



Cat Adoption Handbook



General & Medical Support: (503) 988-7387

Adopted Pet Behavior Helpline: (503) 988-0033

Table of Contents

Cat Adoption Handbook	1
General & Medical Support: (503) 988-7387	1
Adopted Pet Behavior Helpline: (503) 988-0033	1
Table of Contents	2
Successful Homecomings	3
Basic Supplies	3
Other Supplies	3
The First Week Home	4
Indoor vs Outdoor	5
So how do you make sure your new cat enjoys a happy, healthy and enriched life inside?	5
Litterbox Habits	6
Physical and Mental Stimulation	7
Exercise!	7
Mind Games	7
Introducing Cats to Children	8
Introducing Cats to Dogs	9
Introducing Cats to Cats	10
Troubleshooting Any Problems	11
Scratching on Furniture	11
Playing too rough	11
Fear	12
Resources	14
Microchip registration	14
Behavior Helpline	14
(503) 988-0033	14

Successful Homecomings

Adopting a new pet can come with a lot of change for both pet and pet parent, and having the right supplies on hand can help to make the transition as smooth as possible. Here is a list of supplies to help you start on the right foot with your new cat:

Basic Supplies

- Cat carrier
- Collar with Identification tags
- Food (Choose a cat food where the primary ingredient is a whole meat. The shorter the list of ingredients is- the better the food is for your new pet!)
- Water and Food bowls
- Bedding
- Litterbox
- Cat Litter
- Scratching Post
- Toys (wands, laser toys, squeaky toys, balls)

Other Supplies

- Nail trimmers
- Brush
- Flea Control
- Treats

The First Week Home

Coming into a new home can leave a cat feeling uneasy and worried. With such an increase of space and unfamiliar scents, it may take them a week to two weeks to feel entirely comfortable. By providing them with a small area, such as a bathroom, to call their own for the first few days or weeks, you will be helping them to adjust at her own pace. Place all of the items she needs to feel at home in there- including food, water, toys, a scratching post, bedding, and a litter box.

Never force them to come out of their safe space- allow them to explore their new home on their own. Once they appear comfortable in their own room, slowly introduce them to the rest of the house, room by room. Bring them back to their safe space at night, until they are comfortable in the entirety of the house.

Before you give your new pet free roam of the home, make sure your home is cat-proof. Tie up dangling cords on blinds and curtains, place breakable items away, lock up hazardous chemicals, shut doors to areas you do not want them to go, put away food items, pick up clothes and toys on the floor, and make sure that all windows and doors are secure and firmly locked.



Indoor vs Outdoor

Now that your new cat is home- you may be asking yourself, is it safe to let them outdoors? In addition to the dangers of other animals and weather, the following are some reasons to keep them as an inside cat:

- **Disease-** In addition to diseases they can get from other cats (such as feline leukemia, FIV and distemper) outdoor cats are much more prone to be exposed to parasites as well, such as ticks, fleas, ear mites, intestinal worms and ringworm.
- **Safety-** There are potential hazards that can seriously harm your cat's well-being and sometimes their life: cars, loose dogs and wild animals, toxins and poisons.
- **Effect on the environment-** Even a well-fed housecat can have devastating effects on native bird and small animal populations.

So how do you make sure your new cat enjoys a happy, healthy and enriched life inside?

- **Companionship-** Having someone to play with can do wonders for a cat's health. That companion could be another cat, or a dog, or perhaps just a two legged human friend to play with.
- **Toys-** Interactive toys can help your cat release energy and safely practise some of their instinctual drive. Toys can get boring after a time though, so keep a supply on hand to rotate through.
- **Environment-** Are there enough places for them to climb, perch or hide in? Climbing tools, such as cat trees, are essential to making them feel at home. Sunny spaces to perch will be a welcomed spot as well to sunbathe and enjoy the view. Most cats love to hide and are happily entertained by something such as a cat condo or as simple as a cardboard box.
- **Enclosed Patios-** If you have the space to add in an enclosed patio to your house- they will definitely enjoy it! This will allow them to experience the outside without any of the risks. Check out versions of "Catio's" online- there are many resources to buy or construct one yourself.

And don't forget- even indoor cats at times can unexpectedly slip outdoors due to an open window or door. Make sure your indoor cat is fitted with a collar and visible identification which will help them get back home to you.

