

Keeping your cat safe

cats.org.uk



Cats are naturally curious animals. While most will enjoy happy lives free from danger, their curiosity has the potential to put them at risk of harm. We want to do all we can to protect our cats against unfortunate incidents.

As cat owners we are also legally responsible for ensuring we provide for their needs, and protect them from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

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.

For more information see
cats.org.uk/keeping-your-cat-safe

Cats Protection recommends that you:

- have your cat neutered. This reduces the risk of your cat fighting and sustaining injury, contracting diseases or becoming lost
- understand what your cat needs to be happy in your home. Place their food, water, litter tray and beds in locations that are appealing to your cat
- make sure they have a choice of places to hide or rest
- provide your cat with their own space and toys to play with. These keep them happy and healthy and encourage them to stay close to home
- provide a healthy diet and appropriate health care, including vaccinations, flea and worming treatments and regular vet check-ups
- ensure your cat is microchipped, and your details kept up to date, so if they go missing, you can be contacted and reunited with them
- are aware of potential hazards around the home and protect against them where possible
- know what to do in case of medical emergency, or if your cat goes missing
- consider taking out pet insurance. This will give you peace of mind and help you pay to treat your cat should anything unexpected happen

The dangers at home

Poisonous substances

Cats are very susceptible to poisoning. 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. See the 'First aid' section later in this leaflet.

It is advisable to keep the following chemicals firmly out of your cat's reach, as anything that gets on your cat's paws or fur is likely to be eaten when they are grooming:

- antifreeze. This is lethal for cats. Keep it out of your cat's way and avoid using it in water features. Clear up any antifreeze spills immediately
- disinfectants. In particular those containing phenol, which usually go cloudy when added to water. These are very toxic to cats
- decorating chemicals, such as white spirit
- pest control agents, such as:
 - slug bait. Extremely poisonous, especially if it contains metaldehyde or methiocarb
 - rodent bait. Avoid these, especially anti-coagulant types (which stop blood clotting).

Even if kept out of the cat's reach they can still cause harm if the cat eats a poisoned rodent

- weed killers. In particular those containing paraquat

- insect killers can be extremely toxic to cats

- dog flea treatment medication
- human medications. Drugs like ibuprofen and paracetamol can be highly toxic for cats
- certain human foods. These include onions, raisins and chocolate

Plants

A number of plants, lilies in particular, can be lethal for cats. All parts of the lily plant are toxic to cats, and even the water in the vase. Sadly, cats have been poisoned by simply brushing against certain plants and then licking the pollen from their fur. It is important to make sure you do not bring them into your home or grow them in your garden.

Plants to avoid indoors and outdoors include, but are not restricted to:

- all types of lily, both *Lilium* and *Hemerocallis* species
- Lily of the Valley (*convallaria majalis*)
- Foxglove (*digitalis*)
- Daffodils
- Autumn crocus

For more information and a comprehensive list of poisonous plants, visit cats.org.uk/plants

Cats are more likely to chew on plants if they are bored or are looking for grass to nibble. If your cat is a chewer provide them with some cat grass which is non-toxic and can be bought online or at garden centres and pet shops. Many cats enjoy nibbling on cat grass. Plant this in the garden or in pots in the home. Providing cat grass in pots inside your home is particularly important if your cat doesn't have access outside.

Falls

Cats can fall from upstairs windows or balconies. If you want a constant supply of fresh air, particularly if you have a cat who is kept indoors, it is advisable to screen the windows with wire mesh. Window screens can be bought online or from DIY shops. 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.

Caution indoors

- Block off any areas where your cat could become trapped, such as behind the fridge or oven. 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

- 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. Keep the lid down to prevent the risk of drowning or being exposed to toxic cleaning products and bacteria
- Be careful when running a bath. To prevent drowning, don't allow cats to be unsupervised near the water and if the water is hot, keep cats out of the bathroom

Other indoor hazards

Hazards can come in many forms, whether it is something sharp, noisy, stressful or poisonous to cats. Everyday objects found in the home and even some cat toys can be harmful if they are not carefully put away out of cats' reach.

