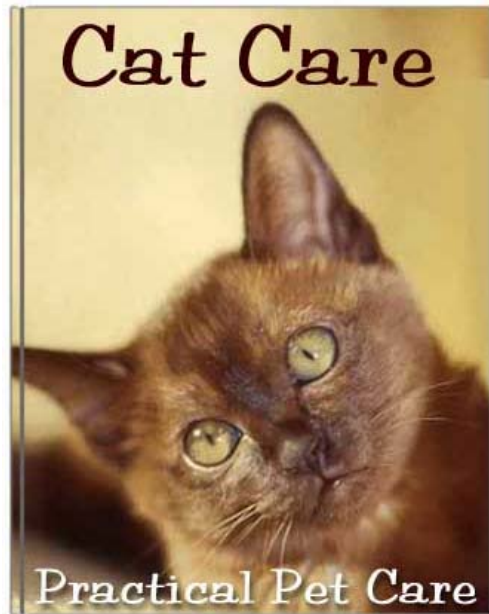




CAT CARE

A PET CARE E-BOOK

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PRACTICAL PET CARE
PRESENTS

CAT CARE



A PET CARE
E-BOOK

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FEEDING

Cats are carnivores and require a meat diet. Dogs are omnivorous to a large degree, and have the ability to break down and digest vegetable as well as animal protein. Cats, on the other hand, are incapable of digesting and receiving nutrition from the majority of vegetable proteins. As cats have no ability to manufacture various vitamins, enzymes and other

substances necessary to life, they must receive these substances directly from food.

This makes it very important to feed your cat a properly balanced diet. Typically, a cat's diet should consist of 25% protein (almost all of which must be animal protein), 30% fats, and 5% carbohydrates. A medium- to high-quality dry cat food will provide all necessary nutrients. There are also special cat foods for cats with special needs, such as kittens, older cats, and cats prone to urinary tract infections. Dry food has the advantage of

inhibiting tartar buildup on teeth, whereas canned foods can contain 70% water, and use gelatin as a binding agent, which just passes straight through your cat's body. Canned food can be given in moderation as a treat, however.

As for other foods beloved by cats, moderation is the key. Milk is a food, not a drink, and provides the calcium and phosphorus needed for strong bones and teeth, as well as many other vitamins and minerals. Unfortunately, a large percentage of cats lose the ability to digest milk as

they grow older. To test your cat for milk tolerance, give it a small bowl of milk, then watch its stools for the next six hours. If diarrhea develops, the cat cannot digest milk. Yogurt is another excellent source of calcium and phosphorus. Unlike milk, yogurt has already been consumed by a bacterium, and is therefore partially digested. This makes it very easy for cats (and people) to finish digesting. Butter is an excellent source of fats, good for growth and coat. Margarine does not contain the calcium and phosphorus that makes butter so beneficial to cats, though your cat

won't know the difference. The polyunsaturated vegetable fats used in most margarines go straight through a cat, making it a mild and good-tasting cure for hairballs and constipation. Most cheeses will cause constipation if fed in large amounts. Raw egg yolk provides protein, sulfur, calcium, phosphorus, and a host of other vitamins and minerals. The raw egg white, on the other hand, contain avidin, which breaks down and destroys the B vitamins. If you must feed your cat whole eggs, cook them first, which congeals the white and destroys the avidin.

The average-sized cat will eat about one cup of dry food per day. If your cat tends towards the obese, you may want to provide half a cup of food twice a day. Other cats do fine when free-fed, with a bowl of food available at all times, eating a little bit every two or three hours. Fresh water must always be available, and this doesn't mean leaving the toilet lid up!



HABITAT

While many cat owners insist their cat needs to have free run of the outdoors, being an outside cat will typically shorten his life. Being hit by a car is the most common danger, but there are also unwanted pregnancies, extreme weather conditions, catnapping for re-sale or research, poisoning, diseases and parasites, injuries from other animals, and

being picked up as a stray and, for lack of identification, being euthanized at an animal shelter. None of the outdoor cats we've owned ever died of old age. All of our cats are strictly indoor now.

There are plenty of ways to make your home a safe and entertaining habitat for your cat. The first step is to securely put away anything that can be toxic to your cat, which includes cleaning supplies and houseplants such as dieffenbachia, philodendron, pothos and English ivy. Electrical cords can look like

toys to your cat, and should be secured in a way that makes them no fun to play with. Many people think their cat would never chew through an electrical cord (what reason could they possibly have to do it?) but we once had a kitten do exactly that. We resuscitated him with kitty CPR, but his tongue was burned right off, a very painful injury that necessitated putting him down. A safe home is essential for any animal, and will take some work on your part.

