

How can we help?



Every year we receive thousands of calls from cat owners who feel they have no choice but to rehome their cat

The prospect of losing a feline family member can cause a great deal of emotional distress and Helpline Advisors often speak with people who are angry, upset, frantic or despairing.

It's all too easy to lose hope when faced with the relentless tide of rehoming calls; however, we are trained to see every call as an opportunity to give honest, impartial advice that helps both cat and owner to live healthy and happy lives.

When we receive a call from someone looking to rehome their cat, we'll always ask the reason for rehoming as there may be options that the owner hasn't considered that could help them to keep their furry friend.

Sometimes, the reasons why owners give up their cats are complex or numerous and it can be challenging or time consuming to work through their concerns with them. You may be surprised to discover that 'people problems' such as health or circumstance rate as some of the highest reasons for rehoming.

Now we are facing more challenging times than ever before; with the number of rehoming calls increasing we can never let a chance pass to help an owner keep their cat for life. Consequently, we'd like to take this opportunity to explore some of the top reasons for rehoming cats and what can be done to prevent the next kitty from joining the bandwagon!

Allergies

It may seem obvious but it's important to find out before getting a cat whether or not you could be allergic. We receive hundreds of calls every year from people who've taken on a cat only to find afterwards that they are allergic. Cats Protection adoption centres welcome visitors who are thinking of getting a cat. By simply spending time in one of our centres you should soon find out if cats cause an allergic reaction, such as:

- sneezing and a running or blocked nose
- itchy and watery eyes
- coughing and wheezing
- itchy skin

If you already own a cat that you believe may be causing you or someone else in your household to have an allergic reaction then don't panic. Giving up your cat may seem like the only option but there are other alternatives.

Firstly, visit your GP to establish if it is indeed your cat that is causing your reaction as there are many other allergens you can encounter in the home, such as pollen, dust mites, detergents, feathers and perfume. If your GP confirms that you are indeed allergic to your cat, then you can discuss options such as anti-histamine tablets or nasal sprays that are available.

You can also ease your symptoms significantly by designating cat-free zones within the home, regularly cleaning and vacuuming, washing your cat's bed and grooming him outdoors before wiping him down with a wet cloth.

There are now products on the market, which, if used regularly, can allow people who are allergic to felines to keep a cat. In tests, Petal Cleanse alleviated the symptoms of 90 per cent of allergy sufferers. For more information on Petal Cleanse and many other products endorsed by Allergy UK, visit their website www.allergyuk.org or phone them on **01322 619 898**.

In the end, the decision on whether or not to keep your cat is up to you. However, we sincerely hope that this advice will help you to live happily with your cat.

Owner cannot cope

Continuing the issue of human health and its impact on cat ownership, we often speak with owners who feel they can no longer cope with owning a cat due to factors such as illness, hospitalisation or entering residential care.



This issue is often a very emotional one as you will find that owners who have cared for their cats for many years suddenly cannot carry out basic tasks such as feeding or cleaning out litter trays. It's an incredibly distressing situation to be facing which can often be exacerbated by the fact that neither cat nor owner know how to adapt.

If you or someone you know is finding it increasingly difficult to care for a cat due to illness and/or hospitalisation then don't struggle alone. There are organisations out there that can help you to keep your cat while ensuring their welfare needs are met.

Blue Cross has a team of community veterinary nurses who work out of the Victoria hospital and Merton hospital – both in London. The nurses visit elderly and disabled clients to help give veterinary treatments. You can contact Blue Cross on **01993 822 651** or via their website: www.bluecross.org.uk

The Pet Fostering Service Scotland co-ordinates short-term foster care for companion animals in Scotland for owners who have to go into hospital, need respite care or are in a crisis or emergency. You can find out more about their foster care service by contacting them on **01877 331 496** or via their website: www.pfss.org.uk.

The Cinnamon Trust has a national network of community service volunteers who may be able to provide practical help to the elderly and terminally ill if any aspect of day-to-day cat care poses a problem. This may include assistance in giving medication or taking a pet to the vet. You can find out more about the services they provide by contacting them directly on **01736 757 900** or via their website: www.cinnamon.org.uk.

If you are faced with the prospect of leaving your home to enter full-time residential care then you may be interested to learn that The Cinnamon Trust also has a Pet Friendly Care Homes Register which lists residential and nursing homes that are happy to accept residents with pets. To obtain a copy of this register please contact them on the number above or visit their website. In addition, the Elderly Accommodation Counsel can advise you on which councils and housing associations accept pets in their retirement housing.

You can contact them directly on **020 7820 1343** or via their website: www.eac.org.uk

If you would like to discuss any of the above issues that may be affecting you or someone you know then you can speak to us in confidence.

Pregnancy

Cats make wonderful companions to children, helping them to develop important social skills such as how to foster caring relationships based on love and respect.

However, helpline callers sometimes believe they have to rehome their cat because they or someone in their household is pregnant. We believe that this is due in part to old wives' tales surrounding cats, pregnant women and babies.

There's no reason why you should get rid of your cat if you're pregnant or have a baby in your household.

Practising good hygiene when you are pregnant or have little ones around is what parents do anyway, but when it comes to your cat we would recommend you follow the tips below:

- **make sure your cat is in good health by doing a vet check-up**
- **get someone else to change your cat's litter tray if you can and, if you can't, wear gloves and wash your hands carefully after changing the tray**
- **put the nursery room strictly out of bounds**
- **keep baby food and cat food separate and clear away any unwanted cat food as it can attract flies**
- **use a cot or pram net, pulled taut, to keep your cat at bay**
- **never leave a baby and a cat together unsupervised**

If you follow the steps above and consult your GP and health visitor, there should be no reason why you cannot keep everyone in your household (both two and four-legged) happy and healthy. For more information or to obtain a copy of Cats Protection's *Cats and Children* essential guide please contact us.

We hope that you've found this article informative and that our advice helps both you and your cat live long and prosper! ●



To contact Helpline, please phone **03000 12 12 12** or email helpline@cats.org.uk

If you see a cat, or indeed any animal, that you think is being mistreated or neglected then do call the relevant animal authority on their cruelty helplines:

England and Wales	RSPCA	0300 1234 999
Scotland	SSPCA	03000 999 999
Northern Ireland	USPCA	028 3025 1000