Play objects

- Toys
 - Rotate the use of cat toys to keep games interesting
 - Don't leave your cat unattended with any toys which could be shredded and eaten or they could get tangled in

- Check toys regularly for signs of wear, replacing when appropriate. Cats can be prone to eating thread and material they are playing with. This can become lodged in the intestines causing serious harm

- Christmas decorations

- Avoid leaving your cat unattended with dangling Christmas decorations, such as glass baubles, strings of fairy lights and tinsel. These can not only become tangled in limbs and around necks but can also be swallowed

- Trailing plants

Sharp objects

- Sewing needles. Cats and kittens are often attracted to play with the cotton attached to sewing needles which can lead to serious internal injuries if either the needle or thread is swallowed
- Sewing pins are small enough to be swallowed
- Glass decorations or indoor plant pots. These are easy for a cat to knock over and break, leaving sharp edges which can cut delicate paws

Keeping warm

- Screen off open fireplaces
- Always supervise your cat if you have lit a fire
- Take care with electric cables

- Don't leave electric heaters where they can be knocked over by your cat

Parties and visitors

- Make sure your cat has a safe place to hide with easy access to their food, water and litter tray
- Don't let your cat eat party food
- Be aware that noisy party bangers, Christmas crackers and the general commotion can be disturbing for your cat, especially if they are used to a quiet household

Fireworks

While firework displays are entertaining for us, they can be distressing for pets. To ensure that your cat will be safe during firework season:

- keep them in from dusk and provide them with a litter tray, food and water bowls and a place to hide
- 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 put 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. Once your cat has settled into your home you can start to let them outside for short periods of time.

For more information visit

[**cats.org.uk/home-and-environment**](https://cats.org.uk/home-and-environment)

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
 - Microchipping is the best method of permanently identifying your cat. It is a quick and safe procedure and they won't even be aware of the chip once it has been implanted. Microchipping is compulsory in England for owned cats over 20 weeks old. For more information visit [**cats.org.uk/microchipping**](https://cats.org.uk/microchipping)

- Collars

- If you choose to fit a collar with your contact details attached, it is important to choose 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 release mechanism will allow the collar to come undone when put under pressure. 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?

Most importantly make sure your cat or kitten has been neutered, vaccinated and microchipped before letting them outside.

First:

- allow them to fully adjust to their new home, laying their scent and marking it a safe place for them. This usually takes between three and four weeks

When ready:

- practice calling their name or creating signals such as whistles within the house and reward them with a small treat when they come to you. This way your cat will learn to associate those sounds with returning to you when they are close

- if they're showing signs of wanting to go out such as leading you to the door, try letting them out before a meal so they will be more likely to return for food when being called
- you can step outside first and let them join you. Keep the door open so they can go back inside if they feel fearful. Kittens should always be supervised when outdoors

For more information see

cats.org.uk/garden-and-outdoors

Roads

Cats are natural hunters and will tend to be more alert at nighttime 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 consider the use of a harness with a lead. This is not recommended as most cats will find this 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, they may run into roads or get lost. The harness might also get caught causing further injury and distress

If you choose to use a harness:

- ensure your cat is introduced to it gradually
- 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 protection 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 won't enjoy being taken for 'walks' outside in a place they don't feel safe

If your cat shows any sign of being unhappy using a harness make sure you take it off immediately.

Instead of a harness:

- consider securing the garden with suitable fencing
- alternatively, you could make the indoor environment more enriching by varying the 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. You can also provide them with some cat grass to nibble on

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) and feline calicivirus (FCV), and also against feline parvovirus (FPV) also known as enteritis. These vaccinations are included as part of our minimum veterinary standards 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, ear mites and a variety of internal worms. Speak to your vet to find out how to prevent and treat these parasites.

Sunburn

We all know how much cats love to lie in the sun! 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.

