

Everything you've always  
wanted to know  
about **cats**



Humane Society

**TREE HOUSE'S GUIDE TO HUMANE CAT CARE**

# Everything you've always wanted to know about **Cats**



- 1 A Brief History of the Cat
- 2 Adopting the Right Cat for You
- 4 The World According to Your Cat
- 6 Feline Diet and Nutrition
- 8 Why Cats Need Their Claws
- 10 Changing Your Cat's Behavior
- 12 How to Train Your Cat  
(it Really CAN be Done!)
- 14 Litter Box 101
- 16 Top Ten Reasons to See Your Vet
- 18 Feline Health Issues and Symptoms
- 24 Special Concerns for Senior Cats
- 26 How to Find a Lost Cat
- 28 How to Help Stray and Feral Cats:  
Trap-Neuter-Return
- 30 Estate Planning: Your Cat's Future

Advisor: Steve Dale

Veterinary Advisors: Dr. Colleen Currigan, Dr. Lynda Ewald

Contributors: Lorie Crouse, Caryn Davidson, Ollie Davidson, Elissa Ferguson, Dave de Funiak, Richard Glasser, Sarah Koz, Joan Levergood, Melanie Roeder, Jenny Schlueter and Lila Stromer.

Many thanks to the Helen Brach Foundation for funding this important educational project.

© 2008 by Tree House Humane Society



# A brief history of the cat




Egyptians are believed to be the first people to have domesticated cats more than 4,000 years ago. Cats became invaluable to the Egyptians due to the felines' incomparable ability to exterminate mice and other rodents, thereby protecting food stores. Cats became so useful that the Egyptians came to regard cats as sacred feline deities, and killing a cat became a crime punishable by death. After death, cats were treated to the same burial rites as people: they were mummified and buried, often in enormous tombs with thousands of other cats.

The Egyptian cat was a large desert cat known today by the scientific name *Felis iybicia*. The Egyptian cat was eventually brought to Europe by merchant traders who used the cats as mousers on ships

and ultimately sold them. Cats became further domesticated in Europe and eventually found their way to America. The scientific name for today's housecat is *Felis domesticus*. So, although modern housecats and their Egyptian predecessors share a family tree, they reside on distinct genetic branches. The domestic cat is literally a breed apart from its wild ancestors.

Despite the rift between your housecat and its ancestors, today's domesticated cat is still influenced by the same instinctive behavior that enabled the wild Egyptian cat to survive. Instinctive behavior is the result of millions of years of evolutionary fine-tuning, and you can see evidence of that fine-tuning each time you witness your cat hunting a laser pointer or leaping

to the top branch of a cat tree. In fact, knowing the instinctive drive behind many of your cat's behaviors will help you better understand and ultimately care for your cat.

In the pages that follow, you will find information on everything from diet to litter box problems to feral cats. Interestingly, so much of the information on the need for wet food diets or correct litter box placement is derived from knowledge of a cat's natural instincts. Although domesticated cats no longer roam the African savannah or hunt in the desert, knowing that their ancestors did is the key to unlocking many of the mysteries of feline behavior. 

# Adopting the right cat for you

Sharing your life with an animal can be a wonderful, rewarding experience, but having a pet is not for everyone. Before bringing a cat home, consider whether or not you're ready for the commitment of caring for an animal. Ask yourself the following questions: Are you willing to commit to caring for a cat for the entirety of her lifetime, which could be as long as twenty years? If you move, marry or have a child, will you keep your cat? Do you have time to spend with a cat? Are you financially prepared to care for a cat? The average annual cost for general cat care is approximately \$1,000 and could be more should your cat require emergency veterinary care, preventive dental care or treatment for chronic issues. Remember that all cats require a commitment of time, money and energy. If you're unable to take on the responsibilities of caring for and supporting a cat, you should probably reconsider adopting.

If you do decide you are ready to bring an animal into your life and family, it is important that you choose your companion carefully. Please consider adopting a homeless cat or kitten from your local humane society or animal shelter. With millions of healthy, adoptable animals euthanized in shelters each year,

purchasing an animal from a breeder or store is unnecessary. Contrary to what some may believe, shelter cats are likely to be just as healthy, and are often healthier, than are pure bred or store bought cats. Also, by adopting a shelter cat, you will be helping to cut down animal overpopulation, and you will be giving a second chance to a cat in need.

**Cat or kitten?** Many people arrive at shelters wanting to adopt a cute, playful kitten, and though kittens can make great companions, they often require more time and patience than older cats. It is important that you consider your lifestyle before adopting a kitten. If you're going to be a one-pet family, reconsider adopting a kitten. Kittens need constant stimulation, and a single, bored kitten will often entertain herself by scratching furniture, digging in or eating plants or climbing curtains. This behavior is not only destructive but can be dangerous as well. Rather than inflicting twice the damage, two kittens usually take their energy out on each other, thus saving your belongings. You also should reconsider adopting a kitten if you have young children. Young animals and children are usually a dangerous combination.

Neither children nor kittens know how to behave appropriately with one another—kittens don't yet know not to climb up legs or bite fingers, and children don't yet know their own strength when they're playing with pets. Older, calmer cats are generally a better match for children. If your schedule already is packed and you have little time to spend at home with a pet, you should not adopt a kitten. If you do not have several hours a day to devote to a kitten, your friendly, affectionate kitten may grow up to become a shy, distant cat who recognizes you only as a food source. Consider adopting an older cat if a kitten does not fit your lifestyle.

**Is a special-needs cat right for you?** Shelters throughout the country are filled with loving, wonderful cats who just need a little extra care. If you have the time and money to devote to one of these special-needs cats, consider adopting a cat who is older, Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) positive or suffering from a non-life threatening condition, such as deafness, blindness, etc. Special-needs cats are often known to develop incredibly strong bonds with their adoptive families.





**Preparing to adopt** Before visiting your local shelter, be sure to call or visit its website to familiarize yourself with the adoption procedures. Some shelters may require proof of address, references or a copy of your rental lease to prove that pets are allowed in the building. Also, keep in mind that all members of the household should be included in the adoption process—adopting a pet is a life-long commitment and these important decisions need to be mutually agreed upon. Now you're ready to adopt. Congratulations on bringing home a new family member!

**Bringing a new cat home** Here are a few things you should know to ensure the experience goes as smoothly as possible! First, prepare your house for the new arrival. Remove toxic plants (for a complete list of poisonous plants, visit [treehouseanimals.org](http://treehouseanimals.org)), put away small objects which may be ingested by your new cat (yarn, paper clips, rubber bands, etc.), put away any breakables, so there's no chance that your new cat might knock them off shelves or tables and close all cabinets and closets where your cat might hide.

Next, set up a single room as a home base for your cat. Cats are territorial animals, and for a new cat, too large a territory can be overwhelming. By keeping your new cat in a small area you will be providing a less stressful introduction to your home. For most cats a bathroom or a bedroom is an ideal location to get accustomed to the home.

Remind everyone to make the initial homecoming peaceful and quiet, without excited squeals and hugs. The secret to success is to allow your new friend to come to you. It is important not to force affection upon your new cat; soft talk and treats can be more reassuring in the early stages than petting. When your new cat seems comfortable with you being in the room, hold out your hand, palm down in a relaxed manner, and let her smell you. If your cat backs away, you have gotten too close. If your cat approaches, hold your position and continue to speak

softly. At this point, begin petting your new cat by softly stroking the top of your cat's head and cheeks, and slowly work down the cat's body, if she allows it.

Once your cat is thoroughly at ease with you, begin to allow her to explore the rest of the house. The first few times your cat is allowed to roam, supervise the exploration. This will prevent her from finding a hiding place. When your new cat has explored her new environment and seems comfortable, position food, water and the litter box(es) in their permanent places. Be sure to show the cat where you have moved them.

Be patient. Remember that each step must be taken at your cat's pace.

**Introducing a new cat to resident cats** As described above, set up a room as a home base for your new cat, allowing for a gradual introduction to the family.


For the first 72 hours, do nothing. It is important to allow your new cat to become accustomed to her surroundings. Your new cat is not only acclimating to home base, she also is using her fine-tuned senses to discover what is beyond the closed door of her home base, including resident cats. After 72 hours, begin introducing the cats to each others' scents. First, leave a blanket or towel in the home base for the new cat and another on your resident cat's favorite sleeping spot. After they each have spent time sleeping on the blanket or towel, exchange the linens. This scent introduction will help your cats get used to each other and will help improve the eventual face-to-face-meeting.

While the cats are becoming used to each others' scents, create positive experiences for them while they are still safely separated. Feed the cats on either side of the closed home base door. Get a feather toy and encourage play under the door. By creating positive experiences, you send the message that another cat is a good, fun friend to have in the house.

After a week of allowing your new cat to acclimate to home base, it is time to switch the cats' living areas. Let your new cat explore the rest of the house while

your resident cat stays in home base. Be sure to not let the cats meet while you are swapping rooms. After a few hours of exploration, you can return the cats to their original spaces.

After about two weeks, it is time to start introducing the cats. Clip both cats' nails to lessen the chance of injury (see how to clip nails on page 8). Place a treat (a plate of wet food or some fresh deli meat) outside of the home base door and place another treat down the hall from the door, but still in sight of home base. Lure your resident cat to the treat down the hall and while she is enjoying the treat, open the door to home base and allow the new cat to enjoy her treat. By allowing the cats to see each other while enjoying good food, you are helping them associate rewards with the other cat. After they have finished their treat, place the new cat back in home base. The next day, repeat the above step, but this time place the plates a couple of feet closer together. Continue this process until the cats get close enough to meet face-to-face. It is important not to interfere when they meet. It is normal for cats to hiss, howl, posture and swat when they first meet. In the unlikely event that they do begin to fight, do not pick up either cat. Put a towel or blanket between them to block their view of each other and try to corral one to a safe place. You will need to spend more time creating positive experiences before introducing them face-to-face again. After the cats have spent time together without conflict, gradually increase the amount of time the cats are out together. After they have spent several hours harmoniously sharing the same territory, several times in a row, you can leave them alone together.

Remember to be patient as the process of introducing cats can take time, but in most cases, cats will learn to coexist peacefully. And in many cases, cats can become life-long friends. 





# The world according to your Cat

Your cat hears, sees, smells, tastes and feels the world differently than you do (and processes it all through a very different brain), so it should be no surprise that there are often miscommunications between humans and cats! To understand and to ultimately change your cat's behavior, it is essential that you understand how your cat interprets the world.

**Hearing** Although not as good at detecting lower pitches, cats can pick up sounds so faint or high-pitched they are out of the range of human hearing. Sound is an important part of the cat's world for both surviving and communicating. Listen to how many different sounds your cat makes—this is your cat communicating in an undeniably complex language. Because your cat hears high-pitched sounds better than you, it is important that you be aware of noise levels in your home, particularly if your cat is timid or easily upset by commotion. Are you playing music loudly or using the vacuum cleaner? If your cat is reacting to these sounds, it is best to create a quiet, calm room for your cat to stay in while you are cleaning or entertaining guests.

**Smell** The wet, pebbly patch of skin on your cat's nose is called a rhinarium. It can catch and hold scent molecules



and gives your cat a superior sense of smell. In fact, smell is so important to a cat's survival that they have a secondary olfactory organ. On the roof of a cat's mouth behind the front teeth is the vomeronasal organ, which you can see when your cat yawns. When confronted with an especially interesting or unusual smell, a cat will drop its jaw open and let the scent waft across the vomeronasal organ in a behavior called the Flehmen response.

In addition, because scent is vital to cats, they will mark just about anything. For cats, scent is a means of communication. Try this experiment yourself: present your cat with a new object and observe his reaction. Most likely, your cat will smell the object. If it looks interesting (and inedible and non-threatening), the cat will butt the object with his head and rub the side of his face (and sometimes his whole body) against the object. Your cat has just claimed the new object by marking it with pheromones. Cats have scent glands on the sides of their faces and in other places along their bodies and tails. In the wild, scenting is the way cats communicate with other cats. When your cat weaves around your legs or ankles, he is showing love by depositing his unique scent and claiming you as his own!

Scenting and marking territory with urine is another way cats communicate "owned" property. For cats who are domesticated and reside in a house, spraying urine can create considerable problems within the household. For more information on understanding spraying and modifying the behavior, turn to page 14.

**Scratching** Scratching is an instinctive behavior that has many practical purposes, such as scenting, stretching

and exercising and keeping nails in good condition. Cats scratch for multiple reasons, and though this behavior is useful and necessary for both the mental and physical health of your cat, the behavior often can be at odds with a guardian's desire to keep furniture intact and pristine. Luckily, there are many ways to keep cats from scratching inappropriate surfaces. Read more about the importance of scratching and painless, easy alternatives to declawing on page 8.



**Touch** Cats have a very keen and sophisticated sense of touch; they have millions of touch receptors all over their bodies. These receptors are most numerous in the face (nose, whiskers) and feet (paw/paw pad) areas. The whiskers of a cat are extremely sensitive to touch and are important in helping the cat to feel for prey while hunting and in navigating around dark areas and through narrow passages (the whiskers will tell the cat if he can fit into a small passage way or between two objects). The touch receptors in the paw pads are also adapted for hunting and are valuable in helping a cat to determine the type of prey (even in the dark) and if the prey is still alive. Paw pads and nose touch receptors are also very sensitive to temperature.

**Taste** Since taste is related to smell, and cats have a superior sense of smell, their sense of taste is exceptional, too. However, this does not necessarily mean your cat has what we might consider good taste. Cats will put things in their mouths that we find disgusting or unclean. This is part curiosity and part necessity as the only way for cats to carry something is in their mouths.

When it comes to food, cats have different likes and dislikes. It is important for you to discover what type of food is appealing to your cat to ensure that he eats well. It is also important, however, for you to be aware of what diet is healthiest for your cat. Sometimes the food your cat wants to eat is not always the healthiest option—just like children, cats often prefer “junk food” to healthy, nutritionally complete foods. For more information on diet and nutrition, please turn to page 6.

**Vision** Contrary to popular belief, cats cannot see in total darkness. Mammals need some light to see; however, cats are far better equipped to see in minimal light. Unlike our pupils, which expand and contract as a circle, cats’ pupils begin as tiny vertical slits that can open to include the entire iris, the colored portion of the eye. The tapetum is a reflective layer of cells at the back of the eye that bounces even the faintest light back through the light-sensitive cells. Have you ever noticed your cat’s eyes glowing at night? The glowing is actually light reflected off the tapetum. This reflective feature enhances a cat’s ability to best utilize low amounts of light, a trait all nocturnal animals need to survive.

**Nocturnal instincts** Cats are naturally nocturnal (most active at night) and crepuscular (most active at dawn and dusk) animals. If we consider that the domesticated cat’s ancestors came from



the plains and deserts of Africa, the modern cat’s midnight antics make perfect sense. Temperatures rise dramatically during the day on the African grasslands. To survive the heat, animals find shade and sit still. A smart predator (which the cat most certainly is) won’t waste energy searching out hiding places of prey and chasing down game while the sun is up. At sunset, the temperature drops and darkness hides movement. This is the ideal time to come out to find food and water, and it is precisely the time



when the ancestors of your cat went on the prowl. So your cat’s noisy charging around at 3 a.m. isn’t necessarily a “behavior problem”—it’s an instinct! For more information on how to combat nocturnal “behavior problems,” turn to page 10.