Scratching posts and carpeted furniture will provide interesting places to climb and rest, and most are tall vertical designs, which take up little space in the home. Most cats feel comfortable when up high, and will jump up to a height that feels safe when confronted with other animals or children. They can also learn to sharpen their claws only on approved cat furniture, sparing your couch. A widely accepted method of instruction (which can be applied to jumping on counters, etc. as well as scratching furniture) is the squirt bottle. It doesn't take long for a cat to

learn what actions get him a squirt of water in the face!

Of course, an indoor cat must be provided with a litter box. One pan per cat is recommended, and they should be cleaned weekly. Most cats are naturally clean, and will not use a dirty litter box. They also usually prefer the litter box to be in a quiet place, away from prying eyes. We've had cats that refused to go when someone was watching!

You may also wish to provide toys for your cat. He will find something

to play with regardless, so it's useful to give him something you know is safe. Small balls with bells inside or catnip-filled felt mice are common favorites. And finally, consider providing a small garden just for your cat, with fresh catnip or oat grass. Nibbling the plants will provide extra fiber, and can save your other houseplants plants from molestation.



HEALTH

A healthy cat will have glossy, tidy fur, pink inside his ears (except in cases where the skin is naturally dark), clear eyes, clean pink gums, and a stable weight. Warning signs that your cat is sick include patchy areas on his skin, poor coat quality, runny eyes or nose, discharge or flakes in the ears, unexplained weight loss or gain, vomiting, diarrhea,

listlessness, and a dramatic change in eating or drinking habits. When in doubt, call your vet.

From the first day you get your cat, accustom him to being handled. Look into his ears, eyes, nose, and mouth regularly. Hold him still and look under his tail, pick up his paws and look at the pads and claws. He will get used to being handled in this way, and you will notice any symptoms quickly and be able to call up your vet if something is wrong.

All cats need to have vaccinations. The common shots and ages are: first feline panleukopenia (FPL), Feline viral rhinotracheitis (FVR), Feline calicivirus (FCV), all three components given in one shot at eight to nine weeks with a booster shot of these at 12 weeks; Feline leukemia virus (FeLV) at 12 weeks, and a rabies shot at 16 weeks, with a booster at one year old. Continuing boosters will need to be given every three years after these.

You should also have your cat spayed or neutered. It can be done as early as

six weeks of age, and should definitely be done before your cat reaches puberty, at about five or six months old. Spaying or neutering imparts health benefits such as a decreased risk of uterine, mammary, or prostate cancer, and insures that your pet won't reproduce.

Of course, you'll have to take your cat to the vet for these procedures. The vet is also your best resource when accidents happen. It can be an unwelcome and unexpected expense, but professional health care is, of

course, part of your responsibility as a cat owner, and should be expected.



LIFESPAN

Improvements in veterinary medicine and care by owners have helped extend life expectancy well into the teen years, sometimes into the 20s. However, cats age quickly in terms of human years. By the time they are six months old, they are the human equivalent of ten years old.

Although cat-to-human age comparisons can vary, after the age of two, cats take on about four human years for every cat year. An 11 year old cat is the approximate equivalent of a 60 year old human, right down to the onset of aches and pains, health problems, declining fertility and weight gain or loss. But in terms of changes in diet and health care, cats are considered "senior" at about eight years of age, equivalent to middle age in humans.

Indoor cats live on average to be 16 to 18 years old. Outdoor cats live on average to be three to five years old.



SIZE

There is not a lot of variance in size of cats according to breed. The largest cat breed is the Ragdoll. Males weigh twelve to twenty pounds, with females weighing ten to fifteen pounds. The smallest cat breed is the Singapura. Males weigh about six pounds while females weigh about four pounds. The average cat weighs 12 pounds.

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the heaviest cat on record was Himmy, an Australian cat, who weighed 46 pounds, 15.25 ounces in 1986. The tiniest cat on record was Tinker Toy from Illinois. A male Himalayan-Persian, he weighed 1 pound, 8 ounces fully grown and was 7.25" long and 2.75" tall.



GROOMING

Cats spend much of their waking time grooming themselves, but you will still have to help them out. Long-haired cats should have their coats brushed twice a week to remove loose fur which could be ingested and become a hairball.

Even short-haired cats should be brushed weekly, to keep their skin

healthy. You will also need to trim your cats claws every three weeks or so, and brush his teeth weekly. You should never use toothpaste meant for humans on your cat - there are many pet supply stores that can provide equipment and supplies for grooming.

You could also consider using moistened wipes to keep your cat clean, grooming gloves which really attract cat hair, and a recommended cat shampoo for the occasional bath. As with all animals, these grooming jobs need to be done whether you

want to do them or not, so be prepared to pay a groomer if you can't do them yourself, or a vet when troubles arise from lack of grooming.