Always try to keep them indoors during the hottest part of the day. It is a good idea to try to offer some protection if you can't restrict your cat's access to the sun:

- use sunscreen to protect your cat's ears and nose. Discuss this with your vet first as you need to use a product that is suitable for cats. Some human sunscreens contain chemicals that are toxic to cats.

Cats groom themselves regularly, so the effectiveness of using sunscreens to protect against sunburn or skin cancer is unknown

- provide shade in your garden from plants, trees or umbrellas/parasols

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

Cats keen to venture outdoors might still want to brave the temperatures, even during a harsh winter.

- Provide a cat flap to your home so that your cat can come in if they become cold. Check this hasn't frozen over or been blocked with snow
- Provide shelter for cats in your garden
- Keep the doors of sheds and greenhouses wedged slightly open (ensure they can't close and trap your cat inside) or install a cat flap in them
- Check any outdoor water source hasn't frozen over. Make sure they have plenty of fresh water available indoors in case outdoor water sources freeze over
- Ensure your cat can reach their chosen toileting site and if it is hard or frozen dig the soil over for them to make it more appealing
- 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. Just a few drops can cause irreversible harm and even death

- Rock salt used to keep roads from icing over can also be toxic to cats. Groom any salt residue from your cat's fur and wipe it off their paws when they come home
- Always make sure your cat comes inside at night, locking the cat flap once they are inside. Provide them with warm, comfortable and safe places to sleep

Make your garden cat-friendly

- Plant cat-friendly outdoor plants. For more information see cats.org.uk/plants
- Plant flowers in pots. This can help protect delicate plants from trampling paws but also create moveable hiding spaces for your cat
- Bushes give cats a safe place to hide and relax, with shade from the sun
- Ensure ponds are either safely covered with wire mesh, or have a shallow, banked edge allowing your cat to climb up and out
- Create an outdoor toilet by digging up a spare patch of soil. Find a place where your cat will feel safe. For more information see cats.org.uk/toileting
- Thick tree trunks or sturdy logs can provide outdoor scratching posts

- Create perches or escape routes such as garden tables, benches and cat shelves on walls
- Make sure waterbutts have firmly fitted lids

If there are hazards outside of your garden and you feel your cat is at risk, you could consider cat proofing your garden so they cannot wander further. For more information see

cats.org.uk/catios

Garden football netting

Leaving unattended football netting in the garden, especially at night, can pose a serious risk not only to wildlife but also to cats. If your cat accidentally gets tangled, it can cause them to panic leading to more entanglement around their limbs, which can sadly cause a serious injury or blood circulation to be cut off. It's important to regularly inspect your garden for any loose or unused netting and remove it where possible. If you have children, ask them to put the netting away after they play.

Indoor-only cats

Certain cats need indoor-only lifestyles. Blind and deaf cats should be kept indoors as they are less able to keep themselves safe. 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 they have 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 an environment that is interesting and provides them with plenty of mental stimulation and opportunity to exhibit their natural behaviours. For more information see cats.org.uk/indoor-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:

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

Tempt them

- Shake a box of their favourite cat food/treats to entice them home
- Leave in the garden their favourite toy, some of their unwashed bedding or even an item of your own clothing which will have your scent on it
- Leave a bowl of water and some favourite food
- Keep calling their name, leaving enough time for them to hear you and be led home

Advertise

Create some posters/flyers with a clear description of your cat (including distinctive markings, colour). A photo is a big help:

- put up posters in your area and distribute flyers to local shops, garages and post offices
- contact local newspapers and even radio stations
- 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 vets practices
- your cat's microchip database provider.
Ensure all your contact details are up to date
- your local Cats Protection. Call 03000 12 12 12
or visit cats.org.uk/find-us
- other local animal charities
- your local council
- delivery people, such as post, newspaper, milk
- 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 months or even 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 provider

For more information see cats.org.uk/lost-a-cat

Emergencies

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

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 of pain or injury. In an emergency, your first point of contact should be your vet's practice. Make sure you keep their details in a handy place. Some practices will use another clinic for their emergency work at nights and weekends, so this is worth knowing in advance if possible. Signs that a cat requires emergency advice and/or treatment include:

