

Cat Owners' Handbook



**Government
of South Australia**

Dog and Cat
Management Board

2020 edition
**Updated with
new laws**

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Owning a cat can enrich your life in many ways, but it's a big commitment to your cat and the community. This is your guide to socially-responsible cat ownership.

In the book you will find:

- information on how to care for your cat
- strategies to prevent your cat causing public nuisance or injury
- information on the legal requirements for owning a cat in South Australia.

It is important to remember that your cat is dependent on you to provide its food, water, shelter and the activities necessary for its physical and mental health. This commitment to your cat could last for at least 15 years, so investing in the establishment of a great relationship from the very beginning will be rewarded by years of happiness together.

If you require any further information on any of the topics covered in this book, please refer to the list of resources on the inside back cover, or ask your vet.

Benefits of owning a cat

Cats provide companionship, affection, family fun and entertainment to people of all ages and lifestyles.

People have had a close relationship with cats for thousands of years. This has evolved from being a tool for rodent control to becoming a cherished household pet.

Cats are one of the most popular pets in Australia due to their low maintenance, playfulness and affection. They are the ideal pet for those with low mobility and smaller homes as their play and exercise requirements can be met within the home.

There are physical and mental benefits for cat owners, with studies showing improved general health, improved immunity, lower stress levels and blood pressure.

Cats provide great companionship and contrary to popular belief, cats do not need to roam from your property. Keeping your cat confined to your property is relatively easy. This not only reduces the impact on Australian native wildlife, but reassures you that your cat is safe from other animals, traffic, severe weather events or from becoming lost.



Choosing your cat

In South Australia there are laws regulating the breeding and sale of cats. Breeders and sellers must be registered in Dogs and Cats Online and include their breeder registration number in advertisements. They must also not sell a dog or cat unless it has been desexed and microchipped. More information about the laws on buying or selling dogs and cats is available from the Dog and Cat Management Board's website.

Before sourcing a kitten or cat, research your local animal welfare organisations, shelters, rescue groups and breeders.

There are a number of factors to consider before making the decision to become a cat owner. These include:

- the suitability of your living arrangements for a cat
- the amount of time you can devote to your cat
- the cost of feeding and caring for a cat
- your general lifestyle
- arrangements for your cat if you travel
- an understanding of any local council or government laws relating to cats.

There are many options when choosing a cat: kitten or adult, long-haired or short-haired, pure bred or moggie, male or female.

Kittens

Factors to consider before choosing a kitten:

- Kittens can be cute and irresistible, but they also demand a lot of attention, are full of energy, and can be very mischievous.
- Kittens do not know the difference between their toys and your furniture or belongings; they will play with both.
- Kittens need regular exercise and playtime with their human family.
- Kittens need to be trained. This includes toilet training and appropriate play training.
- Young kittens can adapt more easily to children, busy households and other pets, but also require more protection to keep them safe.
- Kittens should be at least eight weeks old and fully weaned from their mothers before separation.

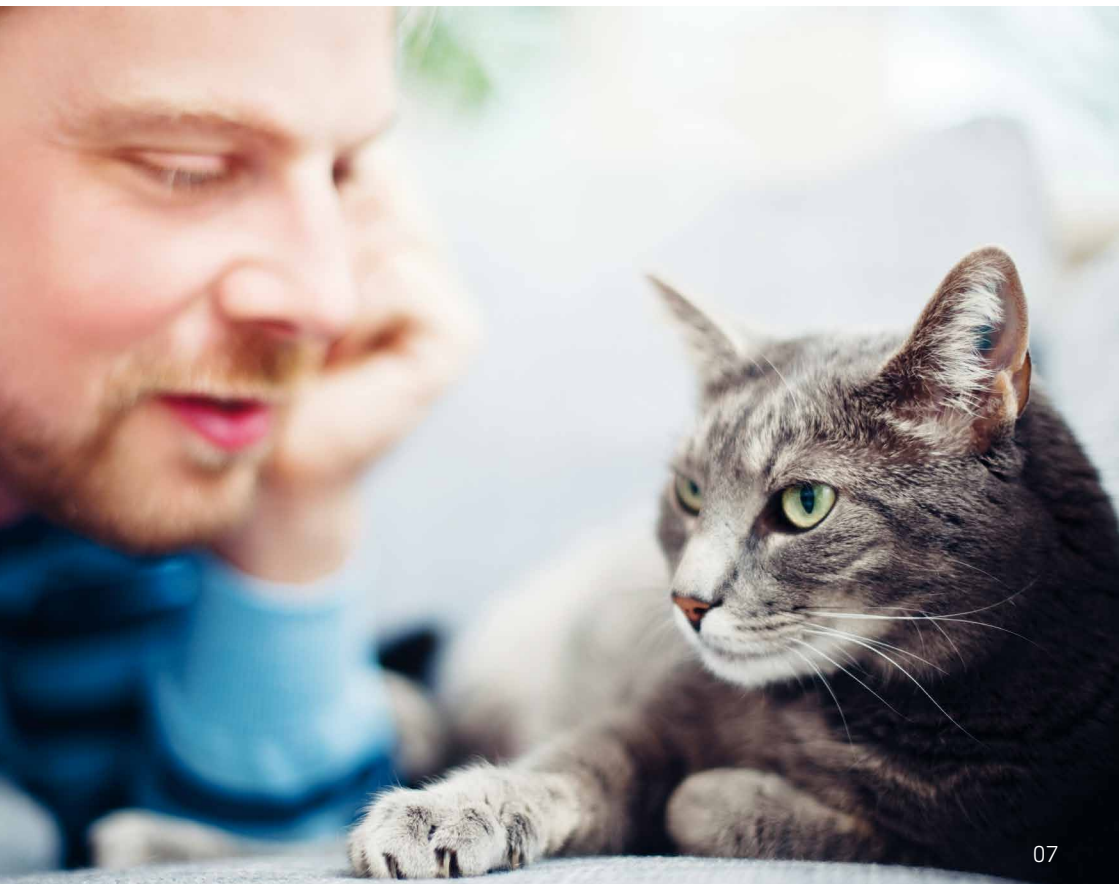
Adult cats

For some people, an adult cat is a good option. Adult cats:

- do not require constant supervision and tend not to be as destructive on household items as kittens
- are often more predictable than kittens
- are just as likely to form a bond with you as a kitten.