We encourage cat owners to learn about **Cats Safe at Home**, a joint program of The Feral Cat Coalition, Audubon Society of Portland, Washington County, and Multnomah County Animal Services. Take the pledge to protect cats and wildlife at **CatsSafeAtHome.org**.



WASHINGTON COUNTY

Litterbox Habits

Misuse of the litter box can be a stressful problem for not only you, but your cat as well. There are three main reasons that cats tend to not use their litter box: medical condition (such as a urinary tract condition), stress or anxiety, and litterbox preferences.

If your new cat misuses their litter box there are a couple of steps you should take in order to determine what the cause is. First, figure out if there is a pattern. Next, take them in to the veterinarian to rule out any medical conditions. Lastly, review your litterbox habits and make sure you are following the below tips.

1. Cleanliness- No one likes to go to the bathroom in a dirty toilet- cats especially included. Make sure you are scooping the litter box at least once per day and completely cleaning and disinfecting the box once per week with warm soapy water and bleach.
2. Location- Where does the litterbox live? Is it in a high traffic or noisy area? Is there privacy? Location is an important factor to making sure your cat feels safe and undisturbed while they relieve themselves
3. Multiple cats- The generally rule is one litter box per cat plus one additional. Not every cat likes to share bathroom space and the pickier the cat, the stricter this rule is.
4. The Litter- What kind of litter are you using? What may seem like the best product for you isn't necessarily what your cat wants to stand on and go to the bathroom in. Swap out the one you are using and stick to it if it works!
5. The Litter box- Size matters. And the bigger, the better. Cats like to stretch out and have room to move about in their box. Some cats prefer and are comfortable with litter boxes with lids on them- but not all do.

Practice these five habits and your cat will thank you!



Physical and Mental Stimulation

Your new cat's pampered and lavish new life with you is a far cry from the life its ancestors lived- one of hunting and roaming. It is important to remember that your indoor kitty has mental and physical needs to keep them healthy and happy.

Exercise!

- No matter the age or breed of your new cat, every cat needs exercise. Like humans though, every cat's physical abilities and limitations are different. Thus, tailoring your workout and playtime to your cat's needs is crucial. You should try to spend about 10-15 minutes a few times each day engaging your cat in some form of activity.
- Cat towers are a good source of exercise and help cat's to practise climbing and jumping.
- Get your cat running and jumping with the use of a laser or wand toy. This will also help them exercise their mind by simulating hunting. Get creative and find the toy that gets your cat moving!
- Young cats and kittens can do extremely well with another feline playmate and will burn off energy throughout the day by playing and wrestling.

Mind Games

- Equally important is keeping your cat mentally stimulated to ensure both their happiness as well as to prevent any unwanted boredom behaviors.
- A window shelf is a great tool to keep your cat engaged. Most cats love to sit in windows and safely watch the world around them
- Use food toys to give your cat a mental challenge to solve. A cat Kong can last hours and is a great tool to keep them occupied and thinking. Use your creativity to make food puzzle toys out of boxes or paper towel tubes!
- Did you know you can clicker train a cat to do tricks and commands? The sky's the limit on what you guys can learn together!

Introducing Cats to Children

Cats and children can make great companions, however not all cats have had a lot of exposure to children so it is best to introduce them slowly and always supervise their interactions in the beginning. The following tips are great reminders to keep on hand when introducing cats to children:

- Respect the cat's personal space and let the cat initiate the interaction – the cat might not be comfortable right off the bat interacting with children.
- Never let a child take the cat's stuff (food, toys, etc.), especially when they are using or playing with it.
- Always ask a cat's owner before approaching and/or petting an unfamiliar cat. If a cat stiffens their body, turns away or looks uncomfortable back off – it does not matter much they want to pet them, if the cat looks like they want out, let them go. If they are pushed too far, they may scratch or bite the child.
- Don't pet the cat too roughly or hug them– although this is what humans like to do, cat's really don't like it. If they want to be pet, always pet them on the part of the body they offer up.
- Be ready to intervene in child/cat interactions if the situation is even remotely uncomfortable.
- Never assume your child and cat can be left alone together without supervision.
- Do not let a child chase a cat, tease them or get in their face and pull any body part. Cats are not toys.
- If a cat hisses during an interaction, try not to punish the hiss. Hissing is valuable because it is one of the few tools the cat has to communicate they are uncomfortable. By suppressing a hiss, the cat is still feeling the same, but has no way of telling us. This can create a cat that does not give important verbal warnings before they bite or swat.
- Do not tolerate teasing or mishandling of a cat from any child. If the cat is uncomfortable, remove them from the interaction and give them a quiet, safe place to relax.

