

Keeping your cat safe



CATS PROTECTION
ESSENTIAL GUIDE 5



Cats are naturally inquisitive animals and while most will enjoy happy lives free from danger, their curiosity can get them into scrapes from time to time. As a responsible owner, you'll want to do all you can to protect against unfortunate incidents. You also have a legal duty of care to provide for your cat's needs and ensure they are protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Above all, Cats Protection recommends that you:

- have your cat neutered – this reduces the risk of your cat fighting and sustaining injury, contracting diseases or become lost
- provide a safe and secure home, with thoughtful placement of their food, water, litter tray, hiding and rest areas. Your cat will need their own space and plenty of enrichment to keep them happy and healthy and encourage them to stay close to home
- provide a healthy diet and appropriate health care – including vaccination, flea and worming treatment and regular vet check-ups
- ensure your cat is microchipped – so if they go missing, your details can be quickly traced allowing you to be reunited
- are aware of potential hazards and protect against them where possible
- know what to do in case of emergency, or if your cat goes missing
- consider taking out pet insurance, to give you peace of mind and the financial means to treat your cat should anything unexpected arise

This guide highlights some of the dangers faced by cats, suggests ways to minimise risk and gives advice on what to do when faced with an emergency.

The dangers at home

Poisonous substances

Cats are very susceptible to poisoning and a number of everyday household items can pose a danger to them. If you suspect your cat may have eaten a poisonous substance, seek veterinary advice immediately – even if they appear well, delaying for just a few minutes may endanger their life. It is advisable to keep the following chemicals firmly out of your cat's reach, as anything that gets on your cat's feet or fur is likely to be ingested when they are grooming:

- antifreeze – is lethal for cats, so always keep this out of your cat's way and avoid using it in water features. Clear up any antifreeze spills immediately
- disinfectants – particularly those containing phenol, which usually go cloudy when added to water – are very toxic to cats
- decorating chemicals, such as white spirit
- pest control agents, such as:
 - slug bait – is extremely poisonous, especially if it contains metaldehyde or methiocarb
 - rodent bait – avoid these, especially anticoagulant types. Even if kept out of the cat's reach they can still cause harm if the cat eats a poisoned rodent
 - weed killers – particularly those containing paraquat
 - insect killers can be extremely toxic to cats
- dog flea treatment medication
- human medications – even drugs like aspirin and paracetamol can be highly toxic for cats
- certain human foods – including onions, raisins and chocolate
- poisonous plants – see over

Plants

A number of plants – lilies in particular – can be lethal. Sadly, cats have been poisoned by simply brushing against certain plants and then licking the pollen from their fur. It is advisable to avoid them if at all possible, whether cut flowers or grown in the garden.

Plants to avoid include – but are not restricted to:

- all types of Lily – *Lilium* and *Heemerocallis* species
- Lily of the Valley – *Convallaria majalis*
- Foxglove – *Digitalis*



A comprehensive list of plants that are dangerous to cats can be found on International Cat Care's website www.icatcare.org. Cats are more likely to chew on plants if they are bored or are looking for grass to nibble, so plant some Cocksfoot grass in the garden or in pots in the home. This is particularly important if your cat doesn't have access outside.

Falls

Cats can fall from upstairs windows or balconies, so if you want a constant supply of fresh air – particularly if you have a cat which is kept indoors – it is advisable to screen the windows with wire mesh – window screens are commercially available. Avoid giving your cat access to the balcony and make sure it is fenced off. Sadly a number of cats are injured or killed each year after falling from a height.

Household appliances

Small spaces are attractive to cats and it is natural for them to hide when feeling anxious, or just because they want a peaceful rest. Block off any areas where your cat could become trapped and keep the doors of household appliances such as the washing machine or tumble dryer, firmly shut. Keep your cat away from hot surfaces and liquids. Cats may also be attracted to the water in your toilet, so make sure you leave the lid down to prevent the risk of drowning.