Adult cats may have existing behavioural or health problems. If acquired from a reputable shelter, rescue group or breeder these should be identified and fully disclosed with possible solutions for managing them.

All cats should be checked and vaccinated by a vet regularly. They should also be inspected and treated for fleas and worms. Kittens should be lively and playful with bright, clear eyes and a soft, clean coat. Older kittens and adult cats may be less active but should be alert, well nourished and agreeable to being handled.



Owning a cat

Basic responsibilities

Although cats are relatively independent, they still have basic care requirements. Cats need regular meals, clean litter trays, grooming, exercise, entertainment and veterinary care. It is important that before acquiring a cat you ensure that you are willing to provide for its needs. Some cats live into their late teens or early twenties, so it can be a long-term commitment.

Your cat and the law

There are laws affecting you and your cat which include mandatory microchipping and desexing and you are required to register these details in the statewide database, Dogs and Cats Online. Also, depending on where you live, your local council may have a cat bylaw to set limits on how many cats can be kept on a property; containment rules; curfews; and/or charge a fee for registration. It's best you check these obligations with your local council.

Microchipping

South Australian legislation requires cats to be microchipped by 12 weeks of age, or at the point of sale, and the microchip details recorded on Dogs and Cats Online.

A microchip is a small computer chip approximately the size of a grain of rice, which is placed under the skin at the back of the cat's neck by a trained practitioner. The microchip number is recorded and searchable in Dogs and Cats Online. This is useful for finding and contacting owners should a cat become 'lost'.

Identification

In addition to the required microchip your cat should be wearing a collar with an ID tag which has your contact phone number on it. Engraved ID tags are available from veterinary clinics, pet shops, engravers and the internet. Unfortunately too many cats arrive at animal shelters without identification so can't be returned to their owners. Without identification, cats are at risk of being treated as if unowned.

Any cat, regardless of whether it can be identified or not, can legally be euthanased if found in a national park, designated wildlife sanctuary or more than one kilometre from a human dwelling.

Your cat's collar should have an elastic insert or quick release mechanism to ensure that your cat can free itself if it becomes entangled. When attaching a collar, allow a flat 'two-finger' space between the collar and the cat's neck. Remember to check the collar size as your cat grows.



Desexing

All cats must be desexed by six months of age or within 28 days of taking ownership, unless you are a registered breeder.

Desexing refers to the process of surgical sterilisation which permanently renders an animal incapable of reproducing. It can also be known as spaying, castrating or neutering (depending on the gender of your cat). Desexing is a quick and humane surgical procedure performed under general anaesthetic by a veterinarian. There is generally very little post-operative discomfort and your cat is usually ready to come home within 24 hours of the surgery.

Your cat must be desexed by six months of age, however it is strongly recommended that your cat be desexed before it reaches sexual maturity. By five months of age, female cats can become pregnant and males may begin to display aggression and spray urine.

‘Early-age desexing’ refers to the desexing of kittens between two to three months of age, and is endorsed by RSPCA Australia. It is practised by most large Australian animal shelters and an increasing number of veterinarians. Many registered purebred cat breeders follow this practice and desex kittens before they leave their care. Early-age desexing is also associated with positive behavioural changes and health benefits.

Busting myths about desexing

Desexing will change my cat's personality.

Desexing should not change the basic components of your cat's personality. However, it does reduce anti-social and territorial behaviours. This should be viewed as a positive change for your cat.

My cat will put on weight after being desexed.

It is commonly thought that desexed cats can gain weight more easily than those that have not been desexed. While it is true that desexed cats may be less active due to a reduced desire to roam, there is no need to adjust your cat's diet after the operation. If you are concerned about your cat gaining weight after desexing speak to your vet before making any dietary changes.

Desexing is expensive.

Desexing is a one-off expense. It is important to remember that a desexed cat has a reduced risk of many health issues that can be costly to treat, saving you money in the longer term. Some SA councils offer incentives for desexing your cat.

Do not contribute to the cat overpopulation problem. Be part of the solution. Have your cat desexed.

There are many reasons why your cat should be desexed:

- There is a serious overpopulation of cats in Australia. Cats are prolific breeders and every year thousands of healthy kittens and cats are euthanased because there are simply not enough homes for them.
- Male cats that are not desexed (known as 'toms' or 'tomcats') are more likely to exhibit territorial behaviour, including urine spraying, roaming, aggression, fighting and yowling.
- Female cats that are not desexed (known as 'queens') can 'come into season' every two weeks from spring to autumn and often yowl and roam as they search for a mating partner. Queens can also exhibit territorial urine spraying in a bid to attract a mating partner.
- Desexed cats (both male and female) make better companions. They are less likely to bother your neighbours with yowling and fighting and have a reduced risk of developing certain types of cancer.