TIME

Cats are well known for being independent. Many people keep cats who don't seem to enjoy cuddling or hanging out with the family. However, most cats form bonds with their owners and will demand attention, and not just at feeding time.

While, in my experience, they are less demanding than dogs, cats do

need just as much attention. Talking to your cat can give them much of the interaction they need, and they will learn to respond to the tone of your voice. Any cat can also be taught to perform tricks, if he receives clear direction from his owner, and gets lots of practice.

You will likely spend less time actively directing your cat to do (or not do) things than you would with a dog, but you should still spend at least half an hour a day directly interacting with your cat, at a bare minimum. Luckily for us humans, a

cat will count time spent snuggling on a lap as quality time, so it's easy to spend time with your pet and still get in your own relaxation time as well.



BREEDING

More than 35,000 kittens are born in the U.S. each year, and a single pair of cats and their kittens can produce as many as 420,000 kittens in just seven years! We therefore recommend you do not breed your cat, unless you make a career of it. There are more than enough cats already living to fill the available homes out there. Besides, spaying or

neutering your cat provides health benefits, such as decreased risk of some cancers, as well as behavioral benefits, such as the elimination of smelly spraying behavior in males who are marking their territory. Many people believe that their cat will get fat and lazy after being spayed or neutered, but proper diet and regular exercise have greater influence over your pet's weight and health than does sterilization surgery.

Cats generally have pregnancies lasting from 58 to 65 days. They can become pregnant at as early as six

months of age and go into heat twice a year, in the spring and the fall. Cats are induced ovulators, which means that they need stimulation by a male in order to release eggs from their ovaries. Until this happens, a cat can remain quite uncomfortable throughout the heat period, which can last up to three weeks.

The first twelve weeks of a kitten's life are very important developmentally speaking. During this time period the entire litter should stay with the mother so they can learn the rules of being a cat.



EQUIPMENT

There are many items you can buy in aid of caring for your cat, including beds, electric clippers, litter boxes and supplies, feeders and dishes, books, flea control products, brushes and combs, gates and barriers, pet doors, carriers, computer software, hairball remedies, scissors and clippers, collars, hair pick-ups, cat furniture and scratching posts,

cleaning products, harnesses, shampoo, dental products, I.D. tags, dietary supplements (only when recommended by your vet, though), leads, toys, and treats.

For any cat, the minimum recommended list is a stout collar and tag with your name, address, and phone number including area code, a litter box, food and water dishes, and lots of toys. Cat furniture and scratching posts are highly recommended.



COST

There is plenty of information out there about how to care for and train your cat. However, most neglects a very important factor: what it will cost!

The estimates below are expressed in US Dollars and based on prices of food, accessories, and veterinary care in the Pacific Northwest, USA; your

expenses may vary. However, they are excellent guidelines. This article covers initial cost (when you first buy your cat), and maintenance cost (which you will pay year-round).

These are also minimum figures -- you can, and are likely to, pay much more for any pet. All cats need toys, bedding, and food, but pampering them with expensive pet beds, furniture, and an abundance or variety of treats, toys, and foods will increase the costs below considerably.

The biggest expense is also the most important. It is essential that you budget for veterinary examinations! No cat should be a "throw-away pet," and all should receive proper medical care. Illnesses and accidents are a part of life, and will occur. Even the healthiest cat needs annual vet exams, to catch potential health problems before they become serious (and more expensive to treat).

It's important to keep these figures in mind when checking out the darling kittens being given away for free outside of the grocery store.

Thousands of pet owners acquire what they consider "free" pets, only to find out later that they are paying hundreds of dollars on care. You should also note that the costs listed here are purely money out of pocket, and do not include the amount of time you will need to spend training, grooming, and interacting with your cat. Time is, after all, money.

Initial cost: Bringing home a new kitten will cost you about \$305. This includes \$10 for cat food, \$100 for shots, \$7 for sundries such as collar and tag, \$10 for toys, \$5 for treats,

\$15 on grooming supplies, and \$30 for the kitten itself.

Maintenance: Each year you will spend about \$75 on cat food, \$120 on vet bills, \$10 on sundries such as collar and tag, \$25 on toys, \$25 on treats, \$20 on grooming supplies, and \$70 on medications like flea treatments or ear mite oil, for an average of \$355 per year, or \$7 per week.

Keep in mind, these figures are for one cat only, and do not include the cost of pampering him, as many

owners choose to do. That free kitten
can easily run you \$500 per year!
Before committing yourself to cat
ownership, be sure you can afford it.



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About the Author



Steph Bairey is the webmaster of Practical Pet Care. She has 26 years of pet care experience and lives with 30 to 40 pets at any one time, including all those covered by her e-books.

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