Introducing Cats to Dogs

If you are combining a dog and a cat in your household, here are some tips to position your pets for success together:

- Have a safe room as well as offer high places the cat can access but the dog cannot. It is important that the cat can retreat to relax away from the dog and then venture forward at their own pace. The cat should have access to food, water and litter in this area.
- Never force the cat (or dog) into proximity by holding, caging, or otherwise limiting their ability to escape.
- For the first introduction, always have the dog on leash. If it seems to be going well, drop the leash and supervise closely.
- If the animals are behaving in a friendly and/or cautious way, try to not intervene in their interactions, except to praise and reward them both for their good manners.
- Interrupt any chasing and redirect the dog's attention to another activity. You may need to manage the dog on-leash around the cat until you have worked out a routine.
- In the first few weeks, observe the trend: is their relationship improving or declining? Monitor interactions until there is a positive pattern in their interactions.
- Make sure the resident dog gets a lot of attention and individual time with you so they do not associate the newcomer with reduced attention and affection.
- Dogs should never have access to the cat litter box – it may cause the cat stress and the dog may eat cat feces and litter. Most dogs will also eat cat food the cat leaves behind – it is best to feed the cat in an area the dog cannot access.



Introducing Cats to Cats



Bringing a new cat home? The first step is to make sure that you have chosen a compatible companion for your resident cat. How do each of them play? Is one rough and tumble and the other gentle and dainty? Making sure that they have similar play styles or personalities before introducing them can help make a smoother integration.

- Begin by keeping the cats in different rooms for one to two weeks, with separate beds, bowls and litter boxes. This way they can hear and smell each other but don't have to interact.
- Provide daily introduction sessions that very gradually move the cats closer and closer together under supervision. During the sessions, keep both cats distracted with food or play. Start out with them far apart. Keep the sessions short and make it easy for them to succeed.
- Only when you see friendly or neutral behavior should they be left alone together unsupervised. Trust them only for short periods together at first and increase their times together gradually.
- Never let the cats fight. Fighting will only harm the relationship and make it more difficult to integrate the new cat into the home. Interrupt any fighting by making a loud noise or spraying water with a water bottle.
- Make sure every cat in the home is spayed or neutered.
- Territory and resources are important to cats. If there are multiple cats in the home, make sure there are plenty of litter boxes, food and water bowls, beds, perches or hidey boxes, and toys so that the cats do not have to share.

Troubleshooting Any Problems

Scratching on Furniture

So why do cats scratch on furniture? Scratching on any surface can be a good form of exercise for them. They get to stretch out their bodies and muscles, as well as extend and retract their nails. When they scratch, the movements also help to remove the outer nail sheaths and keep the nails trimmed. When cats scratch, it also leave visual and olfactory scent markers. So the questions becomes: how do you get your cat to scratch on appropriate items and leave your furniture alone?

- Does your cat have appropriate items to scratch on such as cardboard scratchers or cat trees? Are they accessible to the cat? And are they interesting enough? Adding a little bit of catnip to a scratching post can help make it a more desirable place to scratch. Praise you cat with words or treats when they use the correct item to scratch on.
- Keep your cats nails trimmed and healthy. This will limit the amount of damage they are able to do.
- Next you need to make the items you don't to be scratched less desirable:
 - During the training phase, if you can, remove the item the cat is scratching on to an inaccessible area.
 - Place double sided tape on the item you do not want scratched. Most cats really don't like the feeling on their paws. There are also commercial covers for you furniture to prevent cats from scratching on them.
 - Spray the couch with a citrus-scented spray because cats have a natural aversion to citrus odors.

Now that you know why scratching is important to cats, you might wonder if it would be best just to have your cat declawed. It's important to understand that declawing a cat is not a humane option and is actually an amputation of the digits up to the first joint. It's painful, may have possible complications during and after surgery, and changes the way your cat walks, balances, and interacts with her world. If you cannot find appropriate solutions to prevent your cat from scratching, seek the advice of a veterinarian or cat behaviorist.