**Climbing & leaping** Any horizontal surface is an invitation to a cat. A young and determined cat can leap almost straight up two or three times his body length. In human terms, that would mean being able to high-jump about 12-to-18 feet from a dead start. Cats also will fearlessly jump several feet across horizontal chasms and “tight-rope” walk along narrow passages many feet off the ground. Cats also like to “roost” in high places—atop the refrigerator or on the top shelf of the closet. This desire to climb and sleep in high places is a survival instinct passed on from their wild ancestors. In the wild, cats have to follow prey up cliff faces and along the limbs of trees. In addition, cats in the wild have to hide from predators, and the best place to hide is up high where nothing can

sneak up behind them. These survival instincts are alive and well in even the laziest domesticated house cat!

**Aversion to drinking water** Many domesticated cats live day-to-day being slightly dehydrated. This is due, in part, to their desert ancestry, when they were engineered to survive without access to regular water sources. Domesticated cats sometimes require encouragement to drink. Try including moisture-rich wet food in your cat’s diet. It is also important to have more than one water bowl and to place these bowls throughout the house. Sometimes cats are more inclined to drink from water bowls that are in a different location than their food bowls. You can also invest in water fountains, as many cats prefer to drink from running-water sources. Also, be sure to place your cat’s water bowls in safe, quiet areas away from dogs, young children or general household commotion. Remember, in the wild, cats take time to drink only when it’s quiet and they’re safe from predators. Read more about proper feline diet and nutrition on page 6.

Now that you understand your cat and how he relates to the world, you are better equipped to modify any behavior you might deem inappropriate or problematic. For more information on changing your cat’s behavior, turn to page 10. For information on training, see page 12.



# Feline diet & nutrition



Good nutrition is essential to your cat's overall health. The best diet for your cat is one that replicates what she would eat in the wild—a moisture-rich, meat-filled diet. Cats are obligate (true) carnivores, and therefore require more quality-source

protein in their diets than most other animals. We suggest feeding your cat a diet consisting mostly of quality canned foods.

**Why canned food?** Cats usually rely on their diet for moisture and don't drink as much water as they might need. Canned foods have significantly more moisture than dry or "semi-moist" foods. Canned foods also are lower in carbohydrates and can be especially beneficial for cats with urinary issues, diabetes and other illnesses, as well as in the prevention and treatment of feline obesity. Although there has been concern in the past that feeding only canned food could result in dental disease, we now know that most dry diets do not significantly improve dental health. In fact, only specific dry dental diets with the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) seal have been shown to reduce tartar and plaque formation and gingivitis.

**How often and how much should I feed?** We recommend meal feeding rather than free feeding. Meal feeding means that you feed a specified amount of food, as opposed to leaving out a large quantity of dry food for your cat to graze on throughout the day. You can start by feeding twice daily, using the food label as a guideline. Then review that amount with your veterinarian during your cat's annual or semiannual examination. The amount to feed may vary depending on your cat's ideal weight and activity level.

Meal feeding also gives you an opportunity to monitor your cat's appetite and helps you notice any change in your cat's overall food intake, which is often one of the first signs of stress or illness. Depending on your cat's specific situation, it might be best to consult with your veterinarian before implementing any diet regimen.



**What flavors should I choose?** Of course, every cat will have her own preferences, so it's important to test many flavors and brands to discover what food your cat prefers. It is important, however, to avoid feeding too many fish flavors as fish is high in magnesium, thiaminase and heavy metals, all of which may be detrimental to your cat's health, if fed in excess.

## **This food is cheaper. Is it the same?**

If you are unsure about the quality of your cat food, check the first ingredient. If the first ingredient is a meat or fish, it's most likely a good brand. If the first ingredient is not meat or fish, but is corn, rice, soy or grain derivatives such as gluten or meal, we would not recommend it. Check for the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) certification for some assurance that the food has met minimal nutrient criteria. You should let your veterinarian know what type and brand of food you are feeding your cat. It may be best to feed foods that contain muscle meat (such as chicken or turkey) in addition to, or instead of, organ meats (such as liver) and byproducts (items not suitable for human consumption).

## **What about "semi-moist" cat food?**

These highly processed foods come in sealed pouches or canisters and are usually high in magnesium and carbohydrates. Too much magnesium may be linked to urinary problems in cats. There is generally little nutritional value, and their dyes, preservatives and other additives can cause allergic reactions in some cats.

**What about dry cat food?** Many cats tolerate and enjoy dry food. It may be fed in combination with canned food, if desired. Some cats develop health problems such as diabetes, obesity, urinary or kidney problems, diarrhea or vomiting, which may make exclusively feeding dry food undesirable. Quality "fixed formula" dry foods are properly balanced for mineral content and are available in pet supply stores, feed stores and through veterinarians. Prescription dry and canned foods for cats with health problems and special dietary needs also are available through veterinarians.



**What about raw food?** Many argue raw food is the most natural and nutritionally complete feeding regimen, if prepared and fed properly. There are, however, some risks involved, and careful preparation and hygiene standards need to be followed to feed it successfully. If this feeding option is something you're interested in, we advise that you discuss it with your veterinarian. Whether you feed a commercial product or you make your own, consult your veterinarian to ensure the diet is nutritionally complete for cats. Cats, although they need to eat meat, cannot live on meat alone; they require nutrients such as minerals, vitamins and specific amino acids.

**Are table scraps okay?** We don't recommend feeding them in excess. Nutritionists suggest keeping table snacks to less than 10 percent of cats' daily intake. Occasional treats of meat, fruit or vegetables won't hurt, as long as you feed them in small doses. Don't feed dairy (if your cat is lactose intolerant), fried foods or sweets as they can contribute to problems such as obesity, diabetes and stomach upset. Never feed cooked bones as they are sharp and brittle and can cause severe injury. Also never feed onions or chocolate to cats—both are toxic.

**My cat is overweight. Should I be concerned?** Yes. An overweight cat is more vulnerable to many chronic and lifespan-shortening health problems, such as diabetes and arthritis. Also, fat cats often are unable to groom themselves, so their coats become dull and oily and they develop dandruff and mats. In addition, cats who cannot groom themselves may become clinically depressed. Often fat cats cannot reach their own hind quarters, which means that fecal matter and urine can build up and cause discomfort and infection, even if you clean your cat on a regular basis. Although fat cats may be perceived as cute, you are doing your cat a disservice by allowing her to gain too much weight. You can control your cat's weight by going to your veterinarian and working out a diet plan that will ensure very gradual weight loss (be sure to consider an all wet-food diet). Never put your cat on a crash diet; it is very dangerous for a cat to lose weight too fast and doing so could lead to life-threatening liver issues. A safe way of promoting weight loss is



to encourage your cat to become more active through play. Once your fat cat has become a slimmer, more active cat, you can be sure her overall health, and therefore quality and length of life, has improved.

**What should my cat drink?** Water! Keep plenty of fresh water available at all times. Also, using a pet water fountain encourages cats to drink more and keeps them away from toilets and faucets. We don't recommend giving your cat milk on a regular basis. Many cats can't tolerate it and can experience digestive troubles, including diarrhea.

**What about dishes?** Plastic feeding dishes can cause skin irritation in some cats. A shallow, stainless steel or ceramic bowl is your best bet as cats prefer to keep their whiskers and faces out of their food. Don't use chemical disinfectants or strong detergents to clean your cat's food dishes. Not only can they be poisonous but cats are easily put off by harsh odors.

**Other resources:** For more information on nutrition, please visit our website at [treehouseanimals.org](http://treehouseanimals.org). We also recommend the following websites: [felineoutreach.org](http://felineoutreach.org), [catinfo.org](http://catinfo.org), [catnutrition.org](http://catnutrition.org), [petdiets.com](http://petdiets.com), [balanceit.com](http://balanceit.com). 🐾

**A note on coats:** Feeding your cat a proper diet will help keep her coat healthy, but grooming is also essential. Keeping your cat's coat healthy and mat-free is your responsibility. Cats keep themselves clean by

licking, so baths are generally unnecessary, but regular grooming with a long-tooth, stainless steel cat comb for longhairs, or a short-tooth, stainless steel cat comb or slicker brush for shorthairs, helps control shedding and prevents your cat from swallowing too much hair. "Hairballs" form in the stomach and are usually passed or coughed up without trouble. But in extreme cases, large hairballs can be life-threatening and require surgery. Regular grooming—especially of longhaired cats and particularly in hot weather—is the best prevention.

One of the most important rules when it comes to grooming your cat's coat is to never use scissors to cut out a mat, regardless of how careful you may be. Cats have thin skin that can easily be nicked or cut without you realizing it, and the resulting wound could become infected and form an abscess. If your cat has a mat that cannot be removed by combing or brushing, try a mat splitter or a seam ripper. You can work out the mat by tearing it through the middle and up toward the end of the mat, away from the cat's body. If your cat has too many mats and is not amenable to being groomed at home, consider having her professionally groomed by a veterinarian or reputable groomer.

Regular grooming sessions are a great way for guardians to bond with their cats. Many cats enjoy the grooming process and look forward to time spent with their guardian. So in addition to helping keep your cat clean and mat-free, grooming also can be an enjoyable way for you and your cat to spend time together.

# Why cats need their claws



Tree House is firmly against the practice of declawing cats. The surgery (the medical term is onychectomy) involves amputation of the cat's toes to the equivalent of the first knuckle on your own fingers. The surgery and long recovery period necessitate aggressive pain management for several weeks after surgery. Although laser declawing and advances in analgesia may decrease the amount of pain and the length of the recovery period, the end result is still the same: an amputation. Aside from the pain associated with the surgery and recovery period, we don't support declawing for these reasons:

**1 Scratching serves a purpose** Cats scratch for a variety of reasons, ranging from simple pleasure and exercise to complex instinctual motivations. Here are some of the reasons cats scratch:

- Scratching communicates a cat's presence with both physical and scent marks. Cats' paws have special scent glands between the toes that leave a residual scent (pheromone) after they've scratched. We can't smell these scents, but for cats they're a powerful form of communication.
- Scratching is a good form of exercise. Indoor cats in particular need all the exercise they can get.
- Scratching helps cats groom by re-

moving old nail sheaths.

- Cats express emotions through scratching. Have you noticed your cat scratching when you arrive home from work or as you prepare his dinner? Your cat is expressing his excitement!

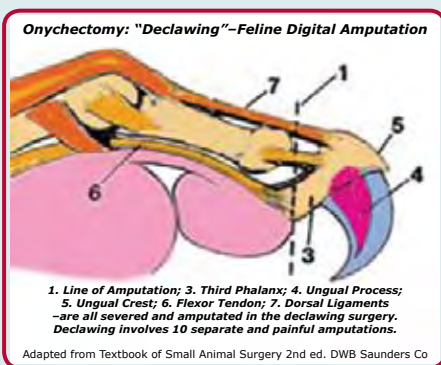
**2 There is no health benefit to the cat and serious complications can occur** Surgeries such as spaying and neutering have direct long- and short-term health and behavioral benefits; declawing does not. In fact, many declawed cats suffer health problems as a result of the amputation. Complications that may result from the surgery include hemorrhaging, abscesses, bone chips that prevent healing (if the declaw surgery was not performed correctly) and regrowth of a deformed claw. In the long term, as shoulder, leg and back muscles weaken due to a shift in balance and weight, your cat may develop chronic conditions such as arthritis or back and joint pain.

**3 Declawing may cause behavioral problems** Scratching is instinctive (declawed cats still go through the motions of scratching). Interfering with an instinctive behavior is generally known to be stressful for an animal, and may result in other undesirable behavioral issues. Urinating and defecating outside the litter box and biting are two of the most common behavioral side effects of declawing. Other potential side effects include cats becoming fearful, nervous, withdrawn or aggressive after being declawed.

**4 Cats need claws should they escape** As careful as we try to be with our indoor cats, accidents happen. Should your cat ever escape, he will need claws to ensure his survival.

**5 Nonsurgical corrections exist and are effective** You can trim your cat's nails, train him to use scratching posts, use Soft Paws, apply Sticky Paws to your furniture or use Feliway spray or diffusers.

**How to clip your cat's nails** Nail clipping is an important part of keeping your housecat groomed. If a cat's nails grow too long, they can cut into the paw pad and cause infection, or at the very least, discomfort. To clip your cat's nails, simply grasp the paw and squeeze the pad so that the nails unsheathe. Look for the pink part (the "quick") inside the base of the nail. This is the sensitive tissue that contains the vessels and nerves. Don't cut close to the quick. All you need to do is clip off the curved part of the nail. If you only cut off this small part, you run little risk of cutting the quick. If you do accidentally cut the quick, the



nail will bleed and the cat will experience a moment of pain. Still, you have done no serious damage. Apply pressure to the end of the nail with a clean piece of tissue or gauze until the bleeding stops. If the bleeding persists, a septic pencil or flour should stop the bleeding.

A video demonstration of nail clipping from Cornell Feline Health Center can be found at [http://partnersah.vet.cornell.edu/pet/fhc/trimming\\_claws](http://partnersah.vet.cornell.edu/pet/fhc/trimming_claws).

Ideally, nails should be clipped regularly from kittenhood, so that the process becomes familiar and non-threatening. Touch your cat's paws often when the cat is calm to help him get accustomed to the way it feels. You also can train your cat to enjoy nail clipping by offering treats when you use the clippers. For adult cats who will not tolerate nail clippings without biting and struggling, it is best to get someone to assist. Two people can easily wrap the cat in a towel or blanket (make sure to cover his face so your cat cannot bite anyone), and then clip the nails. If this isn't possible, a veterinarian or a qualified groomer can clip your cat's nails.

**Recommendations for a good scratching post** A good scratching post should have a strong and sturdy base (so it will not rock or tip over when your cat uses it) and should be no less than two feet high (taller is preferable), so your cat can get a full-body stretch. The post should be covered in sisal or a similar natural fiber. Smaller, carpet-covered posts are unappealing to many cats because they won't reliably hold a cat's weight. In addition, there's no clear distinction for your cat between a carpet-covered post and the carpet on your floor. We recommend spending a little extra money for a good, natural fiber-covered post that will keep for years, save your furniture and appeal to your cats.

It's a good idea to have several different kinds of scratching posts, especially if you live in a multi-cat household. This is because individual cats may differ

Tree House offers excellent scratching posts at very competitive prices that help support our life-saving mission. You can purchase a great post and many other items and support Tree House at the same time! Visit our online 'Cat'alog at [treehouseanimals.org/store](http://treehouseanimals.org/store) or stop by one of our locations to shop.

in the surfaces they prefer to scratch (sisal, cardboard, carpet, bark, etc.) Also, cats are territorial, and while they may share their posts, some prefer their own. Lastly, individual cats stretch and scratch differently; some cats enjoy a good horizontal stretch or even a semi-horizontal stretch. You can find good, inexpensive cardboard scratchers to fulfill these purposes. Be sure to securely anchor all posts so they don't slide across the floor.

### Introducing a scratching post

Initially, your cat may need some help discovering the new scratching post(s). Positive reinforcement is a great teaching method. Encourage your cat to use the new post by dangling toys from the top or scratching your own nails at the top of the post. When your cat reaches up and scratches, offer praise and reward the cat with a treat. You can even rub catnip on the post to encourage interest. Clicker training is an excellent technique to encourage scratching (see more about clicker training on page 12). We do not recommend placing your cat's paws on the post. This will only create confusion as your cat will be more focused on getting your hands off his paws than discovering the new scratching post.

If you have tried all the recommended techniques but your cat continues to scratch your furniture, don't panic. Be patient and try the following alternatives: cover the furniture with an unappealing scratching surface, such as a shower curtain, plastic furniture covering, plastic carpet runners (nubby-side up), plastic car mats (nubby-side up) or Sticky Paws double-sided tape. You can rearrange the furniture or, if possible, temporarily remove furniture from the room. Place the scratching post either right next to the furniture or in place of the furniture that your cat has been scratching, and begin the retraining process as described above. Remember, it is far more effective to praise good behavior and positively redirect negative behavior than to discourage or punish undesirable behavior. Doing the latter may result in your cat learning to exhibit the undesirable behavior when you are not around, and in some cases, it may actually reinforce the negative behavior. After several weeks of training, or when your cat is successfully using the post on a regular basis, you can uncover the furniture or bring it back into the room

and move the post to its new location.

