

HENRICO HUMANE SOCIETY OFFERS CAT CARE, ADOPTION, AND BEHAVIOR TIPS

Before Adopting a Cat...

The Henrico Humane Society says the sight of cat or kitten may be irresistible to just about everybody, but the decision to adopt a feline should never be an impulse decision. Owning a pet requires a commitment from you to provide for all of your cat's needs and that includes understandings subtle cat behavior. Here are some issues to consider before taking that first feline step:

Are you and your family willing to make a 15-20 year commitment to the cat? You will have to provide food, litter, and ongoing veterinary care including possible surgeries. Don't forget to take the ongoing cost of food, water bowls, a litter box, scratching post, carrying case, grooming tools and toys into consideration as well.

Cats require a litter box, and you will have to clean it daily and scrub it once a week. Cats are very clean animals and they won't go in a box that is soiled and smelly. So if you're not keeping it clean, don't blame your cat for going outside the box!

Cats require daily love, attention and care despite their independent nature. Don't get a cat just because you want a pet and think it is fine to leave the animal alone for long stretches of time! If your job requires you to travel, you may want to reconsider, or you will have to get someone to take care of your pet while you're away.

Planning to give a cat as a gift? Then make sure the recipient knows of your plan. Never give a companion animal as a surprise present since animals are not inanimate objects and should not be treated as "returnable."

When considering a feline companion for your cat, remember the best match is usually younger, smaller, and the opposite sex. A three-to six-month-old kitten is a good choice for almost all, but geriatric cats, who are mellower, also make wonderful pets.

Remember that it will take your new feline friend a while to feel comfortable at home. Be patient, allow the cat to explore his/her new environment and provide lots of gentle handling and petting in a quiet, calm place.

General Information on Cat Care

DIET:

Premium-quality dry or canned cat food provides a healthy diet for your pet. Fresh, clean water must be available at all times. All water bowls should be washed and refilled daily.

FEEDING:

1. An adult cat should be fed one large meal or two smaller meals each day. Kittens 6 to 12 weeks old need to be fed four times a day, and kittens 12 to 24 weeks old need to be fed three times a day.
2. Always keep food bowls and utensils clean.
3. Do not give a cat food that is even slightly spoiled.
4. Carefully remove small bones from fish and chicken.
5. Serve food at room temperature.
6. Dispose of uneaten food once the cat walks away.
7. Monitor your cat's weight, and do not let your cat overeat.
8. Consult a vet if your cat has refused food for 24 hours.
10. Do not put reheated food back in the refrigerator.

HOUSING:

Cats should have a warm, dry place of their own in the house. Line the bed with something warm and soft, such as a towel or blanket. Be sure to wash the bedding often. It's safer to keep your cat indoors. Outdoor cats can get poisoned, hit by cars and hurt in fights. They are also more apt to pick up diseases and parasites.

HEALTH:

Your cat should see a veterinarian at least once a year for an examination and shots. Also take your feline to a vet if he becomes sick or injured. Carefully go over your cat's body at least once a week and check for fleas, ear mites, bumps or cuts. Whenever you contact your veterinarian, it is helpful to supply some details about the condition of your cat. Here is a list of questions you may be asked:

1. Is it alert and active?
2. Is it eating and drinking?
3. Is it vomiting or retching?
4. Is it passing urine and feces normally?
5. Is it coughing or sneezing?
6. Is it pawing at its eyes or ears?
7. Is it showing any signs of pain?

LITTER BOX:

All cats need a litter box. The bathroom, utility room or screened porch are all good places to put the box. Always keep it in the same place since moving it will probably upset your cat. Scoop solids out at least once a day. Dump everything, wash the box with a mild detergent and refill it at least once a week. Cats won't use a smelly, dirty litter box.

GROOMING:

Cats keep themselves relatively clean. Most cats rarely need a bath, but they do need to be brushed or combed. Frequent grooming helps keep your feline's coat clean and reduces both shedding and hairballs.

IDENTIFICATION:

If allowed outdoors (we **do not** recommend this!), a cat should always wear a collar and an identification tag. A safety collar or "breakaway collar" has an elastic panel that will allow your cat to free himself if the collar becomes caught on something. Please remember that I.D. tags are essential for cat safety! It makes it possible for someone to return your pet to you if he or she should become lost.

CLAWS:

All cats need to scratch to loosen old nail sheathes and allow new nails to grow. Cutting your cat's nails every 10 to 14 days will keep them relatively blunt and make them less likely to scratch people and furniture. Provide your cat with a sturdy scratching post covered with rough material such as sisal or tree bark to prevent further destruction.

WHY SPAY AND NEUTER?

This sterilization prevents your female cat from having unwanted litters and protects both males and females from certain diseases of the reproductive system. Neutering cats reduces the urge to roam, mate, spray, and fight and focuses the cat's attention on his or her human family. And you will be helping to reduce the serious pet overpopulation problem in the country. Remember that one female can and her offspring can produce 420,000 kittens over 7 years!