Cat behaviour

Every cat has a unique personality. However, there are some aspects of your cat's behaviour that you may wish to change. Listed below are some common undesirable behaviours and how they can be prevented.

Spraying

Cats spray urine to mark their territory and to communicate with other cats. Spraying conveys information about a cat's age, sex, health status and rank. While spraying is normal behaviour, when it happens too often it can become a problem.

There may be medical reasons for spraying, such as urinary tract infections, so you should take your cat to the vet to have it checked. This condition is treatable, but if left untreated could be potentially life-threatening.

If your cat sprays doorframes, curtains and window ledges inside, it may be responding to a perceived threat from outdoors, while spraying chair legs, beds and dressing tables can mean your cat is increasing in confidence by mixing its scent with yours.

Preventing spraying

There are a number of ways to prevent spraying:

- Desex your cat. Desexing a male cat puts a stop to spraying in around 80% of cases.
- Use tin foil to cover objects that your cat sprays. Alternatively, place litter trays or small bowls of dried cat food around the targeted rooms to divert your cat's attention.

- Decrease the size of your cat's territory by keeping certain rooms out of bounds. Introduce the new territory by placing familiar items, food and toys in it.
- Avoid punishment. You need to catch your cat in the act of spraying if it is to understand why it is being punished. If the event happened hours, minutes, or even seconds ago, punishment will only upset your cat.

If you are unable to prevent spraying, or in severe cases, talk to your vet, or a behavioural counsellor.

Cleaning after spraying

- Clean the area with a warm diluted solution of a biological washing powder to remove the protein components of the urine.
- Rinse the area with cold water and allow it to dry.
- Spray with an alcohol, such as surgical spirit, to deal with the fatty deposits and then allow the room to dry thoroughly before allowing your cat access again.

You can also buy commercially-prepared sprays from pet shops or your vet that will mask the pheromone scent.



Aggressive cats

Cats are emotional creatures and can be extremely territorial. Environmental or social changes can trigger extremes in cats' behaviour. If a cat becomes fearful it can spit, hiss and scratch in order to defend itself. This response can be triggered by sights, smells, sounds or unfamiliar cats/animals.

Stopping aggression

The best way to prevent your cat from displaying aggressive behaviour is to keep it indoors.

If aggression continues, take your cat to the vet to rule out any medical conditions. If your cat is in good physical health, your vet will be able to offer you appropriate behavioural advice or refer you to a behavioural counsellor.

Destructive cats

Destructive cats can destroy your home and belongings by scratching and chewing.

Stopping destruction

If you want to stop your cat from scratching and chewing its way through your belongings, you need to offer it an alternative. Provide scratching posts which can be made from fabric, carpet, bark-covered logs, softwood remnants or sisal fibre. Put these in different locations, experimenting with both vertical and horizontal positions. Cover with smooth plastic any areas of your home or furniture that you do not want damaged.

Make sure that dangerous items that should not be chewed by your cat (ribbons, telephone cords, fabrics, sewing thread, needles etc.) are kept out of reach.

If your cat persists in scratching or chewing, or is overly destructive, contact your vet as it may be exhibiting a compulsive disorder.

Caring for your cat

Veterinary Care

A relationship with a local vet is important for the care of your cat. As soon as you get your cat, you should book them in for their first vet check up, just to be sure they're healthy and happy. Your vet can provide advice on both health and behaviour-related issues, and is there to help you look after your cat, so do not be afraid to ask questions.

Vaccination

If you buy a kitten or cat, the seller must tell you about its vaccination history. This is usually provided in the form of a vaccination certificate. If your kitten has not been vaccinated you should take it to your vet for a health check as soon as possible.

All kittens should receive the following core vaccinations:

- Feline Calicivirus (FCV)
- Feline Herpes Virus (FHV)
- Feline Parvovirus (FPV).

Cats may need to be vaccinated more often if they are entering a high-risk environment, such as a boarding cattery, or if they are not contained in your garden and could be interacting with stray or unowned cats.

Additional vaccinations might be necessary for your cat if a particular geographic location, local environment or lifestyle places them at risk of contracting specific infections. These include:

- Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV); and
- Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV).

Check with your vet regarding the best vaccination options for your cat.

Weight Control

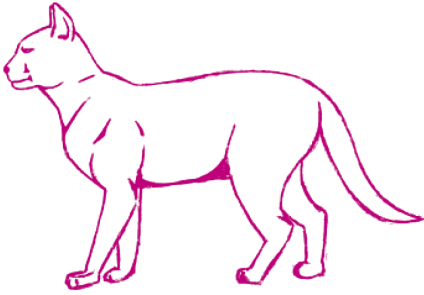
Weight control is not just a human problem; cats can also become overweight. Excess weight places a strain on your cat's joints and organs, affects its general wellbeing and can lead to life-shortening conditions, such as diabetes.

With a healthy cat you can feel its ribs and spine and its last few ribs and flank fold (under belly) may be visible from the side. Cats should have a waist when viewed from top and good muscle mass.

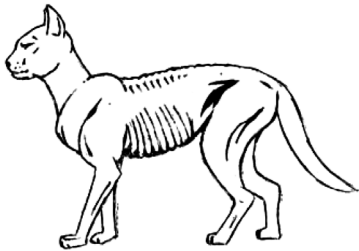
The diagrams provided will help you understand your cat's weight and manage keeping it in optimal condition.

You can monitor your cat's weight with regular weighing on household scales. Keeping your cat's weight within a healthy range is not only good for your cat, but can avoid unnecessary, preventable vet treatments.