- trauma, for example 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 pee
- 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
- holding the eye(s) shut or severe discharge from the eyes
- severe lameness
- severe drooling
- 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.org.uk/caring-for-your-pregnant-cat**](https://cats.org.uk/caring-for-your-pregnant-cat)

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
- lameness
- subtle signs such as reduced activity, changes in vocalisation (such as more meowing, or growling or hissing), 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, and in most cases it will involve safely getting the cat to a vet clinic as quickly as possible. A vet practice should be called immediately as attempting first aid can delay necessary treatment. Cats may require oxygen therapy and specialist care, and delays can cost lives.

All vet 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 make a frightened cat feel more stressed. Take a deep breath and assess the situation
- Consider the dangers to you as well as the cat. If the cat needs to be moved from where they are, find a suitable place to administer first aid nearby
- Wear protective clothing if available. Distressed cats often scratch and bite
- Avoid direct eye contact with the cat as they will find this threatening
- 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
- Take extra care when moving your cat as they may be frightened and in pain. Putting a towel over them 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 their 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
- 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. 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.

- Apply pressure to the 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, for example debris or nails, as severe bleeding may occur
- Avoid attempting to apply a tourniquet or an overtight bandage as these can cut off blood supply and result in permanent damage

Fits, seizures and convulsions

Fits or seizures can result from epilepsy, poisoning, organ failure or disease in the brain. Fits will vary in duration and frequency.

Signs of fitting include:

- changes in behaviour
- drooling
- rigidity or paddling. Cats may appear to go stiff, especially their legs or neck, or lay on their side and move their limbs in a paddling motion

- muscle tremors
- 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:

- drooling
- 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 eaten a poisonous substance, you must act quickly.

If you can see the poison, take your cat away from it immediately and phone your vet for advice as soon as possible. You may need to take your cat straight to the surgery. Inducing vomiting in your cat at home is not advisable. 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 on 0300 123 4999.

Medicines

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

Paws to Listen

Paws to Listen is a free and confidential grief support service provided by Cats Protection, for owners grieving the loss of a cat in any circumstances. Our fully trained and empathetic volunteers provide emotional support via telephone and email.

Call us on **0800 024 94 94**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or email **PawstoListen@cats.org.uk**

For more information see **cats.org.uk/grief**

Looking for cat advice?

The following vet-approved guides are available to download from **cats.org.uk/information-leaflets**

Essential guides

Behaviour: Understanding your cat's behaviour W84009

Behaviour: Managing your cat's behaviour W84010

Bringing your cat home W84002

Caring for your cat W84001

Caring for your kitten W84015

Cats and people W84014

Cats living together W84011

Elderly cats W84016

End-of-life, grief and loss W84007

Feeding and obesity W84004

Feral cats W84017

Indoor and outdoor cats W84012

Keeping your cat safe W84005

Microchipping W84008

Moving home W84003

Neutering W84006

Pregnant cats, birth and care of young kittens W84018

Veterinary guides

Arthritis W83201

Cat flu W83216

Digestive disorders: vomiting and diarrhoea W83218

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) W83209

Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) W83202

Fleas and other parasites W83215

Heart murmurs and heart disease W83211

Hyperthyroidism W83212

Infectious disease and vaccination W83217

Kidney or renal disease W83206

Skin disorders W83204

Teeth and oral health W83214

Please see cats.org.uk for more information on:

Cats and pregnant women: toxoplasmosis

Cats and the law

Cats with disabilities

Diabetes

Feline asthma

Feline coronavirus (FCoV) and feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)

Feline parvovirus (FPV)

Hypertension

You and your vet

For more information about Cats Protection or to find out how you can support us, go to **cats.org.uk**



Cats Protection is a registered charity 203644 (England and Wales), SC037711 (Scotland) and is listed as a Section 167 institution by the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland.