



OPEN أوبن  
PAWS باوز

# Caring for your Cat

*Although considered independent pets, cats are reliant on their owners for food, shelter, veterinary care and companionship. They can live for 20 years! So before you decide to give a home to a cat, think about the commitment and learn how to care for your pet the right way.*

***There is reward for kindness to all living things—Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.)***



## Do you really want a cat?

Before you get a cat, think carefully if you are truly ready for the commitment to provide the right care and attention for the rest of its life. Too many people get pets "because they are cute" but don't really want the bother of the extra cleaning, care if it gets sick, extra costs for toys, veterinary treatments and boarding during holidays and the extra time to groom and play and provide companionship.

It is also important that everyone in the household also has the same expectations about owning a pet, even if *you* are committed, will everyone else be?

Too many animals are given away because their people really didn't understand what was involved and then it is the animal who suffers.



## Bringing your new cat home.



Anytime you transport a cat it needs to be secured in a safe carry box, or a harness. If they struggle to escape outdoors, or in a car you could risk injuries or lose them forever if they escape - a box or harness will keep them secure and under control. Most cats will be quite afraid to move out of their familiar place, so it's best to avoid lots of moving.

For the first couple of days, keep your new cat in one room. This gives the security the cat needs and helps it get used to you and your home more quickly. Make sure the cat has food, water and a litter tray (but not close together) in its room and allow it time to settle in.

When you go into the room, sit still and talk gently to the cat, but do not force yourself on the pet – allow it to come and investigate you so there are no feelings of being threatened. Children must be taught that the cat or kitten is not a toy and they should not chase it to pick it up - they should always let it go if it doesn't want to be played with and allow it to sleep undisturbed when it needs rest. We can provide special information on how to introduce a new cat to other pets too - to avoid trouble, please ask before you get the new pet.

After a few days, begin to introduce your cat to the rest of the house, slowly, one room at a time. Bolder cats will come out at once and immediately start exploring, whereas the more timid ones will take longer. During this time make sure doors and windows are kept closed as cats can escape through the smallest gaps!

## Diet



Cats are carnivores - they are meat eaters - so they don't need fruit or vegetables like us. Naturally they would hunt and eat their prey whole: bones, feathers, skin and insides too. So, it's not nutritionally balanced or natural to feed cats *just* meat e.g. of a cow, sheep or a tuna. Our food, with salt, spices or sugars are not healthy for cats either. Neither is dog food a good substitute, because cats and dogs have different nutritional needs.

The easiest way to provide a balanced diet is to feed a premium quality, complete cat food. Check the food label to check the quality, the ingredients should list a type of meat first, e.g. chicken or beef, not meat by products which are lower quality or grains which are cheaper fillers, other vitamins and minerals will be added to balance the diet too.

Kittens need a special diet – because they have a lot of growing to do - they need more energy and protein for that. Kittens also need to be fed more regularly because their tummies' are only small. If using dry food, you can allow them access all day, or give several small meals during the day.

Adult cats can be fed twice a day. If you leave food available all the time your cat can gain weight from nibbling more than it needs. If you have a window open or cat flap the food will attract outside cats to come in – a very bad idea. Lastly, it's harder to judge the cats' appetite if there is food available all the time, you could easily miss an important early sign your cat doesn't feel well.

Whatever you feed your cat, it is essential that there is a constant supply of fresh, clean drinking water available. It is best to have water in a few places around the house and cat drinking fountains are also excellent to encourage them to take a healthy amount. Cats have no need for milk after they have left their mother – in fact, milk can cause diarrhoea.

### Toys, scratching posts and fun for happy cats.

Play is an essential part of your cat's life and it will also encourage the cat to bond with you - as well as helping to keep your cat fit, healthy, mentally active and better behaved.

Many different cat toys are available from pet shops but most cats will play with anything that is light and small – you can make your own toys out of ping-pong balls, paper bows etc. Toys filled with "catnip" hold a special attraction for many cats. A cardboard box is great; cut "paw-sized" holes and play with a ribbon or paper ball!

A scratching-post inside the house is helpful in protecting your furniture, even if your cat is able to go outside; and it's essential (get a few!!) if your cat stays indoors. These should be covered in material that is not found anywhere else in the house (e.g. string rather than carpet) so that your cat learns not to scratch other furniture. Tall ones are best (32" or 80cm tall) and some cats also like to scratch horizontally, along the ground. The more, the better!

The more you learn about cat behaviour the more you will appreciate your cat – and they will appreciate you and the home you give them. There's lots of great information on line to help you.

Cats are intelligent and also very sensitive animals. It is essential you create an environment which makes them feel safe *and* happy – ideally a peaceful home with lots of things to do, places to hide and lots of love.





## When to let your cat go outside

Your new cat will need to be kept inside for 2-3 weeks to establish a bond with the house, the people and this may take even longer if you have other pets.

The cat should think of your house as a safe, happy place - if not, it may run away when you open the door!

If you live in a residential compound or villa that is safe for cats to play outside you may decide it's good for the extra exercise and mental stimulation. But if you live where Pest Control are hunting cats, there are many street cats or a road with busy traffic, it may be safer for your cat to live indoors.

Vaccinations should be completed beforehand, to protect them from diseases. And kittens or new cats should be neutered before going out – or they may get pregnant to street cats, catch other diseases or get lost while looking for – or being chased by – a potential mate!

To introduce your cat to your garden for the first time, choose a calm day - not too hot or cold or windy. Make sure it's hungry – ready to come home to eat (just delay meal-time by a few hours if necessary). Let the cat walk through the door and explore a little - but stay in attendance - eventually taking the cat back inside to be fed- the reward for coming home.

Once confident, the cat will start to go off for longer periods and eventually you can give free access via a cat flap. Try to keep your cat in from dusk until dawn as night is when cats are at most risk of being hit by cars, in fights with other cats or harmed by Pest Control. **If you put a collar on your cat, make sure you put your phone number on it** and make sure it's a safety collar so kitty can't get hooked up by it.



## Cats that live permanently indoors

It is not easy to keep a cat only indoors after it's been used to living outside. However, some cats with disabilities may need to remain in for their own safety and some, who have grown up as indoor cats, do very well if their owners provide them with enough things to do

Indoor cats will require less food than a cat which has access to more exercise out doors. You will also need to encourage the inside cat to exercise by playing and provide things to keep it occupied– because cats are smart, they can get bored too.

Scratching-posts are essential for the indoor cat, otherwise the cat will use your furniture to clean and sharpen its claws. You should also ask your vet to check if the cat's claws need clipping. **It is not acceptable to de-claw cats** – in reality it is cutting off their toes so they can't scratch at all! This is illegal, as an act of cruelty, in all developed countries – except the USA. In fact, de-clawed cats are 30% more likely to have other behavioural problems (e.g. biting, urine marking, litter box avoidance etc) than normal cats, so it may create more problems than it solves. Just don't do it.



## The Cats' Toilet



It may not be the nicest part of pet ownership but all animals need to use the toilet. Cats are usually very clean and private animals with their toilet habits. They can also be quite fussy about how they like their toilet set up. Make sure the toilet tray is in a private, quiet place and make sure it is cleaned every day, removing any faeces and urine (if you use clumping litter). Use a proper poop-scoop and wash your hands afterwards for hygiene. Most cats prefer un-scented cat litter (and no smelly detergent / cleaning product residues) in their toilet tray. And they usually prefer open trays which provide better ventilation than the covered cat toilets.

If your cat stops using their usual, clean toilet correctly it is likely to be due to one of two problems:

Either the cat has a medical problem, like a urinary track infection or some other irritation (these can be serious so please see you vet about it). Or there is a psychological problem – the cat may refuse to use the toilet another cat has been, or it may be trying to mark its territory more due to some increased anxiety. Either way, punishment will only make things worse – check with your vet to get your cat the help it needs.

## Grooming

All cats need to be groomed regularly. This keeps their fur and skin in good condition. Many short haired cats find it easy to look after their own coat, but brushing and grooming also builds the relationship between you and your pet – in the same way a mother cat bonds by grooming her young. Grooming time also provides a good opportunity to check your cat for any signs of ill health, or injury.

Long-haired cats need to be groomed thoroughly every day to remove all tangles; otherwise they will quickly become matted. If your cat is not used to being groomed, this activity needs to be introduced gradually. Keep the sessions short until the cat begins to accept it. Start with areas of the body where it enjoys being stroked and give treats for good behaviour.



### Washing cats?

There is NO reason to routinely bathe your cat. Occasionally your vet may recommend a medicated shampoo to treat specific skin problems. But Beware! Shampooing is often used by some Pet Shops as an excuse to make money.

In fact it is **not natural for your cat to bathe**

– it can be distressing for the cat and damage its coat and dry out the delicate skin.

Think about it; would a fashion designer recommend you wash a fur coat?



## Health and Veterinary Care.

Caring for a cat means caring for its health too. Your cat can not speak to say it's unwell or in pain and, like most animals, it is in their nature to hide injury or illness to hide any weakness. So it's important to be vigilant to notice any problems, like a mother observes her baby. Check your cat in the quiet grooming time, its eyes, ears, skin etc. Watch for any changes in habits, eating or drinking more or less than usual, the way it moves etc. By being familiar with what is normal, you will more quickly be able to help when you notice any change and seek advice to check if there's a problem

### Vaccinations

The 3 diseases that your cat should be vaccinated against are: cat flu, feline enteritis and rabies. Open Paws or your own vet can advise you on when these vaccinations should be done and how frequently your cat needs boosters. If your cat lives only indoors it may not need rabies vaccinations (until it needs to get a pet passport to leave the kingdom). Some clinics also offer vaccines against Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) - this is only necessary if the cat goes outdoors and socialises with other cats also a blood test can check if your cat has already been exposed before you start vaccinating.

### De-Worming

Cats should be treated against parasitic worms to keep your cat and your own family healthy. *All* kittens are born with worms, passed from their mother, so get advice from us or your vet about treating kittens as they grow.

Adult cats who live outdoors are particularly susceptible to worms – because they get them from hunting and from insects who live outside and need to be treated more often (about every 3-4 months) compared to inside cats.

**Ear mites** are common in cats especially cats that go outdoors. But once the mites affect pets inside the house, all the other pets need to be checked too – dogs included – as the insects can pass between them.

**Fleas and Ticks:** both are not common in Riyadh so there's no real need to routinely expose your cat to the chemicals in flea collars, insect powders or sprays. If you think you see ticks or fleas, ask your vet, or us, for advice; correct treatment should remove them easily.

## Neutering for cats

Neutering is an operation which stops your pet cat from breeding. It is recommended by modern veterinarians for the cats' health, the control of problem behaviours and to manage the cat population humanely.

There is an enormous over population of cats in the city. Most of the street cats you see are abandoned pets or their kittens and kittens of their kittens... Too many people allow their pets to breed without considering the consequences.

Cats do **not** think like people – about choosing a husband / wife and raising a family. When domesticated animals are kept in an artificial environment – i.e. our homes – we have a responsibility to make sure their numbers and their health are looked after.





**There are NO medical, physical or psychological benefits to letting your cat breed.**

Pregnancy, birth and feeding the babies are all very demanding to the mother cat – especially if she is also young. Tom cats are at greater risk of contracting disease and often start urine marking in the house if they are left un-neutered.

**By contrast, neutered animals live longer, healthier lives.**

They have fewer behavioural problems, are protected from reproductive track diseases and even some cancers. And – importantly - neutered pets don't contribute to the overpopulation problem we already have.

At Open Paws, we neuter kittens from just 8 weeks old. The younger age means they recover quickly and the operation is easier too. It means you can have kittens neutered before they go to new homes. But it's ok to leave the operation until they are about 3-4 months for girls or 6 months for boys – only, don't delay, we have seen cats pregnant at 4 months old, which is not healthy for them and once your male cat wanders for a mate – he could be lost forever.

## Going on Holiday or Exit Only.

Pet cats are domesticated animals – *they reply on people* for food, water, shelter and care.

If you are going on vacation, never leave your cat to look after itself – many can not and those who can may move out of your home altogether. Make sure you have someone reliable to check on your pet every day or arrange a place where it can stay safely until you get back.

If you are leaving the kingdom you will need to decide whether you can find a new home or take your pet with you.

Some countries are easy for cats to move to e.g. the USA or South Africa. Others, like Australia, don't accept cats directly from Saudi Arabia at all and some require a quarantine period. Check with the Ministry of Agriculture of the country you plan to move to – they usually have all the information available for pet owners online.



Boarding services are in demand especially over peak holiday periods.

### **PLAN EARLY**

New homes or travel arrangement are sometimes time consuming to arrange. Don't let your furry friend suffer because you run out of time to organise things..

## Respect your cat.

Pet cats can become loving, responsive members of your family; they can bring us a lot of joy and honest companionship. But they can also easily be mistreated just because cat owners don't really understand their needs. Read the quote on the next page. I hope this inspires you to learn more about your cat; the more you learn, the more you will understand your cat, be able to communicate with it, train it to behave correctly in your home and be a happier pet because you provide exactly what it needs.



"There is not an animal on earth,  
nor a bird that flies on its wings,  
but they are communities like you"

*(Qur'an 6:38)*

According to the learned commentators of the Qur'an Majeed, animals all live a life - individual and social - like members of a human community. They are living creatures of Allah in their own right and as such we must respect them.

Keeping an animal as a pet can have great benefits for both them and us. But it is also a great responsibility. Respecting animals, and caring for them well, is expected in Islam. The Prophet himself was reprimanded by Allah for once neglecting his horse, so Allah will judge our actions too.

Learn about animals, what they need and how to look after them so you can treat them well.

For it is written:

"A good deed done to a beast, is as valid as doing good to a person.  
While cruelty to a beast is as serious as cruelty to a person."

*(narrated by Bukhari and Muslim).*

