

Ask the vets+++

Have you got a question?

Send your questions to:

Ask The Vets, The Cat magazine, National Cat Centre,
Chelwood Gate, Haywards Heath, RH17 7TT or email
editorial@cats.org.uk

CP's team of veterinary experts tackle your feline-related questions...



Q Having lost a cat to a road traffic accident previously I am keen to keep my new cat Mickey safe (he's been neutered, vaccinated and chipped). At what age do you think Mickey should be allowed out supervised? He's been here just over two weeks and is 18 weeks old.

Anything you can tell me to reduce the risk of Mickey being killed in an road traffic accident or going missing would be gratefully received. We have a low flow of traffic (one entry and exit into our housing estate, supposedly 20mph). Our front door exit leads to grass and trees but the cats cannot see the road from here unless they venture about 200 metres. The back door (no cat flap) leads to more gardens but the road is visible, only about 25 human foot steps away.

Melanie Eley, via Facebook

A We are sorry to hear about your very sad experience and can understand your anxiety on how to ensure Mickey is safe once he takes his first steps outdoors.

It is great that Mickey is neutered, vaccinated and microchipped before you are considering allowing him to go outside. This is all part of responsible pet ownership and will also help to keep him safe and healthy.

It's important that Mickey feels relaxed and secure in his new house before exploring the great outdoors. Some cats go missing shortly after moving home because owners have let them go outside too soon. These cats sometimes find their way back to their old houses. Cats should be kept indoors for at least three weeks to allow them time to regard the new house as a secure place and to build up a scent profile to help them find their way back.

We would advise not to let Mickey go outside until he has fully adjusted to his new home and knows where his food will be coming from – again, this takes between three and four weeks. When you let him out, do it when he's hungry so that you can tempt him back inside with food, until he is used to coming back to the house freely.

When you do let him out:

- Do it just before a mealtime when he is hungry so you can call him back with his favourite food
- Get him used to coming to you in the house by getting him to know his name or the rattle of his food
- Open the door and step outside encouraging Mickey to go with you
- Don't pick him up – let him make the decision to go outside himself
- Leave the door open so he can run back into the house if he feels insecure

- Only let him out for short periods at first – you can gradually build up the time he is out until you are confident he can come and go as he pleases. For further information please see our *Welcome home* and *Moving house* leaflets on when to let your cat out for the first time

www.cats.org.uk/cat-care/care-leaflets/essential-guides
It is recommended that cats are kept indoors at night, when they may be at more risk of being involved in road traffic accidents. Also, their hunting activities are likely to be greater at dawn and dusk. See the guide – *Indoor and outdoor cats* on the above web link for more advice.

Cats are natural hunters and will tend to be more alert at night time when rodents and other prey are active. Their eyes do not adjust as quickly as ours to changes in light intensity, so sudden bright headlights can be dazzling and disorientating. There is an increased chance of road accidents after nightfall so it is best to keep Mickey indoors overnight. Timing meals to coincide with rush hour may also help to keep your cat away from busy roads.

Some people are worried about letting their cat roam freely outside, so they use a harness with a lead to enable their cat to explore the outdoors safely. While some cats will cope with this – especially if they are used to it from a very early age – others may find it very stressful. Cats are free-roaming creatures and they like to explore their environment at their own pace and choose areas where they feel safe. This ensures they can easily access suitable hiding places if they feel threatened. Many cats do not react well to being restrained so the experience may be more negative than not having any outdoor access. If a cat bolts while wearing a harness, it may also be at risk of entrapment. If you choose to use a harness, ensure your cat is introduced to it gradually and encourage positive associations by using food treats from his daily food ration to reward him. Ensure he is comfortable wearing it inside the house, before you attempt to take him outside. Monitor for signs of stress and let your cat explore at his own pace. Allow him to stay close to the sanctuary of shelter and bushes – rather than forcing him into open spaces.

There is no evidence to suggest that a cat flap which exits onto fields is necessarily safer than the exiting into gardens and vice versa. Knowing which exit will be safer is a very difficult dilemma and one which many owners face. We can't guarantee Mickey's safety once he does go outside, but hope that by following our advice he will be kept as safe as possible. Ultimately it is all about weighing it up and providing the best quality of life for Mickey. In general, Cats Protection feels that cats greatly benefit from outdoor access.

THE EXPERTS



Q My 16-year-old cat Fluffy started howling at night and after lots of tests by our vet she has been diagnosed with high blood pressure. My vet says I must give her tablets every day or she might go blind and I'm really worried that I won't manage. Can you give me some tips please?