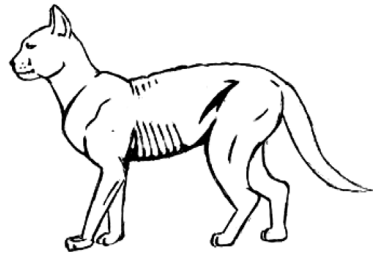
IDEAL



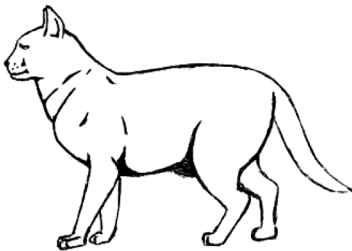
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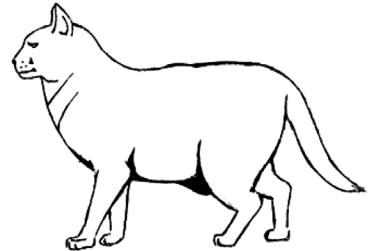
THIN



OVERWEIGHT



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Caring for your cat

Cat Flu

Cat flu is a general term used to describe a common set of symptoms of the upper respiratory tract. It can be caused by Feline Herpes Virus (FHV), Feline Calicivirus (FCV), Feline Reovirus, Bordetella Bronchiseptica or Feline Chlamydophila.

The main symptoms of cat flu include:

- sneezing
- nasal discharge
- ocular (eye) discharge
- mouth ulcers
- fever
- loss of appetite.

Cat flu is spread through direct and indirect contact. Direct contact is via eye, nose or mouth discharges. Indirect contact includes via contaminated food bowls, bedding etc.

Treatment depends on the cause of the cat flu. There are no drugs for viral infections, but supportive care is essential to ensure that your cat recovers. Seek advice from your vet about the best treatment options for your cat.

Worming

Cats can suffer from several types of worms and parasites including roundworm, hookworm, tapeworm, heartworm and toxoplasmosis. Intestinal worms in cats can cause diarrhoea, vomiting, anaemia, poor appetite, weight loss and a dull coat. If not treated promptly, worms and parasites can severely affect the health of both your cat and your family. Worms and parasites have been linked to eye damage in children and toxoplasmosis in pregnant women.

Fortunately, there are a number of excellent products available to treat and prevent worms and parasites. These include tablets, pastes and topical products that are applied to the back of the neck. Kittens should be wormed monthly from 6 to 16 weeks and every 3 months thereafter.

Ask your vet about a suitable worming program for your cat.



Toxoplasmosis

What is it?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a tiny parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*.

Whom does it affect?

Toxoplasmosis can infect any warm-blooded animal, including humans, but cats are a vital link in the parasite's life cycle.

Who is likely to be infected?

Toxoplasmosis is especially common in people who eat or handle raw or undercooked meat, people in contact with infected soil (e.g. gardeners, or children playing in uncovered sandpits) and cat owners who fail to clean litter trays frequently, or do not wash their hands afterwards. Cats are commonly infected when they eat rodents, birds or infected raw meat.

What are the risks for pregnant women?

Infection during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, or health problems for the baby. A pregnant woman should consult her doctor immediately if she has any concerns about toxoplasmosis.

Should a pregnant woman re-home her cat?

No, this is unnecessary. However, it is advisable for pregnant women to wear gloves while cleaning litter trays and wash their hands thoroughly before and after cleaning the tray. If possible have someone else clean the tray.

How can I reduce the risk of toxoplasmosis?

Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling your cat.

The *Toxoplasma* parasite does not become infectious until cat faeces are over 24 hours old. Therefore, daily cleaning of your cat's litter tray can greatly reduce the risk of infection. It is also recommended that you wear gloves and thoroughly wash your hands before and after cleaning the tray or while gardening, in case your, or a neighbour's, cat is using your garden as a litter tray.

Caring for your cat

Flea Control

Fleas are blood-sucking parasites that can cause a number of problems for your cat. They can transmit disease, cause skin irritations, itching, and even anaemia if present in large numbers. Fleas may also cause your cat to develop a flea bite allergy that will require treatment by a veterinarian.

Be aware that fleas spend most of their life off your cat, so just because you cannot see them does not mean your cat does not have them. Fleas can also infest your home, biting people and causing irritation.

Fleas are not difficult to treat. They love to breed in warm, dirty areas where they will not be disturbed. You can prevent infestations by washing your cat's bedding and vacuuming carpets, floorboards, cracks and crevices regularly.

Talk to your vet about suitable, safe products for treating or protecting your kitten or cat from fleas. Some flea control products are combined with worm treatments that can be administered as a convenient two-in-one treatment.

Ensure that any products you use are specifically formulated for cats, as some dog parasite control products can be toxic to cats. Most flea control products cannot be used on kittens under the age of 6 weeks.

Adult stage Fully grown adult fleas can detect heat, vibrations and exhaled carbon dioxide from their cocoons. This tells them that a host is nearby so the fleas know when to leave their cocoons and jump onto the host where they'll find a mate and begin the life cycle all over again.

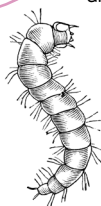


Egg stage Flea eggs aren't sticky, they fall off your pet and into your home. An infected pet will spread flea eggs wherever it has access. The eggs hatch in 2-10 days.

Pupal stage Immature fleas spend around 8-9 days in cocoons, growing and waiting for the right signals that it's time to emerge. Pupae are very well protected and so are virtually indestructible.