### Don't tuck away that post


When it comes to scratching posts, it's all about location, location, location. Try these spots:

- Near where the family congregates
- Near a favorite napping location since cats enjoy a good stretch and scratch after awakening
- Reasonably close to the front door since many cats like to scratch when people arrive home
- As part of a feline aerobic center, like a sprawling cat tree, where cats can climb, play and snooze
- Near a window or places where cats gather

**Try Soft Paws** Soft Paws is a painless and simple alternative to declawing. Soft Paws are vinyl caps that glue to your cat's claws. The caps prevent damage to furniture, protect people from getting accidentally scratched and prevent cats from scratching and aggravating skin conditions under treatment.

**Try Feliway** Feliway contains a synthetic version of the facial pheromone that cats use to mark their territory. Although generally marketed to combat spraying, it also has been shown to decrease scratching behavior.

**Tree House is not alone** The American Association of Feline Practitioners discourages the practice of declawing and advises veterinarians never to include declawing along with spay/neuter as a promotional incentive or to present declawing as a routine surgical procedure. Many European countries have outlawed onychectomy. In addition, Australia, Brazil, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Turkey and the city of West Hollywood, CA all have prohibited or significantly restricted the practice.

For further consultation, please visit [stevedalepetworld.com](http://stevedalepetworld.com) and read "Think Twice Before You Declaw" or call the Tree House Behavior Hotline at 773-784-5488 ext. 300. 





# Changing your cat's behavior

Many people believe that cats are too independent or apathetic to respond to people's attempts to modify their behavior. But the failures people have experienced when attempting to alter their cat's behavior are not the fault of the cat. Rather, they are a misunderstandings between humans and felines. The motivations behind cat behavior are complicated and deep-seated, but with creative thinking, flexibility and patience, you can correct unwanted behavior in your feline companions.

**Be patient** There are often multiple reasons for some behaviors, like litter box problems or aggression among cats. Discovering the reasons for the undesired behavior and finding solutions to the problem may take weeks or months. But don't worry; most problems can be solved!



## Medical problems and behavior

Oftentimes, your cat's behavior problems are her way of communicating to you that she is experiencing a serious health issue. Any sudden change in your cat's behavior that does not resolve itself quickly after an obvious cause (like last week's visit by your sister and her brood of unruly kids) should be considered a potential medical problem, and your cat should be checked by your veterinarian.

Keep in mind that even behavior problems that reveal themselves more slowly also can be the result of a medical issue. For example, your older cat may become less tolerant of the other cats in your household because of a serious health concern, such as kidney disease. Your older cat may not want to appear weak in front of your other cats, so instead of playing and cuddling as she once did, your older cat becomes aggressive towards her feline roommates.

Additionally, behavior issues also can become medical problems. A cat who is fearful of another cat in the household may be too afraid to come out to eat and drink or may not feel safe going into the litter box. Not eating or drinking enough, or holding her bladder for long periods of time, can quickly become a medical problem.

Once you take your cat to a veterinarian and can rule out a medical condition, you can begin working with your cat to eliminate undesired behaviors. Here are some tips to get you started.

## Four Easy Rules of Cat Training

### 1. Understanding the behavior

**Instincts** A cat's basic instincts for safety or play often are at the root of common behavior problems. For example, the need for safety when using the litter box is often at odds with where we would like to keep the litter box. The instinct to

hunt and play hunt often is the motivation behind your cat attacking your legs while you sleep. And the fear of potential predators or the instinct to protect her territory from other cats may trigger an indoor cat to spray near the door after sensing another cat outside.

## Tree House's Behavior Hotline

Every year, Tree House behavior counselors receive thousands of calls from all across the country. Due to the number of calls we receive, and the intensive counseling often involved, it is not always possible to solve complex problems such as litter box issues and inter-cat aggression with one phone call. If you would like to work with our counselors to permanently solve your cat's problems, please contact us today:



- Call 773-784-5488 ext. 300 and leave a detailed message describing the behavior problem.
- One of our counselors will be in touch shortly for an assessment call. This counselor will gather information about your situation to help determine whether your problem can be discussed in a shorter counseling session or whether you will need more intensive counseling. At this time the counselor will, at the very least, help you begin to solve your problem.
- In a couple of days, you will receive another call to discuss your problem in-depth.
- Our counselors will then be available for guidance over the next several months as you put your plan into action.



**Individual personality** Every cat has a different personality which may have been defined by life experience, genetic make-up or a combination of the two. Some cats are constantly on your lap and demanding your attention, some are content simply being near you and some are fearful of people. All of these are normal cat personalities. What you might consider a behavior problem may simply be the personality of your cat.

**Territory and changes** Cats are territorial animals. They spend a great deal of time marking and defining the space that belongs to them, and most cats are not comfortable with change to, or within, their territory. If something new and possibly frightening comes into your cat's territory, such as a new feline roommate or a construction project, your cat may perceive the territory as unsafe and retreat to a spot under the bed or couch. This is a common response to change.



## 2. Offer another option

Now that you know why your cat is behaving in a certain way, you can begin working to change that behavior. You can manage your cat's natural instincts and her impact on your home by providing acceptable options to meet your cat's needs. If your cat is attacking your legs

while you sleep, try engaging her in a long play session before you go to bed, so she receives the playhunting session she so desperately needs. Also, by playing with your cat at night, you will ensure that she will be tired enough to sleep through the night. Or you might consider adding another cat to your household, so the two cats can tire each other out during the day, leaving you able to sleep at night. If your cat reacts negatively to change, you can help her by introducing change more slowly to reduce the cat's stress levels. For information on how to correct problems with improper elimination, please see page 14. For information on how to deter your cat from scratching furniture, please see page 8.

## 3. Remove the cause of the problem

Punishing your cat will only teach her to fear you. Also, punishing your cat can exacerbate problems and can make an anxious cat even more anxious. The easiest way to manage a behavior problem is to eliminate whatever is causing the problem. If your cat licks or chews plastic bags from the grocery store, be sure to keep them in a place where the cat cannot reach them. If you have a cat who chews on cords, you should keep cords hidden, or coat them with liquid dish soap to discourage chewing.

## 4. Ignore unwanted behavior and encourage desired behavior

It's easy to react to unwanted behavior by yelling or chasing your cat away from the couch she is scratching or the plant she is chewing. But this reaction actually can be just the attention your cat is seeking, and by yelling or chasing, you have just unknowingly encouraged the behavior you are trying so hard to deter. Instead of reacting to the scratching or biting, ignore the behavior completely. When your cat receives no response from you, she will eventually move on to a more interesting activity (like napping or eating). You also can encourage good behavior. When your cat uses the scratching post or lies near a cat companion she previously disliked, be sure to give her treats or pets or engage her in play. By associating food, affection and play with good behavior, you are ensuring that your cat will repeat the desired behavior. Consistently ignoring unwanted behavior while encouraging desired behavior will bring about long-term change in your cat! 🐾

## Timeouts and how to use them

Timeouts are very useful for managing a variety of feline behavior issues, including play aggression and inter-cat aggression. Timeouts are used to eliminate the reward for an unwanted behavior (such as the reaction from a fearful cat or your own reaction of yelling and chasing, which your cat could perceive as great fun) and to give the cat time to forget about the activity in which she was participating. The cat will spend 20 minutes to one half-hour in a room by herself, without the opportunity to continue the behavior. The key to correctly using timeouts is to corral or place the cat into the quiet timeout room, while giving the cat minimum attention. Do not chase the cat to give her a timeout. Chasing the cat may turn out to be even more fun for the cat than the original behavior, so you may inadvertently encourage the unwanted behavior. Do not play, pet or talk to the cat when putting her in timeout. This attention could be viewed as a reward. After 20 minutes in the timeout room, release the cat. If she goes right back to the unwanted behavior, promptly return the cat the timeout room. Consistent use of timeouts will help eliminate many types of behaviors.



# How to train your cat (it really CAN be done!)

A kitten's mind is a terrible thing to waste. "It all began when my clients in puppy classes wanted equal attention for their cats," says Dr. Kersti Seksel, a veterinary behaviorist in Seaforth, New South Wales, Australia. "Kittens have potential, and kittens deserve an education too."

Just over a decade ago, Seksel began offering classes for kittens from Down Under, which she called Kitty Kindy. The 60-minute to 90-minute course meets twice (over the course of two consecutive weeks), and it's exclusively for little kitties.

Legendary veterinary behaviorist Dr. Ian Dunbar developed somewhat similar sorts of classes for puppies back in the 1960s, and he calls these sessions for kittens, "potentially far more valuable." There may be one hundred reasons why kitties should attend school. Here are a few:



For starters, cats and kittens visit veterinarians far less than they should (on average less than once a year); that's notably less often than dogs do.

One reason why cats don't see veterinarians for wellness exams is the exhaustion and frustration that guardians often experience just getting the cat to the veterinarian. Take out the carrier and watch what happens. The cat bolts. You might as well join a health club for the calories you burn attempting to snag the cat and then stuff him into the carrier. It's exhausting.

Once inside the carrier, the situation gets no better. Cars are enemies of cats. The cat isn't pleased about being in the carrier in the first place, and in the second place, they're not accustomed to going in the car. The only time most cats find themselves in a carrier and in the car is when they're about to go the veterinarian's office, which hasn't exactly been a fun experience for them. Also, these cats feel particularly uncomfortable being away from their territories, since they are hardly ever away from their home turf.

Of course, it doesn't have to be this way. An objective of the kitten classes is to socialize kitties while they're still impressionable (from 8 to 15 weeks) and to at least establish a relationship with a veterinarian. A completed veterinary form is required for any kitten who enrolls in a kitten class.

Instead of being forcibly chased around the house and stuffed inside the carrier, owners are taught to properly desensitize kittens to the carrier. Cats actually can be taught to voluntarily jump into a carrier just as dogs can be taught to go inside their crates.

In fact, cats can be taught a whole lot of things. Cats can be taught to do most anything a dog can do (and often they do it better).



Of course, the question may be—why would you bother training a cat in the first place? Just as owners who work with dogs (those who train dogs for agility, or obedience, who do search and rescue work, or just those who teach their dogs tricks) seem to have stronger bonds than those who don't train their dogs, the same logical assumption may be made for people who train cats. No one knows why more cats are relinquished to shelters than dogs, but perhaps people don't have as strong a bond with their cats as they do with their dogs. Also, learning is fun for the cats, just as teaching can be fun for their people.

"Cats may sometimes take more patience to train than dogs," says Karen Thomas, who trains animals for television and the movies. "Cats will want to be paid for their work, but I think that's fair. They do learn and they seem to enjoy learning."

Begin by using a clicker (available in our 'Cat'alog and at most pet stores). Click the clicker as you feed your cat. Click and treat. Click and treat. Click and treat. Soon cats associate the clicker with



something good.

There are two ways to begin. One is simply to wait until your cat does something you like. For example, you can start clicker training when your kitty happens to sit. Click the clicker and offer just a pinch of tuna or salmon from a spoon. Sit and wait, and odds are your cat will sooner or later re-create what he did for getting that yummy. At first you'll require patience, but your cat will soon understand that sitting means "I get 'paid.'"

Another method is to shape the behavior. Hold that spoon with the moist food just a tad above your kitty's head. If it's too high, he'll want to bat for the food with a paw or jump for it. But if it's just the right height, kitty will lift his head up just a tad. When his head goes up, his rear-end will go down—and he'll be sitting; it's feline physiology.

It's not always easy to teach a cat to come by name, but it's absolutely possible. Most cats are trained to come to "calling" when the refrigerator opens or to the sound of a can opener; you can simply pair the cat's name with the mechanical device. And absolutely offer a treat when he comes running. Of course, you can do the same with clicker training. In any case, teaching a cat to respond to "come" may be lifesaving should she accidentally get outdoors, or in case you require a fast response in an emergency.

Tree House advisory board member and veterinary behaviorist Dr. Karen Overall, from the Center for Neurobiol-

ogy and Behavior at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in Glen Mills, says, "As cats age they typically get bored, because we don't ask anything of them, and we have a problem with obesity in cats. They simply have so little in their lives, nothing interesting is going on except for food. In fact, a surprising number of cats who live to eat—and if their families are lucky—use the litter box, are clinically depressed. Enriching their lives is necessary, and training is one way to do that."

**Kitty Kindergarten** Tree House hosts Kitty Kindergarten Classes during the summer months. Check our website or sign up for our E-Newsletter for more information.

In the kitten classes, kittens are passed around the room (so they become accustomed to meeting strangers and being handled by novel people), they also meet dogs (at some point around one-quarter of all cat homes will also have a dog). Family members are taught how to teach their kitties to scratch in all the right places, and there's a lecture on "Litter Box 101." There are also basic care demonstrations, such as clipping nails and brushing teeth, and a discussion on how to enrich the indoor environment.

A few years back, Dr. Illona Rodan heard about Seksel's tutoring for tabbies Down Under; she immediately imported the curriculum to her feline practice in Madison, Wisconsin. "I'm sure people thought I was a little crazy," she says.



"But I knew these classes would save lives. The number one cause of death in indoor cats isn't heart or kidney disease or cancer; it's people who give up on their cats' bad behavior. These kitten classes are great fun, but they also teach people how to prevent behavior problems, or if they occur, they offer a resource for help."

The hope following the kitten classes is that families will continue to socialize their cats, bringing them outside safely in kitty strollers or allowing them to play in the yard in safe cat containment systems. When they learn young, most of these cats enjoy being on a leash and harness, and going places and meeting new people isn't so traumatic.

Also, by training their cat, perhaps family members will be more "tuned into their cat" even when signs of illness are very subtle (as they often are with cats). Without hiding and running from the carrier, expressing disdain about car rides or minding being handled by veterinary professionals, the hope is that people will more often take their cats to the veterinarian.

Most of all, imagine how impressed your friends and family will be when they see that your kitty will sit on command and offer a high five. 🐾

*Thanks to Pet Expert Steve Dale for contributing this article. Steve is the author of the bi-weekly syndicated newspaper column "My Pet World" (Tribune Media Services), and the host of nationally syndicated radio programs Steve Dale's Pet World, The Pet Minute with Steve Dale, and Pet Central, at WGN Radio, Chicago. Steve is a contributing editor at USA Weekend and serves on the Board of Directors for Tree House Humane Society.*



# Litter box 101



Litter box issues are a common problem, and they are the number one reason why guardians relinquish their cats to shelters. Although litter box issues can be very frustrating, they usually can be solved if you are patient and willing to explore the problem and the various possible solutions.

**Medical problems and inappropriate elimination** The first thing to consider when confronted with a litter box issue is whether your cat is trying to communicate physical discomfort. Urinary tract problems (including cystitis, kidney infection, urinary bladder stones, etc.), diabetes, arthritis and bowel issues are some of the more common medical explanations for litter box problems. Any time a cat begins urinating outside of the litter box, she should be seen by a veterinarian for a physical examination and to rule out medical causes for the change in behavior. Even if there is a logical explanation for the cat not using the box, such as a new animal in the home,

there is a possibility that lack of access to the box has caused the cat to hold her urine, which can cause a urinary tract infection. Problems can occur the other way around as well. A cat with a painful, untreated urinary tract infection can begin to associate the pain of urination with the litter box, creating a possible future behavior problem in addition to the existing medical problem. Urinary tract problems do not always show up on the first test, so work closely with your veterinarian when your cat has urinated outside of the box.