Other indoor hazards

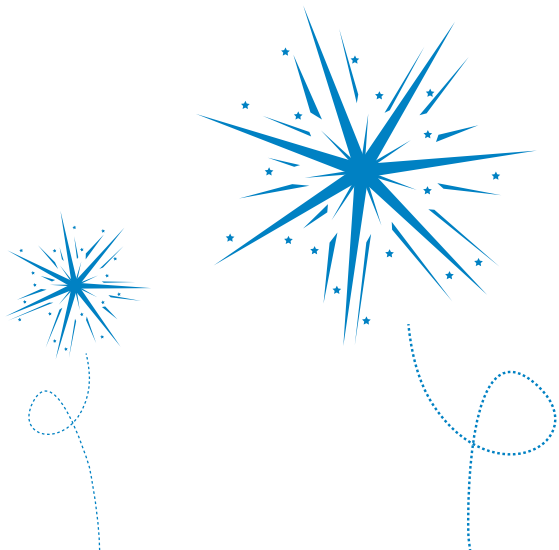
Screen off open fireplaces and always supervise your cat if you have lit a fire. Take care with electric cables, sewing pins and needles. In particular cats may be attracted to play with the cotton attached to sewing needles which can lead to serious internal injuries.

It's a good idea to rotate the use of toys to keep games interesting for your cat but don't leave your cat unattended with toys which could be shredded and eaten or cause entanglement and check toys regularly for signs of wear, replacing when appropriate. Likewise, take care during festivities and avoid leaving your cat unattended with dangling Christmas decorations and tinsel. Don't let your cat eat party food and make sure they have a safe place to hide and easy access to their food, water and litter tray during parties. Noisy party bangers, Christmas crackers and the general commotion can also be disturbing for your cat, especially if they are used to a quiet household.



Fireworks and parties

While firework displays and parties are entertaining for us, they can be distressing for pets. To ensure that your cat will be safe and sound, keep them in after dark and provide them with a litter tray, food and water bowls and a place to hide. During firework season, make sure that all doors and windows are securely closed to prevent your cat from escaping. Try to reduce outside noise by keeping curtains drawn, which will also reduce awareness of any flashes. Playing soothing music or having the TV on may also help. Try not to reinforce fearful behaviour by overly comforting a cat that is looking anxious. A pheromone plug-in diffuser can be used to decrease anxiety and can have a calming effect – start using it a couple of weeks before the fireworks season starts and site it in the room where your cat spends most of their time.



The great outdoors

Most cats enjoy spending time outside and benefit from doing so. However, if a cat is unfamiliar with their surroundings there is a chance that they could become lost. For more information, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Indoor and outdoor cats*.

Keeping track of your cat

Before you allow your cat outside, it is important that you ensure that they are identifiable should they become lost or injured.

Microchips

Cats Protection strongly recommends microchipping as the best method of permanently identifying your cat. This is a quick and safe procedure and they won't even be aware of the chip once it has been implanted. To find out more, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Microchipping*.