Larval stage After hatching from eggs, larvae hide in dark places around your home. They burrow deep into your carpets, down cracks in floorboards and under furniture and feed on flea dirt (flea faeces containing partially digested blood from your pet). The larvae grow, moult twice and then spin cocoons and grow into pupae.



Flea cycle

Diet

Cats who are fed a well-balanced diet are healthier and often more content. They hunt less and will be happy to spend more time at home.

Cats are predominantly carnivorous, meaning that they eat meat, but they cannot survive on meat alone as it does not provide an appropriate balance of vitamins and minerals.

Pre-prepared foods (canned, packaged or dry) contain a mixture of meat, grains and vegetables with the correct balance of protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and trace elements, making them a good choice for your cat. The various components of these pre-prepared foods offer an entirely balanced diet for your cat. By law, all packaged pet foods must have nutritional information printed on the label.

You can also give fresh or raw food to your cat, but you should consult your vet or an experienced cat owner first. Raw chicken necks/wings can supplement a commercial diet.

Scraps from the dinner table do not provide a balanced diet for your cat and cooked bones should never be given as they can splinter. Dog food should also not be given to your cat as it does not contain the essential elements required for a balanced cat diet.

Cats can be hesitant to try new foods, so when introducing a new food, mix a small amount of it with something you know your cat loves. This also helps to prevent stomach problems when changing your cat's diet.

You should try to feed your cat at least twice a day at regular times. Some cats like having food left out so they can graze throughout the day. If your cat is prone to weight gain, or if there are other cats around, this might not be a suitable option. Keep your cat's food bowl inside the house to avoid attracting stray cats to your garden. This also allows you to monitor how much food your cat is eating each day and make appropriate adjustments.

Always supply fresh, cool water for your cat to drink. Some cats enjoy milk but it is not an essential part of their diet and can cause diarrhoea. Vets, pet stores and some supermarkets sell milk designed specifically for cats.

Cats require a different diet at different stages of their lives. It is important that you speak to your vet to ensure that your cat is getting all the nutrients it needs.



Caring for your cat

Companionship

You can help foster a close and rewarding relationship with your cat by setting aside some time every day to interact with your companion. Daily play sessions with your cat can also fulfil their strong hunting and chasing instincts.

Toys are a great way to keep your cat entertained. There are a multitude of commercial toys available, but items such as paper bags, boxes, ping pong or foam balls, scrunched-up paper or ribbons are often just as appealing. Maintain your cat's interest in its toys by alternating or hiding them. Remember that the toy the cat wants most is you, so spend as much time as possible playing with your cat.

Toy safety

Check your cat's toys regularly for loose parts and be mindful of things they could swallow, e.g. string, wool, and fake fur. Don't let your cat play with a hanging toy unsupervised because they can become tangled.

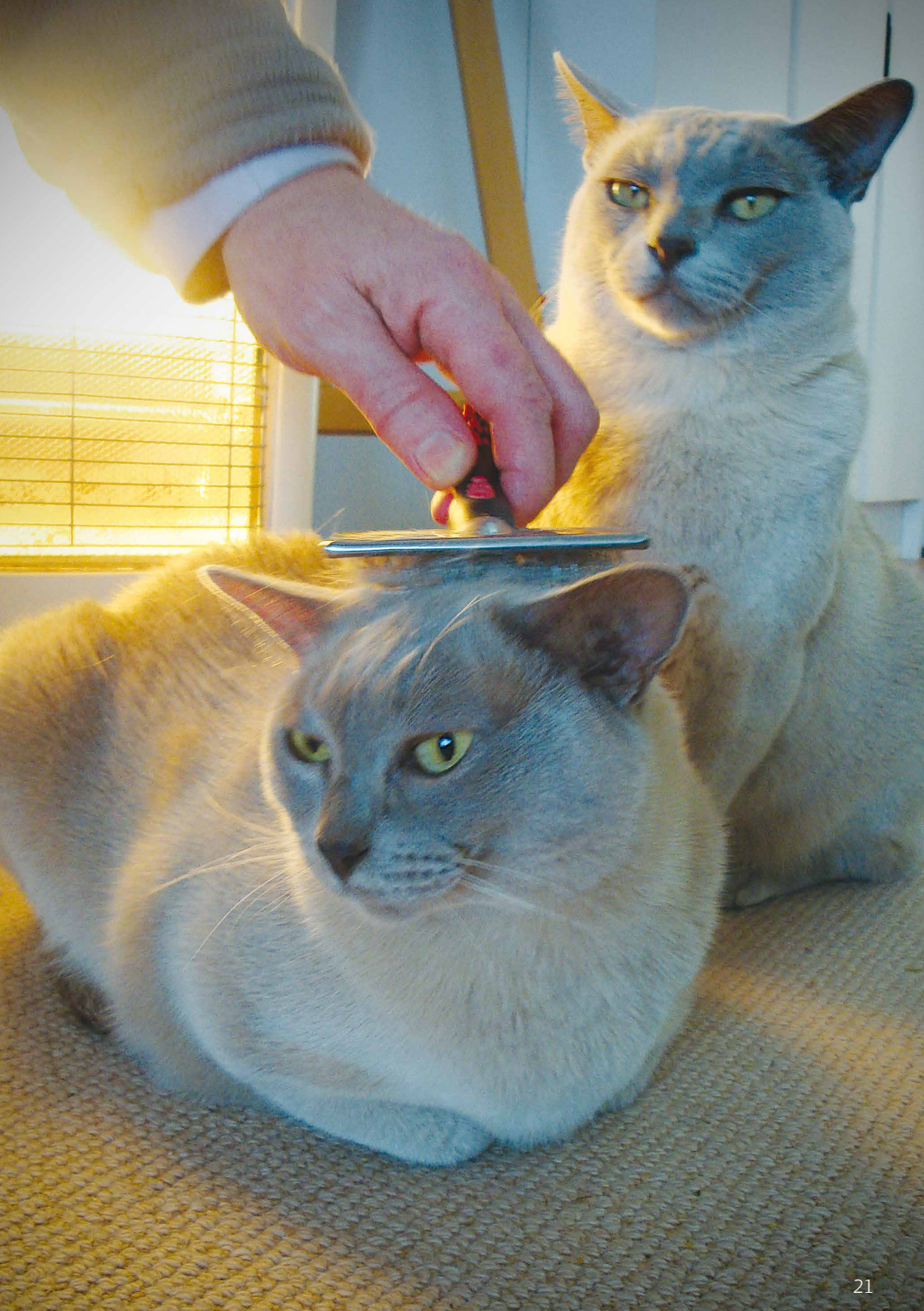
Some cats enjoy the company of others, but careful consideration and monitored introductions are vital for developing a good relationship between two cats. Ask a reputable shelter, registered breeder, or your vet for more advice before deciding to introduce another pet.

