

10 Things to Know Before Getting a Cat

You'll want to be prepared to take on a new set of responsibilities when you bring a cat into your life.

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- 1. Owning a cat is a lifelong commitment.** Cats can live up to 20 years; be sure you're ready to provide food, shelter, and love for your cat's life. Major changes, such as switching owners and houses, can be very stressful for cats.
- 2. Be prepared for the financial responsibilities that come with having a cat.** The average annual cost is anywhere from \$800-\$1,000. That includes quality food, litter, toys, and routine medical costs. Emergency care or treating an illness can range from \$250-\$2,000.
- 3. Cats, like all pets, need sufficient love and attention.** Creating a human bond is crucial to developing a lasting relationship with your cat. Most cats will want to be near you when you're home; make an effort to pet your cat whenever you pass it. Devote time every day to playing with your cat and engaging it in physical and mental stimulation. Each cat is different and desires different levels of attention. As you and your cat get to know each other, you'll know when your cat wants attention and when it does not.
- 4. Cats do not need to go outside.** Indoor cats live much longer than outdoor cats. Outdoor cats have a higher risk of contracting diseases or being killed by cars or other animals. Indoor cats can have very fulfilling lives as long as you provide them with food, water, love, and a stimulating environment. Make sure your cat has access to plenty of sunlight and windows.
- 5. Before you take your new cat home, make sure you have all of the basic supplies.** These include high-quality food, food and water bowls (steel, glass or ceramic preferred) litter box and litter, toys, a scratching post and a carrier for trips to the vet.
- 6. "Cat-proof" your house or apartment** to make sure you don't have any items that could be harmful to your new cat. These can include poisonous plants, shopping bags, plastic bags, ribbon, string, twine, yarn and chemical cleaners. The ASPCA Poison Control Hotline (888-426-4435) provides valuable information about household substances that can be harmful to your cat.
- 7. Take care in introducing your new cat into your household,** especially if you're introducing the cat to a new baby. Cats thrive on the comfort, security and familiarity of their environment. Let the cat explore every nook and cranny of the house or apartment. This allows your cat to feel secure in its new surroundings. If there are children, teach them how to properly hold and pet the cat. Children should also be taught some basic cat body language so that they will know to leave the cat alone when its ears are back, its tail is twitching, or it is growling or hissing.
- 8. Introduce your cat to its litter box.** Your cat should be able to comfortably get in the box, and there should be plenty of room for it to perform its elimination ritual of sniffing, digging, squatting, and turning around and then covering up the feces. The box should be private and easily accessible. Once the location of the box is established, don't move it. Clean the box at least twice daily.
- 9. Scratching is an innate behavior** and should be addressed by providing your cat with the proper equipment and place to scratch. A scratching post should be at least 30 inches tall so your cat can fully stretch its front legs. It should be made of soft wood or wrapped with sisal rope (not carpeting), and mounted on a stable base that won't tip.
- 10. Self-grooming is a large part of a cat's life.** But you should still brush your cat at least once a week with a soft-bristled brush to maintain a soft, shiny and healthy coat and to reduce the possibility of hairballs.