Playing too rough

Some cats engage in inappropriate play by using their claws and/or teeth when playing with people. This behavior generally begins when people play too roughly with kittens and the kitten grows up thinking that this is the normal way to play. While this is cute when cats are small, this becomes an unwanted (and painful!) behavior once they grow up. Most cats won't understand why the rules of play have changed and it is up to their person to re-teach them the appropriately way to play and interact with people.

-
- Never, ever play with your cat using your hands. They may not at first understand that your hand is not a toy.
 - Only use cat appropriate toys to play with your cat. Wand and dangly toys are great because they are extended away from your hand and body.
 - Reward them with treats when they play appropriately so that they know they are doing the right thing.
 - Keep play sessions short, which will give your cat the chance to play without becoming too aroused. If they do forget and start to play inappropriately, stop playing and remove yourself by leaving the room. Take a break and go back to playing with appropriate toys. This will teach them that rough play is not acceptable.
 - Provide self-play toys so that they have a chance to play as rough as they want by themselves.
 - Some cats with an abundance of energy do great with other cats! Another cat in the home can help to teach your new cat how to play politely and appropriately.



Fear

Some cats experience a lack of socialization during their critical kitten development periods and may display more fearful behavior in new situations. This behavior can be seen as avoidance, fearful body postures and growling. These experiences can cause the cat to avoid interactions with new people, other animals or other novel stimuli. Sometimes cats exhibit fairly normal behavior within the environment, but avoid certain types of interaction with people that are new to them. They require a trusting relationship to be comfortable with strangers. A risk that any fearful cat can pose is that, when forced to interact with a “scary” stimulus they can react defensively and hiss, strike or bite to try to make the scary thing go

away. Not every home environment is appropriate for a shy cat; your adoption counselor will help you evaluate your particular situation.

- To help them adjust, it will be best to confine the cat to a single room containing everything it needs, when first in your home. Allow the cat time to acclimate to before gradually expanding available roaming territory - this will keep the kitty from becoming overwhelmed or overly afraid.
- Do your best to restrict available hiding spaces (under beds, behind furniture, etc.) If the cat does find somewhere to hide, this is okay. Do not drag the cat out of hiding - this will only make the cat afraid of you and will cause them to hide more. It is okay to coax the cat out with food or toys but always allow the cat to come out on their own. If you provide an appropriate 'hiding' place such as a carpeted cat house or a covered cat bed, this will allow the kitty to feel secure and comfortable and will lessen the chances of the cat seeking out more permanent hiding spots.
- Understand your cat's threshold. Your cat has a threshold under which they are still able to make good decisions and learn new behaviors. Once they reach their threshold it is best to remove them from the situation and allow them to calm down before working with them again. Once they are back under threshold, the situation may still be challenging for them but it can help to build confidence, reduce stress and help to form positive associations for them.
- Pay attention to what your cat is saying. Every cat has a progression of behaviors that can build up to an unmanageable level of fear. Knowing when your cat is approaching an uncomfortable point is necessary to help them to either avoid the stimulus or practise calming behavior.
- Desensitizing and counterconditioning are great tools to teach cats that “scary” people or situations are not as frightening as they feel they are. Use treats or wet food to slowly acclimate your cat to the stimulus. Start with the stimulus in a non-threatening form (such as a picture of another animal, or a strange person at a distance). Gradually increase exposure to the stimulus until the cat is comfortable and not expressing any fearful behaviors. By rewarding the cat each time it makes a good decision about the “scary” stimulus, it will gradually become less and less scary and the cat will begin to have positive associations with it.
- Make sure to communicate to visitors to your home how to properly interact with your cat. If it is going to cause your cat too much stress, or they have not progressed to a point in their training where it would be beneficial to the cat, remove her from the situation and do not force an interaction.

Resources

Microchip registration

Register your microchip number online with Found Animals.

www.foundanimals.org/

Behavior Helpline

If you are experiencing any behavior issues with your newly adopted pet, call the Multnomah County Animal Services Behavior Helpline directly:

(503) 988-0033

- Please be prepared to provide your name, phone number, the pet's animal ID (located on your adoption paperwork), and your specific behavior concern.
- If there is no answer, please leave a message and your call will be returned the same business day.
- For emergencies, please Any medical issues should still be forwarded to Animal Health, by e-mailing animal.care@multco.us.
- The Behavior Helpline is for animals that have been adopted from Multnomah County Animal Services. For behavioral help with pets not adopted from Multnomah County Animal Services, call our main shelter line at (503) 988-7387.