error is sometimes in order, but usually asking other cat owners what their cat likes best is a huge step in the right direction.

Some people want to put the litter box in a strange place because of visitors, the smell, or just so they won't see it. If you make it extremely difficult or scary to get to the litter box, she might make her own spot somewhere else in the house. Remember, the litter box should work for your cat first and you second if you want to avoid potential behavioral problems.

Carrier - You will need this to keep your cat safe whenever you take her somewhere, like the Vet's office. Your cat should be able to safely stand up, turn around, and lie down without being cramped or touching the top or sides.

Toys - Cats like to play, and toys are fun for you and your cat! Nothing helps to bond you and your cat more than a good toy. You can make a safe toy out of many household items, but you need to know your cat or kitten well enough first. For example, if your cat is not a chewer, you can take the plastic ring off a milk jug and toss it on the floor. Your cat will love it! You can give them your empty toilet paper rolls as well. Even a paper bag will make great fun for a curious cat.

Always monitor your cat or kitten while at play and don't leave them alone with toys. Many toys we make or buy can be harmful to your baby in ways you could never imagine. Toys with long strings or items that can come off, such as eyes or jingle bells, can be very harmful if swallowed or tangled around a leg or neck. Toys are fun and safe - *when you are there to watch and play with them!* And by all means, don't forget to buy them a toy that can hold fresh catnip.

Scratching Post - Your new cat or kitten has a great need to scratch, whether she has claws or not. Be sure to understand why, how and what cats are likely to scratch. If you want to avoid having torn up furniture - get educated and get prepared. Cats love to scratch items in the house for several reasons, but the main one is because they want to bond with you and mark their territory. They have scent glands in their paws and face. In a sense, your new cat is saying "Hey, this is my home, my person and I'm leaving my calling card for everyone else to be clear on the subject!" so take it as a compliment and let them know where to leave their scent.

A good place to start is a sturdy, carpeted scratching post with a heavy base so it won't tip over on them. Rub fresh catnip into it, and tie an old shirt of yours at the bottom. Be sure to use something that has your smell on it.



Kitty Proofing

Even if your cat is an adult, curiosity can get the better of her. Make sure your home is a safe place for her by putting yourself in her paws. Crawl around on the floor and check out any potential dangers. Electrical cords, antifreeze (tastes like candy to pets), poisonous houseplants, and any item small enough to swallow are just a few of the things that should be out of her reach. Cats love hiding places, so make sure she can't get into something dangerous, like the clothes dryer. Close all your windows, and put the toilet lid down. Also be careful of anything she can pull on top of her, like an iron.

Be sure to keep your coins and other small items, such as screws and nails, out of reach in a closed container. These items can block and/or puncture their intestines; they can even be the cause of zinc toxicity. Keep all medications out of reach and in closed containers as well - prescriptions bottles sound and look fun to cats. Be sure to put up blankets with lots of fringe (anything with strings) because their nails get caught in them, a leg or neck can become trapped in them, and they even try to eat them. Many surgeries have been done on cats who played with a frilly blanket, tried to eat the strings and got them tangled down their tongue, throat and intestines.

Meeting the Children- Bringing a new cat or kitten home is an exciting thing especially for kids. It is important you ensure your children are handling their new pet in a humane and compassionate manner.

Teach children how to handle a cat properly: To pick up a cat, support the cat's hindquarters in one hand and use the other to support her chest. Hold the cat gently and securely close to your body. Cats should not be picked up by the scruff of the neck. Never allow kids to pull the cat's tail or whiskers or to poke at her. If your kids are too young to responsibly pick up the cat, *teach them NOT to pick her up but to pet her gently and slowly instead.*

Supervise kids and cats: Supervision is especially important with a new pet. Teach children to respect the cat and *do not allow them to chase or corner her, even in play.* The cat may bite if she feels threatened. Encourage calm, non-threatening interactions. Allow the cat an "escape route" into another room. For example, put a baby gate across a door with six inches open underneath or a cat tree where they can get up high. This will allow your cat to escape under the gate or up the cat tree but limit your child's access to the room.

Do not allow children to disturb a sleeping or eating cat: Also give her some space when she is using her litter box. Tell your children that when the cat is sleeping, using her litter box, or eating, they should not bother the cat.

Do not allow rough play: Rough play encourages your cat to use her teeth and claws on you. Play with your cat using commercial cat toys or those you have made. For example, many cats love to play in a simple paper bag. Toys such as Ping-Pong balls or something soft that can be tossed by your kids for the cat to chase are great.

Do not allow children to tease the cat: Teach kids the difference between teasing and playing. *Never allow your kids to tease any pet.*

Teach children how important it is to keep your cat indoors: Help children understand the importance of keeping their pet safe. Teach them to watch the cat when the door is open so she does not accidentally run out the door.

Share the responsibility of caring for your cat with your children.

Never expect your young child to assume all responsibility for a pet!

If there are issues with your pet, seek help from a pet behavior specialist.

Your child will learn that you don't give up on a family member, but instead, you work it out.

Be a good example for your children. They will learn humane treatment and compassion for animals by observing your behavior.