**Good litter, maintenance and number of boxes** If your cat defecates or urinates directly next to the litter box, this could be a sign that the litter box is too dirty or your cat finds the litter unappealing. It is important that a cat's litter box be kept clean. Cats will instinctively avoid eliminating in an area that has too many feces or too much urine. This aversion to dirty boxes is derived from your cat's natural survival instinct. In the

wild, predators seek out prey by tracking urine and feces. A dirty box is a red flag for your cat; it says that predators will soon find her and attack! By scooping the box daily, you ensure that your cat feels comfortable and safe using it. Also, every few weeks litter boxes should be washed with mild soap and rinsed out. Don't use detergent that is too harsh, as the odor can be off-putting to your cat. A good litter box has about two inches of unscented litter in it. There are a variety of litters available, from clay to crystals to natural, biodegradable matter. Sometimes the solution to a litter box problem

## De-clawing and litter box problems

Tree House behavior counselors have found that many declawed cats experience litter box problems. The declaw surgery is the equivalent of the amputation of human fingers at the first joint (for more information on declawing, please turn to page 8). After having this painful surgery, it is not surprising that our feline friends might not be happy about digging around in a pile of sharp gravel when they have to go to the bathroom! Declawed cats often will choose small rugs or other soft materials like clothing or bedding rather than use the litter box. The best way to avoid these litter box problems is to not declaw your cat.

If your cat is already declawed and has a litter box problem, use the softest litter you can find. Avoid litters with large pellets or gravel. Finer materials are much more comfortable to your kitty's sensitive paws.



is as simple as choosing a new litter. Trial and error is the best way to find a litter that your cat likes.

The number of litter boxes in your home can make a difference as well. The optimum number of boxes is one more than the number of cats in the household. Some cats prefer to urinate in one box and defecate in another, so even if you have only one cat, it may be essential for you to have two litter boxes.

**Type of litter box** Sometimes the solution to a litter box problem is the type of litter box you're using. If you have a covered litter box and your cat is hesitant to walk inside it, try removing the cover. Alternatively, your cat might prefer a covered litter box, so if you are using an uncovered box, try replacing it with a covered one. Sometimes, especially with senior cats and kittens, it is difficult for a cat to step over a high-sided box. If you notice your cat is having difficulty getting into the box, purchase a box with lower sides, a cut-out entrance or a ramp. The size of the box is also important. Bigger cats may be hesitant to use a smaller box where they are less able to move around. Experimentation is the best way to find the box that best suits your cat. And remember, if you have more than one cat, it may be best to have a couple of different types of litter boxes to suit each of your cats' needs.



**Safety instincts and litter box location** Location is one of the most common reasons cats avoid using their litter boxes. Cats know they are vulnerable to attack from predators when they elimi-

nate. Instinct tells cats to choose a place to eliminate where they can see what is coming and to have an escape route if a predator should appear. If your cat is not using the litter box, consider its location.

Putting the box out of sight or far away from where the cat spends most of her time are common practices in many homes, but doing so can create an issue for cats who feel vulnerable when they use the litter box. Small bathrooms, closets, basements, pantries and laundry rooms are all small spaces where a cat can feel trapped, and none are ideal litter box locations. A great location for a litter box is in a fairly quiet room within the part of the home where your cat spends most of her time. Place the box along the wall opposite the door to the room, and make sure there is no furniture blocking the view of the door. This open, safe spot is ideal for a litter box.

If you live in a multilevel home, keep a litter box on each level. If a cat has to make a trip up or downstairs to use the box, there is a greater chance that she will simply urinate or defecate in an area that doesn't require as much travel, especially as she ages.

### Clean up accidents right away

The obvious reason you want to clean up urine and feces is the smell. Of course, the smell is unpleasant to people, but another reason to clean it up right away is that cats are attracted back to areas where they or other cats have urinated. Enzymatic cleaners (available in our 'Cat'alog and at most pet supply stores) are essential. Wipe up as much urine as you can, and pour (don't just spray) enzymatic cleaner on the urine stains. After two weeks, if you can still smell the urine, soak the area again. Upholstered furniture and carpet can be cleaned using a carpet cleaning machine (available for rental at most hardware stores). Use a mixture of cold water and enzymatic cleaner. Be sure to turn off the heating element (heat will kill the enzymes) and repeatedly go over the spot with the cleaning mixture until you have removed as much of the urine as possible. Completely rinse with cool water. Enzymatic cleaners can also be used in washing machines for urine-soaked clothes or other machine washable items.

**Territory marking** Spraying is a way for cats to mark their territory. Intact

**A note on kittens** Very young kittens may not be able to make it to the litter box before urinating or defecating. To prevent accidents while your kitten's bladder is still developing, it is best to confine young kittens to a small area of your home and to have a litter box nearby. Once your kittens are a little older, they can have the run of the house without your having to worry about accidents. Also, though most kittens will instinctually use a litter box, it is a good idea to encourage and reward litter box use through positive reinforcement. When your young kitten successfully uses the litter box, reward the behavior with petting, treats and kind words. A kitten who associates rewards with the litter box is more likely to continue appropriate litter box use throughout the entirety of her life.

(un-neutered) males are the biggest culprits, as they spray to claim territory over competing males. But spraying also can be a way for female or neutered male cats to mark their territory if they perceive a threat within their home or space. Urine sprayed on vertical surfaces is always considered urine marking, but both male and female cats also can mark with urine on horizontal surfaces. Horizontal urine marking is often near a door with access to the outside or an area of the home which houses another animal.

Since cats mark territory in ways other than spraying, a good solution to spraying is to encourage your cat to mark her territory in another way, such as scratching. Place a scratching post or mat near the areas your cat frequently sprays. If marking seems to be triggered by seeing other cats outdoors, cover windows and glass doors so that your cat can't see outside. You can also try Feliway spray or diffuser. Feliway is a synthetic cat-cheek pheromone, (available through the Tree House 'Cat'alog) that can be used to encourage a cat to rub her cheeks instead of marking with urine. Please contact our Behavior Hotline at 773-784-5488 ext. 300 for information on how to use Feliway for urine marking. 



# Top ten reasons to see your vet

There is a common misconception that cats can “take care of themselves.” Consequently, they are taken to the veterinarian far less frequently than dogs, statistically about half as often. Like all companion animals, though, cats require ongoing veterinary care to live happy, healthy lives. Regular checkups are even more critical for cats because they instinctively hide signs of illness. This behavior, developed in the wild to disguise cats’ weaknesses from predators, serves little purpose for domesticated cats. In fact, subtle signs of illness in cats often are overlooked or mistaken for behavior problems, which is why it is extremely important to bring your cat to the veterinarian for regular checkups and when you notice even slight changes in behavior.

If you do not already have a veterinarian, talk to friends and relatives, or contact your local humane society for a referral. In some cases, it may be advantageous to see a veterinarian at a feline-only hospital, or a veterinarian at a mixed (dog/cat) practice, but who has a special interest in feline medicine. Members of the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) can be found at [catvets.com](http://catvets.com). Just as there are board certified specialists in veterinary cardiology and oncology, there are specialists in feline medicine who are certified by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (ABVP). Names of veterinarians boarded in feline medicine can be found at [abvp.com](http://abvp.com) or [catvets.com](http://catvets.com).

Visit the clinic or hospital you are considering and ask questions about the facility, including available services, hours, etc. Make sure you’re comfortable with the environment, as well as the professionalism and friendliness of the doctors and staff. Schedule an appointment for a checkup. Do you like the way the veterinarian communicates with you and

handles your cat? If not, don’t be afraid to move to a new veterinarian or clinic. It’s best to establish a good relationship with a veterinarian before an emergency arises. If the clinic you choose doesn’t have emergency services, find out where the nearest emergency veterinary clinic is located or where your veterinary hospital refers patients after hours.

Below is a list of changes that may signal that your cat is not feeling well. These are only guidelines and are not by themselves definitively diagnostic for a specific condition. Rather, they indicate that a veterinary visit may be needed. You know your cat’s habits and behavior better than anyone. Do not ignore changes that may indicate a developing health issue. If there is a sudden change in behavior, see your veterinarian as soon as possible.

**\* NOTE:** Even if your cat shows none of these signs, consider scheduling wellness examinations every six months. Diagnosing disease early can be the key to successful treatment and may be less costly in the long run. Often, by the time cats display an illness, the disease has progressed significantly, necessitating more extensive and costly treatment. Learn more at [catwellness.org](http://catwellness.org).

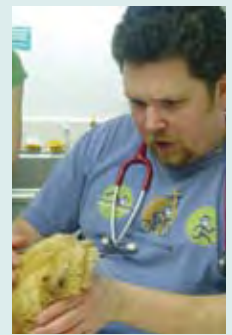
The “Subtle Signs of Sickness,” written by Fort Dodge Animal Health and the AAFP and adapted by Tree House, include:

**Inappropriate elimination** This is one of the most common reasons given for relinquishing cats to shelters. Guardians often assume that the problem is behavioral, so they don’t seek medical help. When a cat begins to urinate or defecate outside the litter box, medical conditions must be ruled out before behavioral intervention is attempted. Any cat that does not feel well for any reason may behave differently, and in cats, that behavior

may include eliminating outside the litter box. Defecation outside the box can be a sign of inflammatory bowel disease, constipation, arthritis or other medical conditions. Cats may urinate outside the box because of Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD), kidney disease, Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (kitty Alzheimer’s), hyperthyroidism, diabetes, etc. The urinary tract also can become blocked by crystals, stones or mucous plugs. This is a medical emergency, especially in male cats who are more prone to urinary tract blockages because of the anatomy of their urinary tracts. These cats can quickly become sick and die as toxins that normally are eliminated via the urinary tract instead build up in their bloodstream. Signs of blockage include straining in or out of the box but only producing a small amount of urine or none at all, frequent trips to the box and/or vocalizing while attempting to urinate.

Once medical problems have effectively been eliminated, or while they are being resolved, you can address litter box problems associated with behavior. For more information on litter box problems, turn to page 14.

**Changes in interaction** A cat that suddenly has little desire for attention from his human family may not be feeling well. For a normally docile cat, aggression towards people or other animals can be a sign of pain, and general irritability may be a sign that your cat simply is not feeling up to par. Having regular playtime and routines for interacting with your cat will help you notice sudden behavioral changes.





**Changes in activity** Decreased physical activity can be caused by medical conditions that result in pain, discomfort or lack of energy. As cats age, they can develop arthritis and other illnesses that may cause them to be less active or playful, but they do not necessarily slow down just due to old age. Some older cats can experience increased physical activity, which can be a sign of hyperthyroidism.

**Changes in sleeping habits** Knowing your cat's daily habits will help you determine if there is a significant change in his normal sleep pattern. On average, cats can spend 16 to 18 hours daily sleeping; daytime rest generally consists of several catnaps. These naps aren't typically deep sleeps, so cats usually can be easily roused by normal household sounds and other stimuli, such as light petting or food. If a cat is sleeping more often and/or more deeply than usual or has difficulty lying down and getting up, it could signal an underlying problem.

**Changes in food and water consumption** Most cats eat well and regularly, provided they are offered food they enjoy. Get to know your cat's eating and drinking habits; they are valuable indicators of the cat's overall health. Increased food consumption can point to problems such as diabetes or hyperthyroidism. Increased water consumption can indicate kidney disease, diabetes, hyperthyroidism or other conditions. Many diseases can cause cats to decrease their food intake or stop eating altogether, which can lead to rapid, even dangerous, weight loss. A cat that has not eaten at all for more than a day is at potential risk of developing serious liver problems. Meal feeding your cat is preferable to free feeding in part because if your cat's eating patterns change, you will notice it right away.

**Unexplained weight loss or gain** Cats can gain or lose weight even when they continue to eat normally, and such instances point toward one or more

underlying health problems, such as hyperthyroidism. Obesity is a significant health issue—studies indicate 50 percent or more of indoor cats are overweight—which can lead to or be a complicating factor in a long list of medical and behavior problems, including diabetes, heart disease and joint problems, as well as an overall reduced quality of life. Cats should be weighed regularly to determine if they're maintaining their ideal weight. This can be done at home with a scale designed for weighing cats (pediatric human scales or any scale that weighs to the ounce will work well) or at regular veterinary visits. Weight checks are another good reason for semiannual exams. It may not be apparent that your cat has lost weight, but even the slightest weight loss can be cause for concern. For example, a 12-pound cat losing three pounds may not seem significant, but this is akin to a 160-pound person shedding 40 pounds. If such weight loss was not planned and/or happened too quickly, it could indicate an underlying medical cause.



**Changes in grooming** Cats are generally meticulous groomers and maintain their coats in a healthy and lustrous condition, free of mats. Areas of fur loss or an unkempt appearance can be signs of disease. Overweight and/or arthritic cats may have trouble grooming their hind quarters and may need help keeping those areas clean. Anxiety and depression can cause cats to groom improperly as well, but as always, it is best to rule out physical causes first. Excessive grooming might indicate allergies or skin irritation. If your cat is over-grooming certain areas, look at the skin in those areas to see if there are any abnormalities. Also, keep in mind that even indoor cats can become infested with fleas, and flea allergies can cause over-grooming.

**Signs of stress** Stress (as experienced by the cat) can result from good or bad events. A situation that a cat perceives as stressful may or may not be seen the same way by his human family. Any change within a household can potentially be a source of stress to the family cat, so changes should be made slowly and carefully. At times of stress, cats may hide, become depressed and eat more or less than usual. Because these same signs can be indicators of medical problems, cats should visit the veterinarian to rule out medical causes. Alternatively, stress can also prompt the onset of disease.

It is also important to recognize that chronic or long-term boredom can be a stressful situation for cats, just as in people. As discussed above, stress can lead to depression along with a host of other health and quality-of-life issues. Cats like to play and be mentally challenged just as we do. Your cat will benefit from daily interactive play and other creative ways that you may be able to find to keep him active and stimulated.

**Changes in vocalization** Increased vocalization or howling tends to be more common in older cats, and it can signal an underlying medical condition such as hyperthyroidism. Pain also can cause cats to be more vocal, so schedule a veterinary visit if your quiet cat suddenly develops inexplicable howling behavior. In elderly cats, howling may be a sign of hearing loss or Feline Cognitive Syndrome (kitty Alzheimer's), the latter of which may be helped by medication.

**Bad breath** Bad breath can be caused by conditions such as kidney failure or diabetes, but it is most often an indicator of poor dental health. Dental disease is common in cats; some sources suggest that 70 percent have gum disease as early as age three. You may be able to see tartar on your cat's teeth, but the majority of dental problems in cats involve pathology that is below the gum line. Cats should have their teeth examined at least annually. Home brushing in conjunction with regular veterinary dental care can prevent bad breath, painful teeth and gums, tooth loss and spread of infection to other organs. 🐾



# Feline health issues and symptoms

Below is a partial list of cat illnesses, their causes and tips on how to best prevent them. It is important to note, however, that if you think your cat is suffering from an illness, it is essential to visit the veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment.

## Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

This is one of the most common problems seen in cats and especially in kittens. Symptoms include sneezing, discharge from the eyes and/or the nose, lethargy, fever and loss of appetite.

The risk of URI can be decreased by keeping your cat indoors and away from infected cats. Although most cats have been exposed, many are asymptomatic carriers, and viruses can be transmitted not only directly but also via hands, clothes, toys, etc. Vaccinations limit the severity of illness but may not prevent upper respiratory infections altogether. Antiviral medications are not completely effective, but in severe or chronic cases, they may reduce symptoms. Antibiotics also may be prescribed to treat secondary bacterial infections. Relief from nasal congestion is important for comfort and may require medications and/or a steam humidifier or nebulizer.