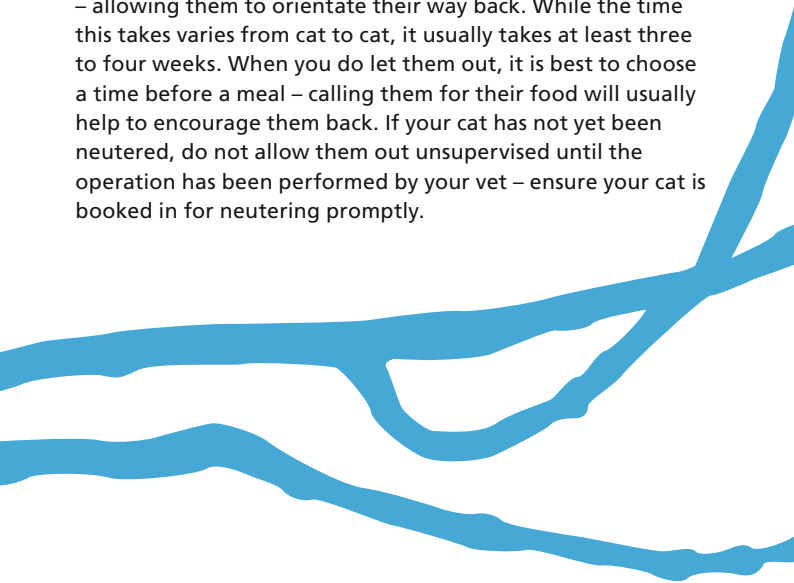


Collars

If you choose to fit a collar with your contact details attached, we recommend a 'quick release' or snap opening collar rather than an elasticated one. This means that your cat is less likely to be trapped if the collar gets snagged. The collar must be fitted correctly – two fingers should fit snugly underneath it when the cat is wearing it. Cats can catch their leg or jaw in an elasticated or ill-fitting collar and this can result in serious injury.

When should I let my cat out for the first time?

If you have a new cat or you have recently moved house, do not let them outside until they have fully adjusted to their new home and have had a chance to lay their scent around – allowing them to orientate their way back. While the time this takes varies from cat to cat, it usually takes at least three to four weeks. When you do let them out, it is best to choose a time before a meal – calling them for their food will usually help to encourage them back. If your cat has not yet been neutered, do not allow them out unsupervised until the operation has been performed by your vet – ensure your cat is booked in for neutering promptly.



Roads

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 your cat indoors overnight. Timing meals to coincide with rush hour may also help to keep your cat away from busy roads.

Harnesses

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 their daily food ration to reward them. Ensure they are comfortable wearing it inside the house, before you attempt to take them outside. Monitor for signs of stress and let your cat explore at their own pace. Allow them to stay close to the sanctuary of shelter and bushes – rather than forcing them into open spaces. Unlike dogs, cats will not learn to go to the toilet while on a lead and will be unlikely to enjoy being taken for ‘walks’ outside in a place they don’t feel safe.

Instead of a harness, consider securing the garden with suitable fencing. Alternatively you could make the indoor environment more enriching by varying the scents and objects – such as toys – to enable your cat to exhibit their natural behaviour. Use puzzle feeders and replicate the hunting experience using fishing rod toys.

Diseases and parasites

To reduce the risk of infectious diseases, ensure that your cat is fully vaccinated before allowing them outside. Cats adopted from Cats Protection will have already been vaccinated against cat flu which includes feline herpes virus (FHV), feline calicivirus (FCV) and feline parvovirus (FPV) – also known as enteritis. These vaccinations are included as part of our Minimum Veterinary Standards (MVS), but regular booster injections are still needed. Consult your vet to discuss the best protection for your cat.

Cats can also pick up parasites such as fleas, ticks and a variety of internal worms. Speak to your vet to find out how to prevent and treat these parasites and bear in mind that indoor cats can also suffer.



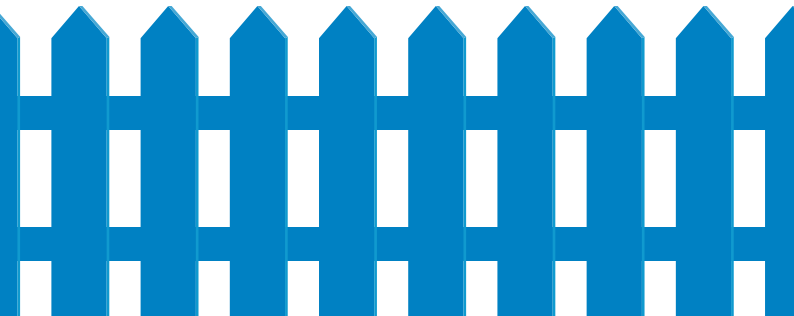
Sunburn

Cats with white fur – including those with white ears or noses – can be susceptible to sunburn during the summer months and sun exposure can be a trigger for a type of cancer. It is certainly a good idea to try to offer some protection – we all know how much cats love to lie in the sun!

You may consider using a sunscreen to protect your cat's ears and nose if you can't restrict your cat's access to the sun, but we recommend that you discuss this with your vet first. It is very important that product you use is suitable for cats, as they can be sensitive to the chemicals. Cats groom themselves regularly, so the effectiveness of using sunscreens to protect against sunburn or feline skin cancer is unknown. The best way to protect your cat is to try to keep them indoors during the hottest part of the day and to provide shade in your garden – from plants, trees or other objects.