Laura Ogilvy, Hull

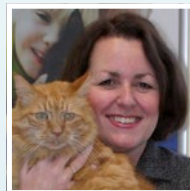
A You have done the best thing for Fluffy by recognising this change in her and taking her to the vet at an early stage, rather than waiting for more serious symptoms to develop. Hypertension (high blood pressure) is a problem we sometimes see in older cats, often as a result of another disease such as kidney disease, heart disease or hyperthyroidism, or as a primary problem on its own. This increased pressure can cause tiny blood vessels in the back of the eye to burst and in the worst cases cause the retinas to detach completely causing sudden blindness. Other symptoms can include disorientation which can cause cats to vocalise more like Fluffy.

In addition to addressing any underlying conditions, the most common treatment for hypertension is oral drugs. Usually medication is needed daily for the rest of a cat's life, as if left untreated it can cause irreversible blindness and even lead to organ damage. It can seem a very daunting task giving tablets to cats but here are some suggestions to make it easier:

- Check with your vet if it is safe to give the tablet with food as some medications must be given on a full or empty stomach. If it can be given with food, first try hiding it in a small part of their food either from your hand or in a bowl, so you can check they have eaten the tablet and not just the food around it!
- Some cats will spit the tablet out after they have eaten, or just eat the food around the tablet; in this case ask your vet if it is safe to crush the tablet as it is then easy to mix it up with their favourite food. You can purchase pill-crushers from most vets
- If neither of these methods is effective ask your vet if they can show you how to give the tablet directly into your cat's mouth by gently restraining her with your hands or with a towel. Your vet will be able to provide you with a pill-giver that helps you administer the tablet right to the back of your cats tongue without having to place your fingers in her mouth

It will be important that your cat's blood pressure is monitored regularly to assess if the disease is progressing and to allow for any adjustments to medication. Please be reassured that depending on any other underlying diseases, many cats will lead a relatively normal life once hypertension is diagnosed and stabilised.

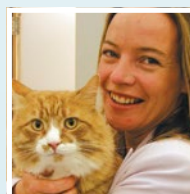
We have downloadable leaflets covering a wide variety of topics such as neutering, microchipping, cats and kittens, how to keep your cat safe, as well as a range of veterinary issues such as hypertension, diabetes etc. These are available from www.cats.org.uk/cat-care/care-leaflets Should you wish a hard copy then please call our Helpline on **03000 12 12 12**.



Maggie Roberts BVM&S MRCVS

After qualifying at Edinburgh University in 1986, Maggie went on to work primarily in private practice. Maggie first worked for CP as Veterinary Officer from 1997-99;

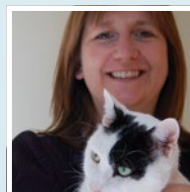
her interest in feline medicine brought her back to the charity as Director of Veterinary Services in 2006. She has three cats, Trevor, Frankie and Ronnie.



Beth Skillings BVSc MRCVS

Beth qualified at the University of Liverpool in 1998 and went on to work in general veterinary practice until 2005 when she joined CP as Head of Veterinary Services. Beth

moved into a new role as Clinical Veterinary Officer in November 2006. Beth has a CP cat, Humphrey.



Lisa Morrow BMLSc DVM MSc (Vet Epi) MRCVS

Lisa graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, Canada in 2000. Lisa first worked with CP as an Adoption

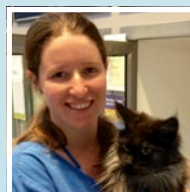
Centre Vet at Derby Adoption Centre and was CP Head of Veterinary Services from 2003-2005. Lisa recently rejoined CP as Field Veterinary Officer in the northern region of the UK. She has two black cats, Kiwi and Mango.



Karen Hiestand BVSc MRCVS

Karen graduated from Massey University in New Zealand in 2001 and spent two years in mixed practice in her home country. Since then, she has

interspersed locumming around the UK with volunteer veterinary work. Karen is the Field Veterinary Officer for the southern region of the UK. She has one cat called Dexter.



Emily Billings BVSc MSc MRCVS

Emily graduated from the University of Liverpool in 2007 and went on to work in a private veterinary practice until joining CP as the National Cat Centre

Veterinary Officer. She has one CP cat called Wolfy.

Our veterinary surgeons have provided the advice on these pages, but for specific cases and health concerns it is important that you consult your own vet who will be able to look at your cat's history and do a clinical examination.