Grooming

Cats require regular grooming to keep their coats and skin healthy. Grooming is an excellent way to bond with your cat and can be very relaxing for both of you.

Grooming tips

- Start grooming sessions when your cat is young, so it gets used to them. Make the sessions brief and enjoyable.
- Long-haired cats should be groomed daily. If your cat is not cooperative you may need to consult a professional groomer and have the cat clipped.
- Gentle stroking or grooming can loosen stiff joints and muscles in older, arthritic cats.
- Include a regular health check in your grooming schedule. Look for abnormalities in your cat's coat or skin during grooming. Your cat's coat should be soft, clean and free of knots; eyes clear and bright; ears clean, with no discharge or smell; and teeth free of tartar and gum disease. Do not forget to check your cat's 'rear end' too! Check with your vet immediately if you find anything of concern.
- Some cats have sensitive areas where they do not like being touched, such as the stomach or base of the tail. Be careful, as touching these areas could trigger an instinctive aggressive response. Extended patting sessions can also produce this reaction. If your cat is sensitive about being patted, try restricting patting to the head and neck region and stop the session before your cat has had enough.



Caring for your cat

Toilet Training

Cats are surprisingly easy to toilet train. To begin you will need cat litter, a litter tray and a scoop, all of which are readily available from supermarkets and pet stores. You may need to try several brands of cat litter and types of tray until you find ones which are easy to use and suit you and your cat. Set the litter tray up in a quiet area of your house, such as the laundry. If you have dogs or other pets, you may need to restrict their access to the litter tray (you can place it on a bench), as cats tend to like their privacy!

Toilet training tips

- If your cat/kitten has just eaten, had a drink, or has been playing for a while, gently place it into its litter tray to encourage it to go to the toilet.

- Remember to reward your cat/kitten with praise and pats when it goes to the toilet in an appropriate place.
- If your cat/kitten has an accident, do not use punishment. Try to identify the signs that your cat/kitten needs to go to the toilet and take it to the litter tray immediately.
- Clean up any accidents as soon as possible. Do not use ammonia-based products, as they will encourage the cat to urinate in that spot again. Commercial products are available which are designed to completely remove the odour, but a mixture of white vinegar and water will work just as well.
- Cats/kittens generally do not like to use smelly litter trays. Remove soiled litter daily and change the tray as necessary (this will depend on the number of cats and trays you have). The general rule is one litter tray per cat, plus one extra, although you may need more or less.



If your adult cat, who was previously toilet trained, begins to toilet inappropriately, take it to your vet as it could be suffering from a urinary tract infection or other health problems. Setbacks in toilet training can also be caused by unclean litter trays, changes in routine, a new or suddenly absent member of the household (human or animal), moving house, new furniture, or the presence of a roaming cat in the neighbourhood.

Talk to your vet or a qualified behaviourist for further advice on toilet training.

Travelling

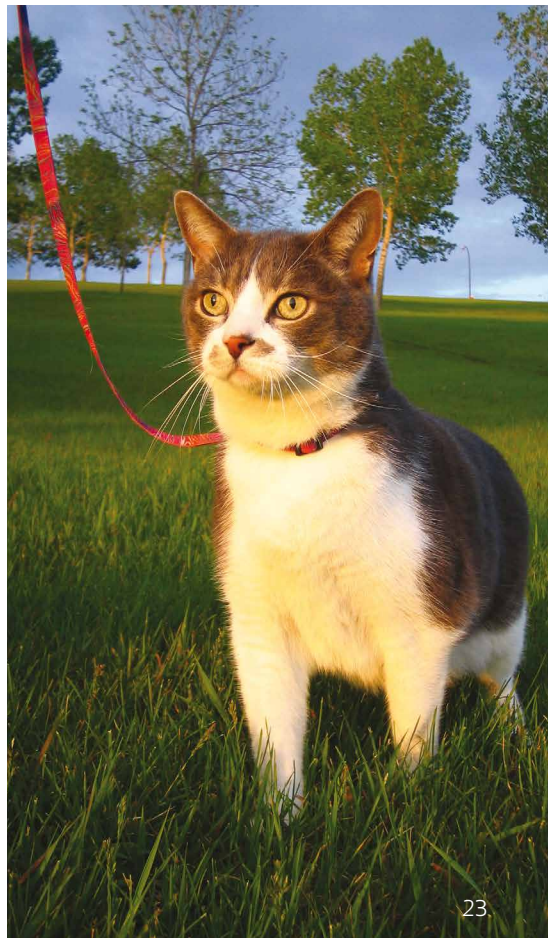
Cats prefer to remain in their own homes, although there is the occasional cat that adapts to travelling very well. If you are going away there are a number of options for your cat:

- You can take it with you, depending on your destination.
- You can book it into a reputable boarding cattery.
- You can find someone reliable who can visit your house at least once a day to feed your cat and tend to its litter tray.
- It is not recommended that you take your cat to someone else's house, as this can be stressful for your pet and it may try to escape in an attempt to return home.

Tips for travelling with your cat

- Your cat must be safely confined to a travel cage or basket when travelling. Never use a cardboard box to confine your cat as it will not be secure and your cat could escape, resulting in injury, accident or loss.
- Line the cage/basket with your cat's favourite blanket to make it more comfortable.
- Introduce your cat to the travel cage/basket well before you need to use it. Use food and toys in the cage/basket so your cat associates it with feelings of happiness and safety.
- Do not allow your cat to move around in the car whilst you are driving. Cats can panic if they become frightened and may distract you from driving, or interfere with pedals or instruments and cause an accident.

- Cats can suffer from travel sickness. You can reduce the effects of travel sickness by ensuring your cat is familiar with the travel cage, withholding food immediately before you travel, avoiding extremes of heat and cold and placing a light cover over your cat's travel cage/basket. If the problem persists consult your vet.
- It is advisable to use a lead or a harness for exercising your cat when travelling, to reduce the risk of it becoming lost.



Cat confinement

Contrary to popular belief, cats do not have to roam outdoors to be happy. Just as dogs must be confined to their owner's property, there is increasing understanding that responsible pet owners should also train their cats to remain indoors.

Cats that are allowed to roam outdoors face an increased risk of injury and infection from cat fights, poisons, traffic accidents and dog attacks. Outdoor cats (even ones who are well fed) can cause considerable injury and death to wildlife. Cats that are allowed to roam often cause disputes between neighbours as they wander onto neighbouring properties and spray, fight, defecate or kill wildlife. All these problems can be avoided by containing your cat to your property.

All cats, at the very least, should be kept indoors overnight. This helps to protect wildlife and reduce nocturnal cat fights. It is well known that cats who are allowed to roam have a shorter life expectancy than cats that are contained on their owners' properties.

Some councils have introduced cat by-laws with cat confinement or curfew regulations. Contact your local council to find out the local rules in your area.

Creating an interesting and safe environment

Build an enclosure or cat-proof your fence. There are commercial and do-it-yourself solutions for cat enclosures that can be as simple or as complex as you wish. Contact your local council for building regulations and guidelines for your area.

You can furnish the enclosure with weather-resistant scratching poles, beds, tunnels, platforms and toys. A covered area can contain a regularly-cleaned litter tray and provide protection from the weather. A bowl of fresh water and an array of logs and cat-safe pot plants will complete the area.

A fence with inward-facing overhangs may discourage your cat from leaving your property. Talk to your local council about rules and regulations regarding fence extensions.

The internet also provides useful resources for researching and creating a safe indoor/outdoor setting for your cat.

If you keep your cat busy by creating an interesting environment, fulfilling its physical, mental and social needs and providing appropriate outlets for its behaviour it will be entirely happy to stay in its home environment.

See our 'Good Cats Play at Home' booklet for more information.



Cat confinement

High resting places

Cats love to perch up high. It allows them to survey their surroundings and makes them feel secure. A safe window ledge, tall scratching post, specially-constructed non-slip shelf or free-standing cupboard with views of the street, backyard or treetops can keep your cat interested and content for hours.

Enclosed spaces

Cats love to hide. It allows them to get away from people and other animals. Give your cat an enclosed, private space in a quiet area of the house, and ask children and visitors not to disturb it there. A cardboard box lined with a soft blanket, a commercial scratching tower with an enclosed platform, or an 'igloo' bed, are all great options. You can even use the cat's travel cage. Remember to keep cats away from dangerous hiding places such as washing machines, dryers, fridges and dishwashers.

Scratching post

Scratching is normal behaviour for cats as it helps them to maintain their claws and mark their territory. It occurs most commonly after resting and during play sessions. However, it can be annoying if your cat chooses to use your favourite furniture or carpet!

In order to prevent this you need to provide an alternative for your cat. Scratching posts are ideal, but need to be tall enough for your cat to stretch full length whilst scratching and solid enough not to tip over.

If your cat will not use the scratching post try playing with or feeding your cat on it, spraying it with catnip, or placing it near a favourite sleeping area. Remember to reward your cat for appropriate scratching behaviour. Discourage inappropriate scratching by using foil, plastic covers or commercially-available deterrent products on places or furniture that you wish to protect.

Kittens can be taught from a young age to have the tips of their claws trimmed. Like human finger nails, you should only trim the white part of the nail and avoid the pink 'quick' which will bleed if cut. Begin by gently handling your kitten's or cat's paws. When they are used to this gently try to trim their claws. Use treats and praise during trimming. Never force your cat to submit to nail trimming, as a negative experience will make the next attempt even more difficult. Ask your vet, breeder or animal behaviourist for further advice.

Bedding

Cats prefer soft, warm bedding so, even though you have provided an assortment of beds in quiet, sunny spots, your cat may still prefer your bed, chair or sofa. It is nearly impossible to train cats not to sleep on your furniture so a simple solution is to use easily-washable covers on furniture, or shut the doors to certain rooms.