Here is an overview of the agents that may cause or contribute to upper respiratory infection in cats:

- **Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis** This virus is caused by the feline herpesvirus, which only affects cats and is not contagious to humans. In addition to upper respiratory signs, this virus can cause corneal ulcers. In some cats, permanent damage may be done to the nasal passages, which may result in chronic issues such as sneezing, congestion, noisy breathing, etc. As with other herpesviruses, this infection can be life-long and signs can recur during times of stress.

Treatment with the amino acid L-Lysine may be beneficial. Vaccination is recommended.



- **Feline Calicivirus** This virus can be associated with oral ulcers, gingivitis, stomatitis (inflammation of the mouth) and/or limping. Recovered cats can become carriers. In some kittens, it can lead to serious, even fatal, pneumonia. In recent years, a more virulent but much less common strain of the virus has been shown to cause extremely high fevers, facial and limb swelling and often death, even in adult cats. Vaccination is recommended.

- **Bordetella Bronchiseptica** This bacteria is known as the cause of kennel cough in dogs, but it also can affect cats. Signs are generally mild, and the cat only may require supportive care or a course of antibiotics. A vaccine is available but is not considered necessary for most cats.

- **Chlamydomphila Felis (formerly Chlamydia Psittaci)** This bacteria can cause conjunctivitis as well as

typically minor respiratory symptoms. Again, it is susceptible to antibiotics, and vaccines are available but are not considered necessary for most cats.

- **Mycoplasma** This bacteria may cause primary or secondary ocular and/or respiratory signs and also can be involved in pneumonia. No vaccines are available, but mycoplasma is susceptible to antibiotic treatment.

- **Feline Distemper or Panleukopenia (FPV)** This disease is caused by the feline parvovirus, which is passed in all body secretions and can live for months to years in the environment. The virus causes suppression of white blood cell production by the bone marrow, as well as ulceration of the intestines. Signs include vomiting, diarrhea, fever, decreased appetite and dehydration. Among unvaccinated cats, it is highly contagious and often fatal, even with treatment, which usually involves hospitalization and intensive care. Kittens are particularly at risk. Vaccines are very effective and have dramatically reduced the number of cats who contract the disease.

- **Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)** This retrovirus is unrelated to human leukemia. The virus is passed between cats via saliva, usually through mutual grooming and sharing food and water dishes. It also can be transmitted to kittens before birth or via nursing. The signs vary, but FeLV can cause multiple illnesses including anemia and cancer. Affected cats also become immunosuppressed and susceptible to other infectious diseases. This disease is incurable and generally fatal, although some cats can live for years before becoming ill, especially if they receive regular veterinary care, proper nutrition and are not subjected to a stressful lifestyle. In most cases, a simple



blood test can detect FeLV infection. The preventative vaccines are very good, but they may not give your cat absolute protection. The best prevention is eliminating exposure, which means keeping cats indoors and away from any direct contact with any known FeLV positive cats. Healthy-looking cats may carry the virus and be contagious; therefore, it is important to test any new arrivals for FeLV before allowing contact with your cat.



### Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

This virus is similar to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Most often, FIV is transmitted through cat bites, but it also may be passed in-utero. Infected cats gradually lose their ability to resist disease but may still live long, healthy lives if kept indoors and provided with diligent veterinary care and proper nutrition. Reliable blood tests for FIV exist, but cats who have been vaccinated against FIV also will test positive, and currently the tests cannot differentiate between a vaccinated cat and an infected cat. In addition to causing cats to test positive, the FIV vaccine may not protect against all strains of the virus. The best way to protect cats from FIV is to keep them indoors and to prevent fighting.

**NOTE:** FIV and FeLV are only infectious between cats—you can't catch them from your pet.

### Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)

This disease is both frustrating and misunderstood. It is nearly always fatal and is far more common in kittens. It begins when a cat contracts the common feline coronavirus, usually through contact with infected stool (that is, through shared litter boxes). The benign coronavirus causes mild signs of intestinal upset or no signs at all. Most cats recover on their own, but in some cats the coronavirus changes and the mutated virus then causes an immune-mediated disease called FIP. Why this happens in certain cats is unknown, but genetic predisposition and stress are likely factors in the development of the disease. There are two types of FIP. One form is the effusive (or wet) form, in which fluid builds up in body cavities, most often the

abdominal cavity causing a characteristic distended abdomen. The other is the dry form where virus associated inflammatory cells invade internal organs. Signs of FIP include prolonged high fever that does not respond to therapy, lethargy, weight loss and decreased appetite. Dry FIP, in particular, is difficult to diagnose. While research on various types of treatment continues, there is currently no cure for FIP and no reliable treatment. A vaccine exists, but it is not generally recommended as its efficacy is controversial. The risk of FIP may lessen with good sanitation practices and a reduction of both overcrowding and stress.

Excellent brochures on FeLV, FIV, and FIP are available from the Cornell Feline Health Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853-6401. Write to them for details or check out [vet.cornell.edu/fhc/](http://vet.cornell.edu/fhc/). Another excellent source of information is the Winn Feline Foundation, [winnfelinehealth.org](http://winnfelinehealth.org).

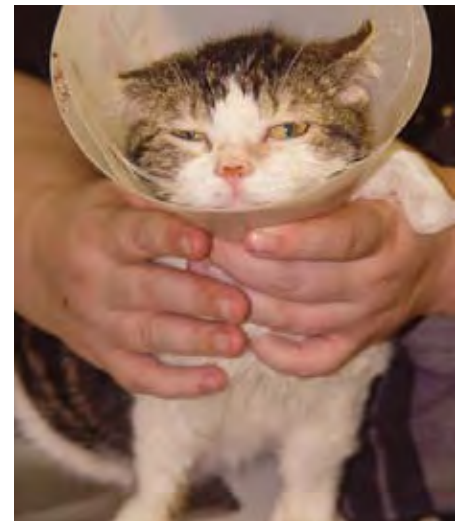
### Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD)

This disease, formerly known as Feline Urologic Syndrome (FUS), is a general term for a set of signs including frequent squatting or straining in the litter box, painful and/or inappropriate urination or blood in the urine. Causes include cystitis (bladder inflammation), urinary tract infections, crystals in the urine, bladder stones, and less commonly, urinary bladder cancer. Especially in younger cats, there is a good chance that no definitive cause will be found. Lack of water in the diet (exclusive dry food diets), stress and change of seasons are currently among the predisposing factors thought to be involved in leading to FLUTD in cats. Because of their urinary tract anatomy, male cats are more prone to blockages if stones, crystals or mucous plugs become lodged in the urinary tract. Immediate treatment is necessary to save their lives. FLUTD can sometimes be prevented by diet, and sometimes it can be controlled with diet and drug therapy. Reducing stress through behavioral and environmental enrichment programs is now a part of standard treatment for cystitis. For more information, see [indoorcat.org](http://indoorcat.org).

**Parasites** Parasites draw their sustenance from a cat's body. Although parasites rarely kill their hosts, severe parasitic infestations can lead to death.

At the very least, parasitic infections can have an adverse effect on a cat's quality of life. Some parasites are also zoonotic (can affect people). Keeping your cat indoors will help reduce the chance of exposure to parasites. The most common parasites are:

- **Fleas** Cats who spend time outdoors or cats who have contact with unprotected pets are most at risk for flea infestation. Flea control is important to prevent flea allergy dermatitis, an irritating and potentially severe skin condition caused by an allergy to flea bites. Fleas also transmit the larval form of one type of tapeworm. There are medications that effectively treat tapeworms, but flea control is necessary to prevent reinfection. Fleas may also transmit *Bartonella*, the bacteria that causes "Cat Scratch Disease," as well as a blood parasite called



*Mycoplasma Haemophilus* that can cause severe anemia. In addition, while fleas prefer animals as hosts, they may bite people. Our warm and often humid homes provide perfect shelter (especially carpeting) for flea eggs to hatch and pupae and larvae to hide. A single flea can lay up to 50 eggs daily and 2,000 eggs in a lifetime. Both the cat and the home must be treated to break the lifecycle. Talk with your veterinarian about which flea control method is best for your cats. Only use flea control products labeled for cats. Some flea treatments for dogs can be toxic to cats.

- **Ear Mites** These tiny, almost invisible insects live and breed in your cat's ear canal. They are very contagious, can be passed between cats and dogs and



can be difficult to treat. Head-shaking, excessive ear scratching and crumbly or greasy brown or black matter in the ears suggest an infestation. Your veterinarian can offer treatment options. Do not attempt to treat the ears yourself, and don't assume that every ear infection is caused by ear mites. Cats also can have bacterial or fungal infections, either alone or in conjunction with the ear mite infection.

### Intestinal Parasites

- **Roundworms** These parasites are fairly common, especially in kittens and in stray and other outdoor-roaming cats. Roundworms often are easily detected by a microscopic fecal examination. They are acquired by ingesting the eggs of the parasite, eating an infected host such as a rodent or bird or through drinking an infected queen's milk. The white worms live in the small intestines of the cat and grow up to six inches long. The eggs produced by the female worms shed in the cat's feces and can persist in contaminated soil for years. While treatment is routine (professional deworming is best—some over-the-counter dewormers don't work), it's extremely important to treat the cat. Roundworms are a public health concern, potentially causing larval migrans in people. This is a condition most often seen affecting children who dig or play in roundworm-affected sand or soil. The immature roundworms (larvae), when

ingested by these children, can migrate to the lungs, liver or eyes and may cause damage to these organs, including blindness.

- **Tapeworms** Typically detected by the presence of tapeworm segments, these parasites resemble grains of rice or sesame seeds and are found in the area around the cat's anus. One type of tapeworm is contracted by ingesting fleas and the other by eating animals such as mice and rabbits. Tapeworms attach to the intestine and absorb nutrients. Most cats are asymptomatic but in some cases cats can develop diarrhea and/or experience weight loss. As described above, treatment involves both medication and flea control.

- **Coccidia** Coccidia are not worms but rather one-celled organisms that thrive in the intestinal tract and sometimes may cause life-threatening diarrhea. They are detected through microscopic fecal examination. The treatment period is longer versus tapeworm and roundworms. Treatment for coccidia involves meticulous scooping of feces from the litter box along with a 14- to 21-day antibiotic regimen.

- **Hookworms** Common symptoms of hookworms include bloody stool, weight loss, weakness and/or anemia. However, in some cases, particularly in adults, cats may be asymptomatic. Hookworm infection is caused by eating

infected animals or ingesting feces that contain infected larvae. Hookworms may be transmitted to humans, causing cutaneous larva migrans. This is a condition where the larval or immature forms of the hookworm travel under the skin in people, creating red, itchy bumps. Deworming treatment is the same as it is for roundworms.

- **Heartworm Disease** This disease can affect cats, but hasn't been an area of veterinary concentration until recently. In cats, heartworms tend to cause lung disease as opposed to the heart disease that dogs develop. In fact, some cats with symptoms suggestive of feline asthma may actually be suffering from Heartworm Associated Respiratory Disease (HARD). Diagnostic testing for heartworms in cats is much more difficult than it is in dogs and often requires a combination of blood tests, x-rays and ultrasound. There is no cure for heartworms in cats, but some may respond to symptomatic treatment with anti-inflammatory medications and certain antibiotics. Monthly preventive medications, however, are very effective and safe. Since heartworm is transmitted by mosquitoes, cats who roam outside or spend time on porches, decks or near open windows are at risk for heartworm disease. For more information, visit [knowheartworms.org](http://knowheartworms.org) and [heartwormsociety.org](http://heartwormsociety.org).

- **Ringworm** Ringworm is not caused by a worm, as the name may imply. Instead, it is caused by a highly contagious fungus. Although it has a classic "ring" appearance on human skin and is often recognized in cats by hair loss with scaly or red skin, it can mimic other skin and coat conditions as well. Cats also can carry ringworm without showing any signs. Diagnosis and treatment are important because ringworm is contagious to other pets and people. Affected hairs may glow under UV light (Wood's Lamp), but this occurs in less than half of infected cats, so a fungal culture is often necessary to confirm the diagnosis. Treatment includes both oral and topical medications prescribed by a veterinarian and must continue until fungal cultures are negative. Environmental decontamination is critical to prevent reinfection. The fungal spores are very hardy, and most over-the-counter products are not effective at killing them. Household

bleach in a dilution of one part bleach to ten parts water works best. Also, vacuuming well and frequently and washing all bedding are important.

For more information on parasites and pets, visit [petsandparasites.org](http://petsandparasites.org).

**Chronic Kidney Failure (Chronic Renal Failure)** This is a progressive but often manageable disease in which the kidneys lose their ability to perform many important functions,

**Signs of an emergency** Seek immediate treatment from your veterinarian or the closest veterinary emergency clinic if your cat:

- Has a seizure (convulsions)
- Becomes ataxic (staggered or has poor coordination, loss of balance) or has vision loss
- Cannot urinate
- Is gasping or has labored breathing
- Has a loss of bladder and/or bowel control
- Becomes comatose or unresponsive
- Paws or scratches excessively at his mouth or face
- Shows evidence of having suffered a serious trauma or accident (bleeding, broken bone, head tilt, etc.)
- Has eaten anything toxic, including certain plants, antifreeze, human medications, etc (a list of dangerous substances can be found at [aspc.org](http://aspc.org))
- Stops eating or drinking completely
- Develops diarrhea that lasts more than 48 hours
- Has atypical vomiting or persistent vomiting of food or fluid
- Passes blood in urine or stool

When in doubt, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible. Your cat can't tell you what's wrong, and the problem is not going to correct itself!

including removal of waste products and conserving water. It can have many causes, but chronic aging changes in older cats are the most common cause. The clinical signs seen most often are excessive drinking and urination. Later signs include weight loss, anorexia, lethargy, vomiting, anemia and sores in the mouth. Unfortunately, by the time many of these signs are seen, the disease often has progressed significantly. Diagnostic tests include blood work, urinalysis, urine culture (which helps to screen for kidney infection) and, in some cases, x-rays and an ultrasound. Treatment for kidney failure may initially require hospitalization with IV fluids as well as medications to control nausea and vomiting, appetite stimulants and antibiotics, if needed. Home treatment may start with changing your cat's diet, but may also involve your administering fluids (a balanced electrolyte solution) by injection under the skin, as well as other supportive medications. Prescription foods may reduce the workload of the kidneys and may slow the progression of the kidney disease, and moist foods in general help to increase water intake. Periodic rechecking of laboratory values and subsequent adjusting of supportive treatments will be recommended by your veterinarian. This is one of many diseases where early detection and intervention may prolong quality of life and lessen suffering, which is another reason semiannual visits to your veterinarian are important.

**Hyperthyroidism** This occurs when the thyroid, a small gland in the neck that helps to regulate metabolism, becomes enlarged and produces too much thyroid hormone. In most cases, this is due to a benign tumor. The cause of these benign tumors is unknown but is actively being researched. Environmental toxins may possibly play a role. The hallmark sign of hyperthyroidism is weight loss despite a normal or increased appetite. Hyperthyroid cats also may have intermittent vomiting and/or diarrhea as well as increased thirst and urination, skin conditions, behavior changes, etc. Some cats become agitated, hyperactive and/or more vocal.

Hyperthyroidism can be diagnosed through blood work. It is important that kidney and liver function also be assessed as this affects future treatment.

Hyperthyroidism can adversely affect multiple body systems, most significantly the heart, so control of the disease is very important. There are three treatment options available:

1. Medication, typically Methimazole, needs to be administered daily (usually twice a day) to adequately control thyroid hormone levels. It is generally given in pill form, but can be specially formulated (compounded) into a flavored liquid, chew or a transdermal gel that can be applied to the inside of the ears. Because this medication is intended only to blunt thyroid hormone production and does not actually cure the condition, methimazole is a lifelong treatment. Occasionally, some cats will experience minor side effects, but the drug has the advantage of being easily adjusted. Cats on oral medication must have exams and laboratory work performed regularly to monitor efficacy and also because treatment affects other organ systems.
2. Radioactive iodine is generally considered the safest and most effective treatment, and it is perhaps the best option for cats with adequate kidney function. In more than 95 percent of cats, it is curative with only one treatment. Also, in the rare case of a malignant thyroid tumor, the thyroid scan that many facilities use prior to treatment will aid in diagnosis and appropriate treatment. Only specialized facilities are licensed to perform the radioactive iodine procedure, and cats must be hospitalized for several days because of the exposure to radioactive materials. A very small number of cats may become hypothyroid after therapy and require thyroid supplementation.
3. Surgery to remove the thyroid glands is usually curative, but hyperthyroidism can recur in some cats if tissue is left behind or if they have thyroid tissue in abnormal locations (ectopic thyroid). Other potential complications include





those associated with anesthesia and surgery in general as well as damage to the adjacent parathyroid gland, which can result in dangerously low calcium levels.

Your veterinarian can assist in choosing the option best suited for your cat's personality and health, taking economics into consideration as well. Surgery and radioactive iodine are far more expensive initially, but in relatively younger cats, the costs of years of medication and monitoring may exceed the costs associated with the two curative options.

### **Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)**

This disease can cause chronic vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration and/or weight loss. IBD is characterized by inflammatory cells found in the lining of the stomach and/or intestinal tract. To confirm the diagnosis, an exploratory abdominal surgery or endoscopy with biopsy is needed, but less invasive diagnostics, such as blood tests, x-rays and ultrasound can help to make a presumptive diagnosis. There is no one specific cause for IBD in cats, and the explanation may vary from cat to cat. Known causes include dietary allergies or intolerances, parasites, bacterial infections, etc. Some cats respond to special diets or supplements. Steroids also may be prescribed, and they often are very effective. Many cats tolerate steroids well enough to use for the remainder of their lives without any serious deleterious effects.

**Diabetes Mellitus** This disease develops when insulin secretion by the pancreas is impaired or when the body's cells are resistant to the action of insulin, thus inhibiting the body's ability to regulate blood glucose (blood sugar). The key clinical signs are increased water and food intake, excessive urination and weight loss. In the later stages, cats may have trouble walking (due to effects on the nervous system) and become extremely lethargic. The disease is diagnosed through blood work and a urinalysis. Diabetic cats may require insulin injections, but some cats can be treated with low carbohydrate diets, especially if diagnosed early (please turn to page 6 for more information on diet and nutrition). Occasionally, diabetes can be maintained with oral medications, but these are rare exceptions. Not all cats remain insulin dependent forever. Diabetes is far more common in overweight cats, especially

middle-age male cats, and its incidence has risen along with the rise in feline obesity.

**Cancer** This disease includes a large group of malignancies that can affect any organ system. Signs and symptoms often are subtle at first, if apparent at all. Examples include visible masses on or under the skin, diarrhea, vomiting, persistent lameness, decreased appetite, lethargy, weight loss, labored breathing and difficulty urinating and/or defecating. Unusual bleeding or discharge from any area may be cause for concern. Check your cat on a regular basis for any lumps. Especially with female cats, guardians should periodically check for mammary (breast) masses. If any of these signs or symptoms are observed in your cat, bring them to the attention of your veterinarian.

Many cancers are very aggressive and can accelerate quickly. In some cases early detection is possible. The earlier cancer is diagnosed, the better the chance is for effective treatment and a positive outcome. Annual, or ideally semiannual, veterinary examinations will allow your veterinarian to catch weight loss earlier and to detect any abnormal findings at an early stage. Treatment for cancer depends on its type and location.



In some cases, surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy may lead to remission or a cure. In others, the goal may be to keep the cat comfortable. Veterinary oncologists are making progress in identifying effective treatments with fewer side effects. Still, our cats can't live forever, and cancer often is fatal, particularly in elderly cats. The ques-

tion of whether to treat and how to treat depends on economic realities as well as how to best maintain your cat's quality of life.

**Hypertension** High blood pressure in cats almost always is secondary to another disease process, such as chronic kidney failure or hyperthyroidism. There often are no obvious symptoms, so routine screening is important. Hypertension should never be ignored because it indicates the presence of an underlying condition. Also, if left untreated, hypertension can cause blindness, stroke or seizures and can hasten the progression of kidney disease, especially in older cats.

Treatment of hypertension begins with treating the primary disease. Often, though, antihypertensive medication also is needed, and some of the same drugs that treat hypertension in people are used in cats.

**Arthritis (Osteoarthritis)** This degenerative joint disease is a painful condition that primarily affects older cats. Unfortunately, much more research is needed to enhance our knowledge about the causes and management of this disease in cats and to approach the level of understanding that we have about arthritis in dogs. The prevalence of arthritis in cats is unknown, but it is thought to affect a significant portion of senior cats (older than 10 years of age) with the elbows showing the highest frequency of obvious disease.

Clinical signs of arthritis in cats are often subtle. Only a small portion of arthritic cats will exhibit lameness or limping. Instead, the signs more commonly seen are behavior changes, such as reduced activity and a decreased ability to perform some of the tasks that they once were able to perform, or that they should perform (jumping, playing, etc). Owners may not even initially recognize these signs since many cats are generally less active indoors. Additionally, owners may not interpret the reduced activity as problematic but instead attribute it to advancing age. Arthritic cats also may groom less completely if their mobility or flexibility is reduced, and they may find other normal functions difficult as well, such as getting in and out of the litter box, going up and down stairs and defecating.

The diagnosis of arthritis can be difficult in cats, and for this reason, the



condition is likely under diagnosed. Radiographs are not always helpful; there often is a discrepancy between what is seen radiographically and what is seen clinically. Therefore, owner observations of notable changes in their cat's behaviors and activity levels are important factors in helping to diagnose arthritis.

Some of the treatment approaches for feline arthritis include: diet restriction if the cat is overweight; home environment changes, including low-sided litter boxes and pet stairs; exercise/rehabilitation/physical therapy; acupuncture/massage; nutraceuticals (glucosamine/chondroitin sulfate); and pain medication (see sidebar).


**Toxoplasmosis** Some obstetricians still suggest that pregnant women relinquish their cats because of the potential for this protozoal parasite to be transmitted to them, which would potentially cause birth defects, even death, in their unborn children.

"Absolutely, positively, you do not have to give up your cat because you are pregnant; please don't even consider that," urges Dr. Margie Scherk, a board-certified feline veterinarian from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Toxoplasmosis (*Toxoplasma gondii*) occurs naturally in the environment. Cats most frequently get the infection by eating an infected animal or by eating undercooked meat. Following a meal of infected prey or undercooked meat, an intractable infection cycle begins which is unique to cats. The organism multiplies in the walls of the small intestine and ultimately comes out in the feces. Cats are the only animals to pass the organisms in their infectious stage in their feces. While some cats with toxoplasmosis do become ill, many show no symptoms whatsoever.

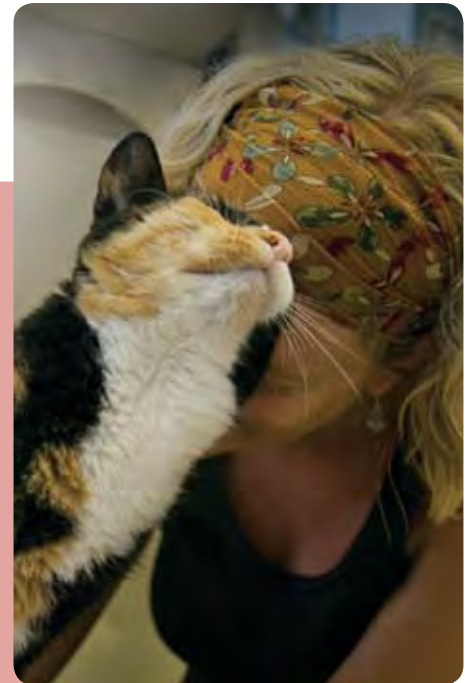
Dr. Michael Lappin, professor of small animal internal medicine at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, explains the specific series of events that must occur for a person to get toxoplasmosis from a feline host. Initially, a person must come in contact with an infected cat, and not all cats are infected. According to Lappin's research, about 30 percent of cats are positive for toxoplasmosis. Cats pass the organisms in their infectious stage of the disease in their feces for only seven to ten days of their entire lives (when there is an acute infection). To affect an unborn baby, the infection must occur within the first trimester.

By scooping the litter box daily, there's no potential for infection to people because the feces eliminated by a cat carrying toxoplasmosis require from 24 hours to five days to become actively infectious.

Lappin says he encourages women to wear gloves while changing the box, offering further protection. Scherk prefers delegating the task. "It's a perfect job for your partner. You're carrying the baby; at least he can scoop the box." 

### **Pain recognition and management in cats**

There are several reasons why it can be very easy to miss signs that a cat is in pain. First, cats are masters at hiding pain. In the wild, a sick or injured animal is vulnerable to attack, so survival can depend on the animal's ability to act like everything is fine even when something is terribly wrong. Second, cats don't exhibit signs of pain the same way people or other animals do. Relatively quiet creatures, cats won't bark, whine, cry or otherwise vocalize when they're in pain. Just because your cat isn't crying or acting out doesn't mean she's not in pain.



Here are some signs that your cat may be in pain:

- Lack of grooming
- Sleeping a lot and/or sleeping in only one position
- Lack of interest in food, water or surroundings
- Wanting to be left alone
- Growling or hissing when stroked, touched or moved
- Nonstop purring
- Licking a particular area
- Abnormal body positions, such as a hunched-back or head-in-the-corner stance
- Restlessness
- Change in food preferences, sleeping spots and/or litter box habits
- General irritability or crankiness
- Reluctance to jump to favorite spots, such as window sills and beds

If you notice any of these behaviors (or any other changes in your cat's regular behavior), contact your veterinarian. Treating pain in cats can significantly speed their healing and recovery from surgery or illness, and can help reduce stress and enhance the quality of life associated with chronic painful conditions such as arthritis. To assist owners and veterinarians alike in recognizing and managing pain in cats, visit: [aahanet.org/PublicDocuments/PainManagementGuidelines.pdf](http://aahanet.org/PublicDocuments/PainManagementGuidelines.pdf).

# Special concerns for senior cats

**How old is my cat?** In general, the first year of a cat's life is equivalent to the first sixteen years of a human's. The second year adds another seven to eight years, for an equivalent of 23 to 24 years of age. Each subsequent year of life adds about four human years. Thus, a 10-year-old cat would be equivalent to a 56-year-old person, a 15-year-old cat to a 76-year-old person and a 20-year-old cat to a 96-year-old person. Most veterinarians consider any cat over 10 years old senior, as that is when age-associated illnesses generally begin to develop.

Advances in veterinary medicine, especially in the areas of preventive medicine, diagnostics, nutrition and cutting-edge specialty medicine, have led to better care and a prolonged life expectancy for our feline friends. To ensure that your older cat lives a long, happy life, it is important

to be vigilant about your cat's health and take steps to prevent illness.

## How to Care for Your Older Cat

Regular veterinary checkups are essential to maintain your older cat's health. Examinations should be performed every six months so that health issues can be identified and intervention can occur as soon as possible.

Appropriate vaccines may be even more important in older cats. As animals age, their immune systems may not function at the level that they once did, and thus their response to disease is impaired. Vaccination decisions should be made with the cat's disease risk and health status in mind.

Good nutrition is essential for senior cats. Many diets currently are marketed for older cats that are designed to provide extra antioxidants, fatty acids, high quality protein and joint health supplements. They also are purported to maintain ideal

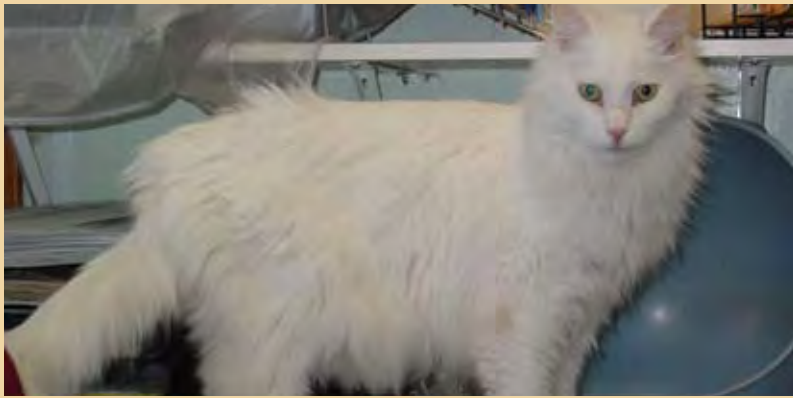
urine pH. Not every food is appropriate for every cat, though, and diet decisions should be made on an individual basis. Your veterinarian can help steer you in the right direction based on your individual cat's nutritional needs. Ultimately, it is most important that senior cats consume adequate calories and nutrients. Due to their decreased senses of smell and taste, this can mean trying different types of food, adding water to the food or warming the food.

Cats often develop tartar and gingivitis as they age, which can lead to infections and oral pain. Many cats require regular dental cleanings under anesthesia. If they have dental problems that were ignored in the past or that dramatically worsened with age, they may need to have oral surgery, including extraction of diseased teeth. No cat should live with a painful mouth, and by removing the diseased teeth, the pain is eliminated. Cats generally adjust quite well to losing teeth, and most will continue to eat normally, including dry kibble, even after having lost multiple teeth. Regular teeth brushing can help to avoid problems but can be painful when the gums are inflamed or the teeth are loose, so see your veterinarian before beginning any home care regimen. Oral cleansing solutions, water additives and/or plaque prevention gels also may be used to help slow the progression of dental disease. See your veterinarian right away if your cat is pawing at her mouth, clearly chewing only on one side or refusing food—all these are signs of dental problems. Unfortunately, many cats tend to live with or hide pain, and you may never see any signs that your cat's mouth hurts, so regular dental exams are critical.

Baseline blood values, taken while your cat is healthy, allow your veterinarian to know what is normal for your cat.







They also provide a reference point for later treatment if those values do change as the cat ages. Routine diagnostics can detect a problem early on, before the cat is showing any symptoms of illness. This can lead to more effective and rewarding treatment for the senior cat.

### Older cats and litter box problems

If your older cat is eliminating outside the litter box, having trouble making it downstairs or upstairs or is avoiding stepping into the litter box, she may have arthritis. Easy solutions to this problem include adding litter boxes to each level of your house, particularly to the area where your cat spends most of her time, and purchasing litter boxes with lower sides so your older cat can have an easier time entering the box. You also might want to consider removing the litter box cover, as your older, visually impaired cat may not like stepping into a dark box. For more information on litter box problems, turn to page 14.

### Signs you should take your older cat to the veterinarian

Knowing your cat and monitoring her for changes so that problems can be detected early can help prolong a healthy and comfortable life. It is important to note that aging itself is not a disease. In cats, behavior changes, including subtle changes, may be the first indicators of illness, pain or discomfort. Guardians who know their cats well, and specifically their cat's normal behaviors, will better be able to detect significant changes. Simply getting older is not a reason for your cat to experience weight loss, difficulty walking, etc. The following signs, as well as those listed in the article beginning on page 18, may indicate disease and should be discussed with your veterinarian.

- **Weight loss** This is often the first (and sometimes only) sign that your older cat may be having a problem. This can indicate almost any geriatric disease, so it is important that you either weigh your cat at home or schedule regular veterinarian checks to keep track of her weight.
- **Excessive drinking/urination** This is very important as these are symptoms of diabetes, kidney disease, hyperthyroidism, uterine infections and bladder infections.
- **Vomiting/diarrhea** Alone or together, these can indicate a variety of problems.
- **Difficulty seeing** Poor vision can be a sign of retinal degeneration, cataracts or sudden blindness caused by detachment of the back portion of the eye, called the retina, from untreated high blood pressure.
- **Difficulty walking** This may be an indication of arthritis, diabetes, infection or a metabolic problem, such as a mineral deficiency. For more information on arthritis and diabetes, see page 22.
- **Decrease in appetite** Any time a cat does not eat for more than a day there is cause for concern. It is important to meal feed your cat rather than leaving food out all day (see page 6 for more information), so you can more quickly notice any loss of appetite in your older cat.
- **Nasal discharge** Bloody or greenish discharge can indicate severe dental disease or oral/nasal tumors.
- **Lethargy** It's normal for cats to sleep more as they get older. However, a

dramatic change in activity over a short period of time is a cause for concern.

- **Confusion** A cat who seems to forget family members, walks into objects, stands in the center of a room and vocalizes or awakens in the middle of the night and vocalizes for no apparent reason may be demonstrating signs of Feline Cognitive Dysfunction (kitty Alzheimer's). These also may be signs of hearing and/or vision loss as well as other diseases, including hyperthyroidism, in the senior cat.
- **Constipation** Your cat may be constipated if she is straining in the litter box, eliminating less frequently, vomiting while defecating or attempting to defecate or eliminating outside the box. Another sign of constipation is small, pebble-like, unusually firm pieces of stool. A common cause of constipation is a lack of water intake so it is important to feed moisture-rich canned food and make sure your cat has easy access to water bowls. Many older cats also may need stool softeners to alleviate the discomfort associated with constipation.

Your older cat, whether you have had her since kittenhood or adopted her as an adult, is an important part of your family and she has given you years of companionship and unconditional love. Please return the favor by providing the essential care and attention that your older cat so desperately needs. 🐾

### Coping with the loss of a pet

Losing a pet can be a heartbreaking, isolating experience, and many pet guardians do not know how to ask for help or who to reach out to for support. To help pet guardians understand and deal with the potentially crippling effects of grief, Tree House created the Pet Loss Grief Support Group. It is a group where people who are dealing with the imminent or recent death of a beloved companion animal can share their thoughts and feelings in confidence. The group is led by two trained counselors and meets once a month. For more information on the Tree House Pet Loss Grief Support Group, call 773-784-5488 ext. 227 or email [griefsupport@treehouseanimals.org](mailto:griefsupport@treehouseanimals.org).

# How to find a lost cat



If your cat becomes lost, act fast and don't give up. How quickly and carefully you search, and how persistent and resourceful you are, can determine whether or not your cat will be found. In the event that your cat is lost, here are some tips:

**Your cat needs you** The important thing to remember is that your cat can't tell you where he is—you are responsible for his safety and rescue. So please don't give up after only a day or two. We recommend that you keep looking for as long as six months, if necessary. There are reports in the media of "miracle cats" who return after a year or more. Your cat could be a miracle cat.

**Look closest to home** If you did not actually see your cat slip outside, be sure

to thoroughly search your home. Cats have been known to hide in the most remote places, such as closets, empty boxes and under furniture. If you live in an apartment, be sure to check the hallways, stairwells, basement, storage closets, laundry rooms and any vacant apartments that may have had a door ajar. Also, check with neighbors as they may have either seen or taken in your cat. Most lost cats who have always lived indoors will not go far from home. Many are discovered hiding just a few doors away or even a few feet from the front door. Start by looking under nearby porches, in basements and garages, in bushes and even under cars. Once outside, your cat will likely be wary or frightened of any human voice and may not recognize you or come immediately when you call. Don't be discouraged if

he doesn't respond. Call to your cat as if you've just seen him, using an upbeat voice, the kind of voice that you normally use to greet him. Call your cat's name often and listen for a reply.

**Be a detective** As you search for your cat, ask everyone you meet if they've seen him. Children are particularly good sources of information as they are usually outdoors more often than adults. Ask people walking dogs, the mail carrier, owners of nearby businesses and people coming to and from work. The more people you include in your search, the more likely you are to find your cat.

**Post signs** As soon as possible after losing a cat, post signs to alert the neighborhood. The lettering must be large enough to read from a distance, and a

**Help...I found a stray!** Take a good look at the cat (or dog, for that matter). Is he in good physical condition, easy to approach or wearing a collar with identification tags? If the stray is wearing tags, a phone call to the number listed is the best way to find out where he lives. If the animal looks to be in good condition, but is not wearing tags, take him to a local shelter or veterinarian's office to be scanned for a microchip, which will be registered to his guardian. If there is no identification, try the following:

- Check Lost sections of local papers or place your own Found ad.
- Register the animal with lost/found match-up programs at local animal shelters and on the many websites created for lost and found pets, such as [pets911.com](http://pets911.com), [lost-pet.org](http://lost-pet.org), or [lostpetsos.org](http://lostpetsos.org).
- Post Found signs in the area where you discovered the animal.

If you think you've found the animal's guardian, don't hand over the animal right away. Take a few precautions to make sure the person claiming the cat or dog is actually the guardian. Unfortunately, reselling animals for research, baiting or as breeders for puppy and kitten mills does happen. An unscrupulous "buncher" (animal broker) may put on a well-polished act as a concerned guardian, so it's best to do the following:

- Ask for identification. When someone calls in response to an ad or posted notice, ask for the caller's name and telephone number and tell the person you'll call back right away.
- Ask for a description of the animal. A guardian should be able to give you details not mentioned in your ad or notice.
- Watch the reaction of the animal when the guardian arrives. An animal being reunited with its guardian is usually visibly excited.
- If you're not sure, ask for proof such as veterinary records or photographs. Don't worry that you're being overly cautious—a pet guardian will understand that you are only trying to protect the animal.

If you can't find the animal's guardian and can't keep the stray, there are options available to you. You can take the cat or dog to your local animal care and control or a private shelter. Be aware that no-kill shelters have limited admissions and may not be able to admit the animal immediately or at all. You also can consider fostering him until you can find an adopter, but be sure to screen all potential adopters and charge an adoption fee.

reward should be mentioned prominently. Put a good description and photo of your cat on your signs. Color copies are generally preferable to properly distinguish your cat's features. Include where and when the cat was lost and a telephone number and email address where you can be reached. If your cat has been microchipped, include the microchip identification number (also, alert the microchip company that your cat is lost). To be effective, you must blanket your area with these lost signs, beginning within a one or two block radius and gradually expanding the area. Ask friends to help you slide signs under the doors of neighbors' houses and apartments, and to post them at local businesses and veterinary hospitals. Place the flyers in visible areas, even on the windshields of parked cars.

**Offer a reward** Offer what you can afford. It's not the amount as much as the idea that seems to motivate people. Children are especially likely to help when they hear about a reward. Rewards of \$100 or more are not uncommon today, and, if you have been searching for a long time, offering an increased reward may help spark renewed interest and effort from neighbors and friends.

**Set up a temporary outdoor feeding station** Leave fresh food and water outside on a porch or in a sheltered area close to your home. Set up a large, sturdy box lined with an old towel or other items that smell familiar to your cat. If your lost cat should return while you are asleep or away from home, food and shelter may save his life.

**When to look** The best time to look for a lost cat is when it's dark and streets are quiet as the cat may be too fearful to come out during the day when there is more activity from people and traffic. Take a flashlight with you and search under parked cars, in yards, under bushes and in alleys. It's a good idea to take a friend along at night for safety and to bring some canned cat food or tuna or salmon to attract your cat.

**Notify humane agencies** Call all the animal shelters and veterinary hospitals in your area, beginning with the municipal animal control agency. Be sure to provide a good description of the lost cat and ask them to post your sign or take

down specific information on your cat, should he be brought there later. Consider delivering a photo of your cat or sending a picture via email—so many cats look alike, it's hard to provide a comprehensive description over the phone. Be sure to continually and frequently check with shelters as unclaimed animals often are at risk of being euthanized.

**Place ads in newspapers and on websites** Be sure to post a lost ad in the Lost and Found classified section of all local newspapers or on websites such as craigslist.com, petfinder.com, pets911.com, lost-pet.org and lostpetsos.org. Beware of people answering your ad but asking for reward money before they return the cat—this almost always is a

scam. You also should read the Found ads or entries in all the local papers or the aforementioned websites, just in case a caring person found your cat and is trying to find you.

**Once your cat is home** Check your cat for possible bite wounds or cuts or scrapes which may require immediate veterinary attention. Initially, keep him separated from other pets in the household until you have determined that he is healthy and reacclimated to his environment. A visit to your veterinarian is necessary to check for infectious disease and parasites. Be sure to have your veterinarian insert a registered microchip if the cat does not already have one. 🐾

### Microchips: the new ID tag

Even indoor pets can sometimes find a way out of their house. And many Americans still allow their pets to roam unsupervised outside. Cats can get lost if chased by a predator or another cat, or as a result of chasing prey. Sometimes older cats simply get lost due to a cognitive dysfunction (commonly referred to as kitty Alzheimer's).

Microchips are technological marvels that have had an amazing impact on the animal welfare community. Admitted stray animals now are routinely scanned for microchips in most animal shelters (including Tree House) and veterinary offices, and often these animals are reunited with their families. Tree House microchips every cat in our care. We encourage all pet guardians to do the same.

The procedure for microchipping is simple. A tiny microchip is encapsulated within a biocompatible material and injected under the skin through a hypodermic needle. The microchip is inserted between the shoulder blades, near the base of the neck. The procedure takes only seconds and is relatively painless. The microchip provides a permanent, positive identification that cannot be removed.

Once your cat is microchipped, you need to register (by mail or online) with the microchip provider. Without registering, the microchip provider will have no contact information if your cat is recovered. If you change



addresses, just as you would notify the post office, contact your microchip provider so that your contact information can be updated. Be sure to consult the microchip provider or the facility that microchipped your pet to get more details about this procedure. Lost or stolen microchipped pets are far more likely to be reunited with their families than pets who aren't chipped.

Recently, there have been reports in the popular press of microchips causing cancer in laboratory animals. However, according to veterinary pathologists, veterinary oncologists and the American Veterinary Medical Association, there have been no reports documented in any veterinary journal in America of cancer being directly linked to a microchip. Clearly, the advantages of microchipping outweigh the risks, if indeed there are any risks.

Tree House offers low-cost microchipping for those in financial need. Call 773-784-5488 ext. 232 for more information.



# How to help stray & feral cats

## Trap-Neuter-Return



If you've noticed feral cats living in your neighborhood, you aren't alone. In Chicago there are an estimated 500,000 feral cats living on the streets and more than 60 million in the USA. For years we've heard Bob Barker remind us to spay or neuter our pets. But it shouldn't stop there! Feral cats may not be pets, but they are in dire need of spaying and neutering as well. To help combat the problem of overpopulation of homeless animals, Tree House is one of a growing number of shelters promoting Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the most effective way to control stray and feral cat populations.

**What is Trap-Neuter-Return?** TNR is a humane sterilization method used to reduce the number of feral cats. Stray and feral cats are humanely trapped and evaluated by a colony caregiver. The evaluation process allows the caregiver to separate friendly strays and kittens 12 weeks old and younger (who are good candidates for socialization) from the feral cats. The feral cats are then brought to Tree House or another participating clinic to be sterilized, vaccinated and ear-tipped. Ear-tipping is an effective way

to visually identify a sterilized feral cat in a managed colony. After the surgery, healthy adult feral cats will be returned to their familiar habitat under the supervision of the caregiver while friendly strays and kittens begin the adoption process.

**Why TNR?** Since 1971, Tree House has been caring almost exclusively for sick, injured and abused stray cats—cats who often have no other chance at a good life—but despite our best efforts and those of other shelters and animal welfare agencies around the country, the number of stray and feral cats is not decreasing at a fast enough rate. Many animal welfare agencies estimate the number of feral cats in this country to be in the tens of millions. Because feral cats breed at a much faster rate than we can socialize them, getting ahead of the overpopulation problem through adoption alone is not a realistic solution.

Trying to socialize a truly feral cat is a laborious and intensive process that could take months or even years (if you succeed at all), and this process is not usually in the best interest of the cat. Feral cats have lived their entire lives without direct human contact, other than possible feeding and monitoring from afar by human caregivers. Feral cats' survival instincts tell them to be wary of people and of confinement, so being caged to socialize them often can harm a cat's physical and mental health despite the best intentions of the rescuer.

Of course, trap and kill is never an acceptable answer. Feral cats have as much right to live as domesticated cats and other animals, and statistics have revealed that not only does it cost more to trap and kill cats than it does to trap and sterilize them, but trap and kill doesn't work. For years, the policy in many communities has been to have a local agency trap and euthanize feral cats. The agen-

cies typically trap some cats within a colony, but not all, so the remaining cats increase their reproduction to repopulate their colony. In just a few months, there are as many feral cats in the neighborhood as before the trapping.

While TNR isn't an overnight solution, it's a permanent one. Over time, colonies diminish. In addition, spaying and neutering colonies lessens the behavior neighborhood residents often complain about—yowling, fighting and territorial marking. Vaccinating for rabies is in the best interest of public health.

**How Tree House helps** For many years, your donations have helped us provide low-cost spay and neuter surgeries for pets of low-income guardians and for rescued strays and feral cats. In addition to our already low-cost spay/neuter packages, every February we offer free spay/neuter surgeries for pets of low-income guardians in honor of Spay/Neuter Month, and every October we perform one hundred free feral fixes in honor of Feral Cat Month. In 2009, Tree House will open a new high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter clinic at our Bucktown Branch. With the new facility, Tree House will be able to significantly increase the number of spay/neuter surgeries.



We know that many animal lovers have questions about the logistics and legalities of TNR, feral cats and wildlife and feral cat quality of life. For more information, please visit [treehouseanimals.org/tnr](http://treehouseanimals.org/tnr) or [tnrchicago.org](http://tnrchicago.org)

ies we perform. With your support, every surgery that our veterinarians perform helps to alleviate the serious problem of overpopulation.

## TNR FAQ

**How do I safely and humanely trap a feral cat?** Familiarize yourself with the trap before attempting to use it. We recommend wiring open the trap and using it as a feeding station for several days to allow the cat to become comfortable walking into the trap.

**When is the best time of day to trap?** Early in the morning and dusk are the best times to trap, but it is most important to trap during the times when you normally see or feed the cat. You may want to withhold food for a day or two before trapping to improve your



chances of luring the cat into the trap by using food. Trapping at night is risky. You could trap opossums, raccoons, skunks or other wildlife. If you accidentally catch one of these animals, release it immediately.

It is important that you not leave a set trap unattended for more than a few minutes at a time. Watch the trap from a comfortable distance. When the trap is sprung, quickly cover it with a blanket or towel, and move the cat to a safe area indoors.

**Where do I keep the trapped cat the night before the veterinary appointment?** Keep the cat indoors away from predators and the elements. Safe places include garages and sheds, inside a spare room in the home or in an automobile (crack the windows for ventilation, and only use vehicles if the temperature outside is not too hot or cold). If you don't have much space, consider keeping the trap in the bathtub. Set up the area by putting a plastic sheet or tarp under the

trap and newspapers on top. Make sure that all escape routes are closed.

**How do I get food and water in the trap?** Do not give food to the cat the night prior to surgery. The cat should have an empty stomach to prevent nausea caused by the anesthesia. Water should be provided at all times while the cat is not in transit. Using a trap divider (a metal divider used to separate the cat from the back of the trap), insert a small bowl of water into the end of the trap. When interacting with a trapped cat, always avoid direct eye contact because that is a sign of aggression. Before transporting the cat to her appointment, remove the water bowl just as quickly and as carefully as you placed it inside, or you can use a wire hanger to overturn the bowl and spill the water.

