

Adopting a Cat

Congratulations! By adopting a cat from the MHSPCA, you have just saved the life of a homeless animal.

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Section 1: The New Arrival

What to Expect

Your cat has been under great stress. At the MHSPCA, he was placed in a strange place full of other animals. Now he is in a new home, with a new family and maybe even other pets! While you are ready to make your cat a part of your family, he may need some transition time.

Preparing for the New Arrival

Every cat household needs the following:

- Free Access to Water at ALL Times. Check your cats' water bowls every time you feed them
- Fresh, healthy food. Use a commercial cat food which is scientifically formulated to provide adequate, feline nutrition
- Litter box & litter and clean it daily
- Cat-safe toys to play with
- Scratching post
- Pet carrier for transporting
- A bed. Buy a cat bed, or use a thick blanket or a pillow
- Grooming supplies. Brush your cat regularly to remove dead skin, dirt and loose hair This is especially important during shedding season (spring & early summer) to prevent the ingestion of hair balls

Section 2: Cat-Proofing your Home

- Cats, especially kittens, are naturally curious animals and will explore anything and everything they can have access to. Cat-proof your home before her arrival.
- Remove toxic plants. Many plants are poisonous to cats if ingested. Call the SPCA or your veterinarian for a complete list.
- Store antifreeze in closed containers out of pets' reach. It's a sweet smell and the tastes are attractive to animals and can be fatal.
- Put away tablecloths. This will remove the temptation to climb up on tables and break your best china or injure himself.
- Pack away precious breakables. Your cat may jump on furniture and accidentally knock over fragile items.
- Unplug dangling electrical cords or tack them down. Your cat may try to chew on cords, so it is best not to risk electrical shock.
- Attach an Identification tag and City tag to your cat's collar.
- Bones are dangerous, especially soft bones such as fish. Bones can lodge in your cat's throat and cause choking or fatal punctures.
- Balls of yarn and string are unsafe. There is a danger of choking or strangling. Keep these things out of reach when you are not there to supervise play time.
- Never leave a burner on an unattended stove or candles.

Section 3: Introducing Your Cat

To the House

Confine your new cat to a bathroom or spare bedroom, with a litter box, food and water bowls, bedding and toys. He will probably hide under a bed or some other hiding place. It might be a few hours (or even days) before he feels safe enough to come out. Close off as many rooms as possible. Open them, as your cat becomes familiar with the house. Let him explore. If your cat goes where he is not allowed, give him a firm "NO" and then remove him and take him to where he is allowed.

To Your Family

Let your cat initiate friendship. He may retreat when you enter the room. Sit quietly and wait. When she emerges do not make any sudden movements or try to catch her. Talk softly to her and let her come sniff you when she is ready. Place treats nearby to lure her out. When your cat realizes you will not hurt her, she will eventually come out.

To Other Pets

Some pets will never become friends, but may merely co-exist (some may even be a danger to the other pet). At the very least, it takes time for pets to adjust, especially for the resident pet to allow another animal into its territory. Do not ignore your original pet! He needs to feel loved. To introduce the cats, keep them separated for a few days, allowing them to smell each other's bedding. Rotate the bedding to help them adjust to the new smell. Let the cats sniff each other under a door. After a while, let the cats meet. There may be a lot of hissing. While the first encounter may seem hostile, allow the cats to work it out on their own. It will go faster that way. If the cats start to fight, do not separate them by hand. Spray them with water, then close the door. Try again a few days later. When your cat meets your dog, introduce them in much the same manner as with cats. Keep your dog on a leash. Do not allow your dog to chase the cat. Supervise all initial meetings.

Section 4: Indoor versus Outdoor Cat

Indoor cats have a life expectancy of 15 years, but it is not unusual for them to live to 20 years, or more. Outdoor cats have a life expectancy of only 1 to 3 years! Isn't it cruel to keep them outside?

While there is a romantic vision of the outdoor cat lounging on the porch and hunting in the woods, the real picture is less ideal. Outdoor cats risk injury by cars, eating poison, drinking antifreeze, or fighting with other animals. Other outdoor hazards include abuse from angry neighbors, extreme weather, fleas and other parasites, infections or diseases passed on by other cats or animals.

Indoor life provides all the pleasures of outdoor life without the dangers. Most of a cat's life is spent sleeping, with much of his remaining awake time spent just watching. Unlike dogs, cats do not run around to explore, but scan their surroundings visually and employ their sensitive hearing to detect subtle changes.

Cats spend considerable time grooming, stretching, sunbathing and moving from one lounging place to another. While these acts seem simple, they are an integral part to a cat's life. Give your cat a nice window ledge with a view. Leave cat-safe toys and treats, and keep the radio on when you are gone. Your inside cat will be in paradise.

Section 5: Cats in the Night

Cats are nocturnal creatures and like to play and prowl at night. To prevent your new cat from disturbing your sleep follow these helpful tips:

- Play with her early in the evening to use up some of her energy
- Leave toys and food to occupy her
- Keep your bedroom door closed
- Do not play with your cat if she wakes you in the middle of the night.

Section 6: Cats and their Claws

The Scratching Post

Have a scratching post available. A carpeted post, a 108 or a sisal post can be used. Scratching posts can also be purchased at local pet stores. Place cat-safe toys or special treats nearby or rub catnip on the post to lure your cat to the area. He will soon learn that this is his scratching station. If your cat scratches an inappropriate object, firmly say "NO" and remove your cat and place her on the scratching post. Praise and reward her when she uses the post.

Declawing

Declawing is a surgical process by which the end joint of the toe is amputated. Often, people believe that declawing is the only way to address inappropriate scratching. However, it can be a painful procedure for your cat, and it is almost always unnecessary. Many cats exhibit behavior or personality changes after the operation.

Some are reluctant to use the litter box. Others can become antisocial and distrustful of their owners.

Alternatives to Declawing

Soft Paws are vinyl caps that attach with adhesive to fit over a cat's claws. While protecting people and furniture, the caps allow the cat's feet to remain intact. Soft Paws are available through your veterinarian.

Nail trimming decreases the need for your cat to scratch by trimming his nails. You can purchase cat nail clippers at any pet supply store or veterinarian's office. By gently applying light pressure to the paw with your thumb and forefinger, you can extend the nail. Do not cut the pink portion of the nail (the "quick"). This is the blood supply to the nail and is painful to your cat if it is cut.

Section 7: House Training

The Litter Box

Most cats were taught by their mother as kittens how to use a litter box. Most adult cats need only to learn where the new litter box is located; some need a little more instruction. Confining your new cat to a small room initially is the best way to foster good litter box habits. Provide a quiet spot, far from high traffic areas for your cats litter box.

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