Ponds

If you have a pond, cats may be tempted to drink from it. To reduce the risk of them falling in, place some wire mesh securely over the pond, or make sure that there is a low edge so it is easy for a cat to get out. Ensure that any water butts also have a lid on them.



Sheds, garages and dustbins

Missing cats often turn out to have been accidentally locked in garden sheds, garages or even bins. Check that a cat hasn't crept into outbuildings and wheelie bins before closing them.

Cold weather

Provide shelter for cats that have access outside. Keep the doors of sheds and outbuildings wedged slightly open – or install a cat flap. If you provide an outdoor water source, check it hasn't frozen over. Ensure your cat can reach their chosen toileting site and if your cat is seeing snow for the first time, consider giving them access to a safe and enclosed area such as a garden and accompany them when they go out. Keep de-icing products safely out of reach and groom any rock salt residue from your cat's fur.

How do I encourage my cat to stay close to home?

See Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Indoor and outdoor cats* for ideas for creating a cat-friendly garden and some fencing tips.



How do I keep my cat away from hazards in the garden?

There are a number of humane ways to keeping your cat away from things that cause sickness or injury. Cats dislike the smell of citrus fruit peel and can also be deterred using chicken manure, or pellets of lion dung – this is available from pet shops.

You can deter cats from certain areas of the garden by using materials that feel uncomfortable under their paws. Suggestions include broken egg shells, stone chippings and prickly plants – ensure that the plants used are not poisonous to cats. If all this fails, clap your hands loudly or try aiming a low-intensity water pistol near your cat when they venture into the forbidden area.

Indoor only cats

Certain cats need indoor-only lifestyles. Blind and deaf cats should be kept indoors as they are less aware of oncoming traffic. Cats with Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) should also not be allowed outside – they can spread the virus to other cats and are also at higher risk of catching other diseases. If you adopt from an animal welfare charity like Cats Protection, we will advise you of any known health conditions that cat has and whether they should remain indoors. You may be able to provide some safe outdoor access if you have a secure, escape-proof garden. Cats kept solely indoors will need extra attention paid to ensure their environment is enriching and they can exhibit their natural behaviour. See Cats Protection's [Essential Guide: Indoor and outdoor cats](#).

What do I do if my cat gets lost?

At Cats Protection we understand how traumatic it can be when a much-loved pet suddenly goes missing. Follow this advice to aid your chances of finding them safe and well.

Look

Cats are well known for their curiosity and ability to find unlikely sleeping places, so check the following places at home while calling your cat and ask your neighbours to do the same:

- all rooms
- cupboards
- boxes and underneath beds
- household appliances like washing machines
- sheds and garages
- vehicles
- gardens
- hedgerows – watch out for snares
- lost and found sections in local newspapers

Advertise

Create some flyers with a clear description of your cat – a photo is a big help:

- put posters on trees – available from your local Cats Protection branch
- distribute flyers to local shops, garages and Post Offices
- contact local schools, newspapers and even radio
- the internet and social media sites can be a great tool to help track down a lost animal

Inform

You can also let individuals and organisations know – don't underestimate the power of word-of-mouth communication. Contact:

- neighbours
- local veterinary surgeons
- your cat's microchip database provider – ensure all your contact details are up to date
- local schools – children are particularly observant when it comes to animals
- local Cats Protection branch – 03000 12 12 12
- register them as missing with www.animalsearchuk.co.uk
- other local animal charities
- the environmental health department of your local council
- delivery people – post, newspaper, milk etc
- some companies offer commercial help and support in tracking lost pets

Above all, don't give up hope – we hear so many tales of cats being found and reunited with their owners, sometimes years after they have gone missing. If you succeed in finding your cat:

- inform any people or authorities who have been asked to look for them
- ensure they are microchipped in case they stray again and always keep your contact details up to date with the microchip database

