



## Responsible Cat Ownership

The question of pet ownership: Do we 'own' cats or do they 'own' us? The answer is debatable, but here's something that is not: living with a cat comes with responsibilities.

### A Suitable Place to Live

Cats dominate their living quarters. They may prefer sunning by the kitchen door over the dining room rug. They may choose to sleep on your bed rather than their own. Although they may dominate your home, it is your responsibility to provide a house that is suitable, safe, and sheltered. Providing shelter from the elements is not very difficult, especially for indoor cats. The roof over their heads is the same one over our heads. Keeping the house safe is another story.

Hazards lurk within your home. It is your responsibility to keep electrical cords covered. It is your responsibility to keep doors closed to prevent your cat from escaping. It is your responsibility to keep poisons out of reach. In other words, cat owners must 'cat proof' their homes.



Keeping your cat safe extends beyond the walls of your house. Place her in a carrier when transporting her to the veterinary clinic or groomer. Have him micro-chipped so that he can be identified should you become separated. This relatively painless procedure requires an injection of the chip and registration with a national service that will facilitate the safe return of lost cats.

Cats do not always like to stay indoors, but going outside is risky. Outdoor cats are often victims of other predatory animals. They can lose races with moving vehicles. They become injured while skirmishing with neighborhood cats or dogs.

They may contract contagious diseases while associating with feline friends. It is your responsibility to protect your outdoor cat from these threats. Or better yet, keep him indoors.

## A Suitable Lifestyle

Cats are not dogs. They do not beg for a game of fetch. They take a lot of naps. But their tendency to be inert does not mean they should lounge on the sofa all day. It is your responsibility to entertain and exercise them.

Physical and mental stimulation keeps them sharp. Instigating a game of 'chase the red dot' with a laser or 'catch the mouse on a string' can be fun for both of you. Plus, physical exercise may keep your cat's weight in check.

Cats are more independent than dogs and do well when left alone. They are good pets for busy people, but remember to set aside some one-on-one time with your kitty. Felines are social animals and need interaction with people or other cats.

## A Suitable Diet

Cats can be finicky eaters and expect to dine in style. But they don't do the shopping or cooking, so it is your responsibility to provide them with nutritious meals. Talk to your veterinarian and choose a diet that is age appropriate. Kittens, adults, and senior cats should consume food specifically formulated for their age brackets. Cats with medical issues often require prescription diets.

Cats are ad lib feeders which makes your job easier. You can fill the food bowl and let your cat eat at will. But, if weight is a problem, you'll need to measure and monitor consumption.

Cats also need an appropriate dining environment. They do not like to eat near their washroom....who would? Place food and water bowls away from the litter box. Feed your cat in a quiet area of the house. Cats don't like to have dinner time interrupted by busy household activities.

## A Suitable Health Care System

Cats may have nine lives, but they are still at risk of deadly diseases and injuries. Outdoor cats are at greater risk; however, indoor cats need protection, too. It is your responsibility to have your cat vaccinated for diseases such as Feline Leukemia, Rabies, Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia and, in some instances, Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. Your veterinarian can help you decide which vaccines your cat should have.

Parasites plague cats, so it is also your responsibility to give your cat preventive medications to ward off intestinal



parasites, fleas, ticks, and heartworms. Parasites are always around, so preventing them is an ongoing obligation.

Cats are prolific breeders and there are many kittens and adult cats that need homes. Have your cat spayed or neutered to ensure that your cat doesn't add to the overpopulation problem.

Healthy cats should see the veterinarian twice a year. Early detection of medical problems means faster, more effective treatment. It is your responsibility to schedule routine medical examinations and laboratory evaluations.

Preventive care is the hallmark of a healthy feline, but sometimes even the most protected cats get sick or hurt. It is your responsibility to handle medical emergencies. Have the number of a veterinary emergency clinic on hand and stash rainy day funds to pay for unforeseen medical problems. An alternative measure is to have health insurance for your feline friend, to ensure you are always able to provide them with the medical care they require without compromise.

## **A Clean Environment**

Your cat is king (or queen) of his (or her) domain. Even though they are not terribly messy, cats require a little domestic assistance. Keeping the litter box fresh is your responsibility. Keeping the food and water bowls clean is your responsibility. Wiping the paw prints off the countertop is your responsibility.

Cats ARE good about keeping themselves clean. They are fastidious groomers, but still need the occasional bath and brushing. Set aside time to give your cat a spa day, or bring her to the groomer regularly.

And remember, there are no vacations for a cat's household staff. So when you are not available, you should find someone to care for your cat at home or bring her to a boarding facility.

## **A Suitable Commitment**

Hopefully your cat will live a long life and be part of your family for many years, so be prepared for a long term commitment. As long as you understand what your cat expects of you and are willing to be of service, it should be a long happy relationship. Keep in mind that your cat will do what suits him!

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