**How should I care for the cat after surgery?** After surgery, be sure to give the cat food and water. An unbent wire hanger may be used to slowly upright overturned bowls. Use a water bottle to fill the water bowl, and slide in filled food bowls or drop the food in through the holes in the trap. You also can use a funnel. It is important that a cat eat and drink while recovering. The cat must be kept warm and dry since she will not be able to regulate her body temperature immediately after surgery. Ideally, she should be in a place that is kept at room temperature. If that's not possible, she can be kept in a garage or shed with blankets wrapped around the trap, leaving an opening for air circulation. You also can stuff a towel or small blanket in the trap for extra comfort. You may want to use portable heaters and heat lamps in cold weather conditions, but be sure to keep them away from flammable objects. It is also a good idea to elevate the traps off the ground a few inches. Place the trap on two-by-four pieces of wood or



on a wide and sturdy bench or table, or put several layers of carpet remnants or cardboard under the trap, cover with plastic sheets and top off with newspaper to provide insulation. Remember to keep newspaper on the floor of the trap and under the trap to absorb waste.

**How long should I wait before releasing the cat back to its territory?** We recommend keeping males for one day during warm weather and two days during winter. Females usually need at least one day more than males. Keep cats in their traps for the recovery period. Generally, if the cat is eating, drinking and eliminating regularly, she should be ready for release. Please understand that it is detrimental to the cat's mental and physical health to keep the cat inside any longer than necessary. As long as the sutures are still in place and there is no excess bleeding, the cat should be ready to be released in a day or two. If you have any doubts about the recovery, please call Tree House or the facility where the surgery was performed. 🐾

**Where should I get a humane trap?** You can borrow a trap from Tree House with a \$50 deposit, which is fully refunded upon returning the trap. If you plan on tackling a large colony, you may want to consider buying your own trap(s). Some quality brands include Tomahawk (livetraps.com), Havahart (havahart.com), and Tru Catch Traps (animaltraps.com). Please call Tree House at 773-784-5488 ext. 221 for more information about our trap lending services.



# Estate planning: your cat's future



There is no doubt that companion animals enrich our lives. Animals can facilitate our recovery from illness, improve our demeanor, offer solace and comfort in times of tragedy and teach us valuable life lessons about compassion and companionship. People develop deep, emotional bonds with their pets, and many experts believe those bonds can actually lengthen pet guardians' lives. Considering all that pets do for us, it only makes sense for us to think about our pet's future and make arrangements for our animal companions, just as we would do for our human dependents.

Establishing a formal will and making plans for the inevitable time of your passing can be a difficult subject to address. The proper distribution of assets among relatives, friends and charities can raise complicated issues and may require difficult decisions. But the alternative is far less appealing—without a proper will to explain your intentions, your assets (which include pets) can be distributed according to rules set by state statute, often contrary to your personal wishes. And for those of us with companion animals, it is frightening to imagine that

our pets could be endangered simply because we did not have the foresight to plan ahead.

Many people not only fail to make formal estate plans in anticipation of their death, they also forget to plan for the possibility of a catastrophic injury or illness that may debilitate them for a long period of time. Loved ones are often forced to decide amongst themselves who should be responsible for animals left unattended, and their decision may be quite different from what you would have wanted.

When it comes to arranging for the care of companion animals, many people are unaware of the options available in planning for the future. And while the information in this section is meant to offer some guidance and direction, keep in mind that you should always consult an experienced attorney when you're ready to discuss formal estate plans.

There are simple steps you can take now to ensure that your pets live out their lives comfortably, even if you are not able to be with them yourself.

First and foremost, make sure that you have two types of caregivers lined up for

your pet: one caregiver for emergency situations and one for long-term care. If you suddenly become ill or incapacitated, you will need someone who can visit with your pet and offer the basic needs of food, water and any necessary medications. This person should live close by and be comfortable with your pet. This caregiver should have a key to your residence, along with the phone number of your veterinarian and any medical information regarding your animal. This individual needs to be willing to take on the responsibility of caring for your pet until such time as you return or the long-term caregiver is called upon. It also might be a good idea to have two people who would be willing to act as short-term caregivers, as individual's situations can sometimes change. Once you choose your short-term caregiver(s), make sure each person's name and information are given to the individual that you have designated as having power of attorney over your estate.

The long-term caregiver should be someone you know and trust. This person should not only know your pet and how you take care of him, but also should personally care about the animal. You will want to choose a person who will be able to give your pet a lifestyle similar to the one you give him. For example, if your cat is an only pet, you may not want to put him into a home with four dogs. You must remember that being in a new environment and, most importantly, being without you will be a stressful situation for your pet. Try to pick a new home that will provide your pet with comfort and security. Again, having two potential long-term caregivers may be advisable.

It is a good idea to put your wishes concerning your pet directly into your last will and testament. To do this, it





is important that you seek advice from professionals who can help make sure that everything is in order to protect your pet's future. Keep in mind that although your will is activated immediately upon your death, it can take days or weeks for it to be legally recognized and acted upon. If you have informed the individual with power of attorney of your designated short-term caregiver(s), you can be sure that your pet will be looked after in the interim. Also, this individual will be able to disburse funds (should your will have a provision for it) to both the short- and long-term caregivers to help them pay for the added expenses of food and medicine for your pet.

In addition to including instructions for your pet in your will, you also may wish to establish a trust for him. A trust will solve the problem of providing care for your pet in the days or even hours following your death, as you can determine ahead of time when the trust becomes effective. Essentially, the trust involves setting money aside to be used for your pet's care. After naming a trustee to control the funds, you can specify when you wish to activate them. You may decide that the trust should take effect on the day that you pass away, or you may decide to have it take effect should you become incapacitated for a certain number of days, or upon suffering a certain type of injury or sickness. One of the other main advantages of the trust is that it can be written to exclude certain assets from the probate process typically enacted upon your death. This will guarantee that funds are available to take care of your pet in the short term. In addition, a major advantage of a pet trust is that it is enforceable in court, if the trustee fails to abide by its terms. A bequest to an individual for the care of your pet is not enforceable if the beneficiary does not

use it as intended. The law regards such a bequest as a preference or expectancy, but not a legally binding obligation.

There are many options available to you regarding wills and trusts. Find the combination that best meets your particular needs and is enforceable in your state of residence. This can be done by consulting with an attorney who has experience in arranging trusts specific to the care of companion animals. Many states, including Illinois, do allow pet trusts as an integral part of an estate plan, but be aware that some states do not legally recognize trusts arranged for the benefit of animals. The only option, if you live in a state without a pet trust, is to make a bequest to an individual for the care of your pets. Pet trusts can be fairly expensive to maintain and administer, so careful consideration must be given to your overall plan. After you and your advisors create your will and/or trust, make sure that copies are given to your chosen executor, including all the information of your chosen caregivers.

Even though pet trusts may be legal where you live, bear in mind that leaving money for a pet may seem odd or debatable to a relative or heir. In some cases, other beneficiaries have contested money left for the care of pets, causing the funds to remain undistributed for months. Be prudent but reasonable in funding the trust, and always consult an attorney for further direction.

In the event that you cannot find a

suitable person to name as your pet's long-term caregiver, there are many animal welfare organizations willing to take them in. These organizations are generally nonprofit and require that a donation be made to them at the time of their taking in your pet. For example, Tree House will act as a guardian for your pet, although we always encourage people to exhaust any possible placement options among friends and family members, since the shelter environment can be a difficult adjustment for a cat accustomed to living in a home. In exchange for accepting this responsibility, Tree House asks that a specific bequest is included in the will, giving \$5,000 for each cat admitted to the shelter.

Many animal welfare organizations across the country have created similar arrangements, so it's best to consult with nearby shelters on their policies. If you have other questions, please contact Dave de Funiak at Tree House at 773-784-5488 ext. 226. 🐾

**Tree House's Lifetime Care Program** With a bequest of \$5,000, your cat will enjoy a cageless, home-like environment including a full veterinary clinic, love and attention from hundreds of staff and volunteers.





# About Tree House

## Mission Statement

Tree House is a humane organization that promotes the inherent value of every animal and strives to educate the public about proper and responsible animal care, with a focus on the care and placement of stray cats with special physical and emotional needs. We are committed to finding every healthy and treatable animal a home.

## History

Tree House was founded in 1971, and since then we have expanded and enhanced our programs and services to become the largest, cageless, no-kill shelter specializing in the care and rehabilitation of sick, injured, abused and neglected stray cats in the country. To date we have found homes for more than 14,000 cats. In addition to our focus on the rehabilitation and adoption of stray cats, we offer many other valuable programs and services, including our Low-cost Spay/Neuter Program, Feral Friends TNR Program, Pet Loss Grief Support Group, Humane Investigations Team, Youth Volunteer Program, Animal-Assisted Therapy, Behavior Hotline, Pet Food Pantry and Education Outreach Program.

In February of 2007 we acquired a new building to house a high-volume, low-cost Spay/Neuter Clinic. Our goal is to substantially increase the number of spay/neuter surgeries we perform from an average of 900 (2007) to more than 5,000 every year. We also were selected by the Chicago Animal Shelter Alliance (CASA) to be the lead agency to secure the adoption component of the Maddie's Fund Community Grant, which is a collaborative effort between the city's shelters and veterinary hospitals to provide a home for every adoptable animal and ultimately reduce euthanasia rates to help make Chicago a no-kill city.

## Programs and Activities

### Direct Animal Services

Lynda Ewald, DVM, our Director of Veterinary Services, oversees an in-house veterinary clinic for both chronic and acute care. New arrivals are examined, evaluated and treated in the clinic. X-rays, spays and neuters and a variety of surgical procedures are performed as necessary. Current residents receive regular check-ups, boosters, blood tests and veterinary medical treatment as needed. Animals adopted from Tree House receive any care required during the first month after adoption through the 30-day "Health Insurance Policy" provided to every adopter.

### Admission/Adoptions

On average, Tree House rescues and adopts out more than 500 cats every year. Our screening process to match the right adopter with the right cat is careful and thorough. We are committed to finding loving and permanent homes for every cat.



All cats adopted from Tree House are already spayed/neutered, de-wormed, up-to-date on vaccinations and micro-chipped before they go home.

### Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Program

Every year we perform nearly 1,000 low-cost sterilizations for the pets of low-income guardians, rescued strays and feral cats. Upon completion of the low-cost spay/neuter clinic at our Bucktown Branch in February of 2009, we hope to perform more than 5,000 low-cost sterilizations per year.

### Feral Friends Program

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is a humane sterilization method used to reduce the number of feral cats. Stray and feral cats are humanely trapped and evaluated by a colony caregiver. The evaluation process allows the caregiver to separate friendly strays and kittens 12 weeks old and younger (who are good candidates for socialization) from the feral cats. The feral cats are then brought to Tree House or another participating clinic to

be sterilized, vaccinated and ear-tipped. Ear-tipping is an effective way to visually identify a sterilized feral cat in a managed colony. After the surgery, healthy adult feral cats will be returned to their familiar habitat under the supervision of the caregiver while friendly strays and kittens begin the adoption process.

The Feral Friends Program includes the Feral Cat Complete Care Package (low-cost spay/neuter with anesthesia and postsurgery pain medication, rabies vaccination, FVRCP vaccination, penicillin, parasite treatment, ear-tipping, cleaning and treating of any wounds and microchipping), Trap Bank, Recovery Space, Pet Food Pantry, trapping assistance and community meetings and workshops.

### Humane Investigation

Tree House has two on-staff humane investigators. Their training and certification give us a thorough knowledge of the Illinois Department of Agriculture animal welfare laws and the authority to respond to reported cases of abuse.



### **Pet Loss Grief Support Group**

Tree House developed the Pet Loss Grief Support Group to help people understand and cope with the potentially crippling effects of grief. The group is coordinated and moderated by a licensed clinical social worker and a licensed professional counselor, both long-time volunteers of Tree House.

### **Volunteer Program**

Tree House depends on volunteers to help with every aspect of our programs and services. Volunteers are encouraged to keep a regular schedule and to assist in cleaning, socializing, counseling, graphic design work, etc. We even have a Youth Volunteer Program which offers children (ages 12-16) valuable skills in animal health and behavior. Focus areas include socialization skills and health-care advice that will not only help children care for their own animals but will give them the tools to act as informed advocates for the proper treatment of companion animals.



### **Animal-Assisted Therapy**

The benefits of the human/animal interaction can be almost miraculous for some people. Institutionalized elderly, disabled or emotionally troubled people of all ages face myriad challenges and therapies. Our Animal-Assisted Therapy Program cats visit hospitals and nursing homes all across Chicago and the suburbs. The nonthreatening presence and unconditional affection of the animal “therapist” stimulates conversation and socialization, brings back pleasant memories and even aids in increasing attention span.

### **Animal Information and Behavior Hotline**

Behavior problems are the most common cause for the surrender of a pet to an animal shelter or a heart-wrenching trip to the veterinarian for euthanasia. To help prevent this from happening, Tree House offers a Behavior Hotline. Counselors are on call seven days a week to help guardians understand and correct the behavior problems of their feline companions. The hotline is free (callers pay only the cost of the call) and the benefits of the program are enormous.

### **Education Outreach Program**

Tree House certified humane educators travel throughout Chicagoland to present on a variety of topics to groups ranging in age from elementary school students to adults. Presentations begin with a short video produced by Animal Planet’s “A Pet Story,” and include information on the history and mission of Tree House. Additional topics include: the proper physical and emotional care of companion animals, animal overpopulation and trap-neuter-return, how animals communicate, disaster preparedness and more.

### **Pet Food Pantry**

We know that low-income pet guardians will skip meals to save enough money to feed their cats or dogs, and feral cat colony caretakers often are feeding up to 15 cats or more per colony. The Pet Food Pantry ensures that both humans and animals are getting enough to eat. Qualifying clients receive supplementary pet food on a biweekly basis. The food is donated to Tree House from a variety of sources, including individuals and pet supply stores.

**Recommended Resources:** The following list represents organizations that we refer to on a regular basis and that were essential resources in the preparation of this booklet.

- Alley Cat Allies**
- American Association of Feline Practitioners**
- American College of Veterinary Behaviorists**
- American Veterinary Medical Association**
- Animal Sheltering Magazine**
- Catalyst Summit**
- Cat Behavior Associates, LLC**
- Cat Wellness News**
- Clicker Training**
- Companion Animal Parasite Council**
- Cornell Feline Health Center**
- Feline Nutrition**
- Feline Outreach**
- International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants**
- No-Kill Advocacy Center**
- Steve Dale Pet World**
- Tails Pet Media Group**
- The Paw Project**
- Winn Feline Foundation**
- Yourdiabeticcat.com**
- American Animal Hospital Association**

- alleycat.org**
- catvets.com**
- dacvb.org**
- avma.org**
- animalsheltering.org**
- catalystsummit.org**
- catbehaviorassociates.com**
- catwellness.org**
- clickertraining.com**
- petsandparasites.org**
- vet.cornell.edu/fhc**
- catinfo.org**
- felineoutreach.org**
- iaabc.org**
- nokilladvocacycenter.org**
- stedalepetworld.com**
- tailsinc.com**
- pawproject.com**
- winnfelinehealth.org**
- yourdiabeticcat.com**
- aahanet.org**







Humane Society

**TREE HOUSE  
HUMANE SOCIETY**

Headquarters: 1212 W Carmen Ave, Chicago IL 60640  
Bucktown Branch: 1629 N Ashland Ave, Chicago IL 60622  
773-784-5488

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

**TREE HOUSE'S GUIDE TO HUMANE CAT CARE**