Emergencies

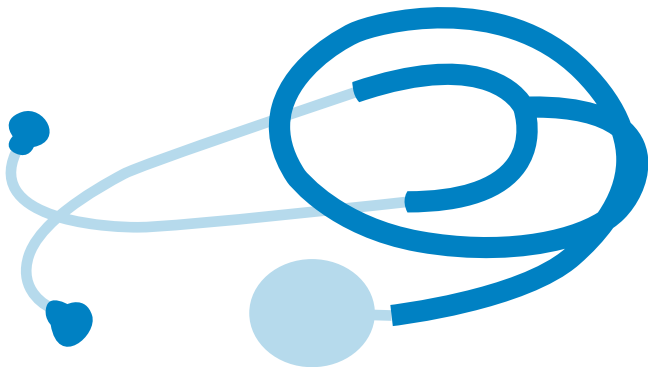
What is an emergency?

Cats hide pain very well and sometimes only show subtle signs of disease. However, it is generally more straightforward to recognise when a cat requires urgent emergency treatment. You may suspect or have witnessed a traumatic incident, or the cat may be showing obvious signs. In an emergency, your first point of contact should be your veterinary practice – make sure you keep their details in a handy place. Signs that a cat requires emergency advice and/or treatment include:

- trauma eg road traffic accidents, dog attacks and falls
- collapse
- frequent vomiting and/or profuse or bloody diarrhoea
- difficulty breathing, such as open-mouth breathing or marked effort to breathe
- continual/repeated straining to pass urine
- dehydration – assess by pinching a fold of skin. If it does not recoil immediately, the cat may require fluid therapy
- any form of fit or convulsion
- severe discharge from eyes, particularly if in combination with a thick nasal discharge
- severe lameness
- severe salivation/dribbling
- a high temperature – signs include the cat being unwilling to move or feeling hot to touch, especially on the ears. The third eyelid may also be showing
- signs of shock – pale lips, gums and eyes, a rapid heart rate and quick shallow breathing, cold extremities, lethargy, weakness and collapse

- difficulties when a female cat is giving birth – for more information, see Cats Protection’s *Essential Guide: Pregnancy, birth and caring for young kittens*

This list is by no means exhaustive so if you are in doubt, seek veterinary advice. It is also advisable to contact your vet if your cat’s routine habits or behaviour changes, as well as when more obvious signs of disease are apparent, such as coughing and sneezing, vomiting and diarrhoea or lameness. Even subtle signs such as reduced activity, changes in vocalisation or an increased appetite or thirst can indicate underlying disease. Your vet will be able to advise on whether urgent treatment is needed.



First aid

The initial steps taken following an accident, illness or injury are known as first aid – it aims to:

- preserve life
- prevent suffering
- prevent a condition from getting worse

First aid does not mean making a diagnosis or giving any medication, but it can help to promote a good recovery. Where possible, expert help should be called immediately as attempting first aid can delay necessary veterinary treatment, compromising welfare. Cats may require oxygen therapy and specialist care and delays can cost lives.

All veterinary practices are required to make provision for 24 hour emergency care – either via their own surgery or with an alternative practice in the area. Ring the vets to find out what to do. They can give you advice, let you know where to go should emergency treatment be required and prepare for the cat's arrival.

Try to remain calm, as stress will affect your ability to help – you are more likely to do something wrong if you panic and it may worsen any stress of the cat. Take a deep breath and assess the situation – remember to consider the dangers to you as well as the cat. If the cat needs to be moved from where it is, find a suitable place to administer first aid nearby.

Remember that the most serious and most life threatening injury will need attention first. This may not be the injury that looks the most dramatic – for example a bleeding wound or broken leg may not be the worst injury, there may be other more serious internal injuries.

Wear protective clothing if available – distressed cats often scratch and bite. Avoid direct eye contact with the cat as it will find this threatening and use slow, deliberate movements and a calm soothing voice. Don't 'shush' as you might with a person, this can sound much like another cat hissing and can make the cat more distressed.

The cat may be frightened and in pain, so take extra care when moving them. Putting a towel over the cat before lifting them can help to calm them. Use one hand in front of their front legs or under the lower side shoulder if the cat is on its side. Place the other hand behind or under the back legs and move the cat quickly and quietly onto a board or tray, blanket or into a box. Be very careful, not to disturb their position and avoid touching any obvious injuries. Try to ensure they are contained in a carrier if taking them to the vets, in case they suddenly try to escape.

Shock

A cat suffering with shock requires immediate veterinary attention. Shock can occur as a consequence of any disease, injury or emergency and can be fatal in its own right. It may not occur until several hours after a trauma and can make what was a minor emergency into a life-threatening one. Signs include pale lips, gums and eyes, a rapid heart rate and quick shallow breathing, cold extremities, lethargy, weakness and collapse. Seek veterinary advice immediately. Use a towel

or blanket to preserve body heat if this does not distress the cat and keep them comfortable. Do not attempt to feed or give water.

Bleeding

Both internal and external bleeding can be dangerous so seek veterinary help immediately. Pressure should be applied to an open wound using a clean towel. If the blood soaks through the dressing, apply another on top. Do not attempt to remove any foreign bodies such as debris or nails as severe bleeding may occur. Avoid attempting to apply tourniquets as these can result in permanent damage and possible amputation.

Fits, seizures and convulsions

Fits or seizures can result from epilepsy, poisoning, organ failure or a lesion in the brain. Fits will vary in duration and frequency. Signs of fitting include changes in behaviour, drooling, rigidity or paddling and muscle tremors and/or loss of bladder control. The cat may lose consciousness or collapse. If you see this happening, remain calm and keep the room dark and quiet. Avoid holding the cat and remove any potentially harmful objects from the area. Observe closely, noting the duration and frequency of seizures and call the vet immediately.

Poisoning

Routes of poisoning include ingestion, absorption through the skin and by licking substances off the coat. As there are so many different types of poison, there are also a number of different signs that a cat may show after exposure to a toxic substance. These can include salivation, vomiting and diarrhoea, twitching and fitting. Your cat may have breathing difficulties, show signs of shock or collapse and go into a

coma. These signs tend to appear suddenly so if you suspect that your cat may have ingested a poisonous substance, you must act quickly. If you can see the poison, then take your cat away from it immediately and phone your vet for advice in the first instance.

You may need to take your cat straight down to the surgery. Inducing vomiting in your cat may not be the best course of action. Look for evidence of what your cat may have eaten and make sure you take it with you to the vet.

Even a sample of vomit may help diagnosis, particularly if it is an unusual colour or contains plant matter. If you are suspicious your cat may have been deliberately

poisoned, speak with your vet and contact the RSPCA 24 hour action line 0300 1234 199. For more information, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Cats and the law*.



Medicines

Do not use human medicines or creams without seeking veterinary advice – many are not safe for cats.

For further advice on veterinary care, see our *Essential Guides: Caring for your cat* and *Pregnant cats, birth and care of young kittens* and the *Veterinary Guide: You and your vet*.

Cats are free roaming and inquisitive animals, but they are usually careful to keep themselves out of danger. However, it can be helpful to know the hazards to avoid and action to take in the face of an emergency, to keep your cat happy and safe.

Cat Guardians

Cat Guardians is the free service provided by Cats Protection, aimed at giving peace of mind to cat owners concerned about what might happen if they were to pass away before their cat.

If you have cats, we know how much they mean to you. Should something happen to you, you will naturally want to make sure that someone is there to care for the cat or cats you love.

Through our Cat Guardians service, individuals can make arrangements with us so that in the event of their death, we will take care of their cats and try to find them a loving new home. Furthermore, Cats Protection promises never to put a healthy cat to sleep, so you can feel assured that we will give your feline friend all the love and care they need until we can find them the new home they deserve. For more information, contact Cats Protection's National Helpline on 03000 12 12 12 or email helpline@cats.org.uk

Learn more about your cat online!

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>

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For more information about Cats Protection or to make a donation, please visit www.cats.org.uk or phone our Helpline on 03000 12 12 12.

Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)

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