Cat confinement

Food foraging

In the wild, a cat will spend up to 6 hours a day hunting, stalking and consuming prey. There are some simple, fun activities you can do to replicate this experience for your cat:

- If you only have 1 cat, or a number of cats that are not competitive about food, hide dry cat biscuits around the house.
- Try using dry food as a training reward to teach new, or reinforce appropriate, behaviour.
- Throw large dental biscuits to your cat to encourage its natural chase and capture instincts.
- Provide interactive toys, such as 'treat balls', which encourage your cat to manipulate it for food.
- Some cats enjoy the occasional raw chicken neck or wing, which has the added benefit of being good for their teeth and gums.

Vegetation

Most cats enjoy nibbling, sniffing and rubbing on a variety of plants, so it is a great idea to have plants inside that are specifically for your cat. Cats enjoy grass seedlings, cat mint (*Nepeta mussinii*), and catnip (*Nepeta cataria*).

There are a number of plants that are poisonous to cats and should be avoided. Members of the Lily family (*Lilium spp.*) are particularly toxic to cats.

Contact your vet for more information.

Additional sights and sounds

Leaving a radio on when you go out is a simple way to provide additional stimulation for your indoor cat. Try a classical music or talkback station. There is also a range of DVDs that play continuous images of birds, fish, mice and toys.



Children and cats

Under the guidance of older family members, children can develop a sense of responsibility when learning to care for their companion. Studies have shown that children with pets display improved self-esteem and social skills.

Very young children should always be supervised when around cats. Kittens in particular have sharp claws that can inadvertently cause scratches. Cats can also transmit zoonoses such as ringworm, so it is important to encourage hand washing after handling them.

It is also important to teach children how to handle cats so that the cat feels safe and relaxed. Children often do not realise how fragile kittens can be and can accidentally injure their pet.



Lost and found

Councils, vets, animal welfare organisations and shelters can scan dogs and cats for microchips and search Dogs and Cats Online to reunite 'lost' pets with owners. Therefore, it's important you keep your details up-to-date in Dogs and Cats Online. You do this yourself at www.dogsandcatsonline.com.au

If your cat goes missing you need to act quickly.

- Log in to Dogs and Cats Online (dogsandcatsonline.com.au) and check your contact details are up to date. Update your cat's status to 'lost' and set a message for public display.
- Contact your council, the RSCPA, the Animal Welfare League and local vets as soon as possible – your cat may have been collected and taken to a shelter.
- Notify your neighbours.
- Place an advertisement or lost notice on community notice boards and social media sites, e.g. the Lost Pets of South Australia Facebook page.

Notices or advertisements should include:

- time and place your cat was last seen
- your cat's breed
- the sex of your cat (e.g. desexed male)
- approximate age, size, and colour of your cat
- any distinguishing features
- a clear colour photo of your cat (if possible).

Do not delay: Under the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*, any cat that cannot be identified, either by collar with ID tag or contact details, or by microchip, is at risk of being euthanased.



Semi-owned and unowned cats

Domestic cats that do not have an owner, but have varying degrees of dependency on humans are referred to as 'semi-owned' or 'unowned' cats.

'Feral' cats are essentially wild cats that have no dependency on, or interaction with humans.

This distinction is important as different management strategies apply.

Semi-owned and unowned cats are a widespread problem throughout South Australia due to cats' early sexual maturity, their ongoing reproductive cycles and their ability to adapt to any environment.

Semi-owned and unowned cats not only prey on native wildlife, but also act as carriers for numerous diseases and parasites that can be transmitted to pet cats and humans. They have a low quality of life.

Signs that a cat is owned and is not a stray:

- The cat is wearing a collar and ID tag.
- The cat has a blue/green tattoo on the inside of its ear shaped like Φ . This indicates that the cat has been desexed.
- The cat has an 'M' tattoo to indicate that it is microchipped (not all microchipped cats have a 'M' tattoo).
- The cat looks well groomed, clean and healthy.
- The cat has signs of recent veterinary treatment (e.g. shaved fur).
- The cat is comfortable with being handled.

If you find a cat you think is unowned:

- Ask your neighbours if they know who owns the cat
- Take it to your local vet, RSPCA, Animal Welfare League or council nominated facility to be scanned for a microchip which could identify it. (If the cat appears to be a lactating female, do not remove her as she could have dependent kittens that will die from starvation without her. Try to follow the cat back to her nest and remove the kittens as well.)
- Place 'found' advertisements around your neighbourhood, on social media (e.g. Lost Pets of South Australia Facebook page) and in local papers.
- If you've done everything you can to find an owner but been unsuccessful, you might choose to take ownership yourself. Before welcoming it into your family, have it checked by a vet. They can also desex and microchip it (a requirement of law—refer pages 8-11) if necessary.
- Please don't feed a cat you don't own as it only perpetuates and compounds problems.





Where can I get advice?

Local Council

Visit lga.sa.gov.au for contact information for all local councils.

Your Vet

To find a local vet you can check the *Yellow Pages* searching under 'vet' or 'veterinary surgeon' at yellowpages.com.au or *Find a Vet* a searchable database hosted by the Australian Veterinary Association of Australia at vetvoice.com.au/find-a-vet

RSPCA

Head Office

172 Morphett Street, Adelaide SA 5000
GPO Box 2122, Adelaide SA 5001
rspca.org.au | 1300 477 722

Shelters

Lonsdale

25 Meyer Road | 1300 477 722

Port Lincoln

22 Windsor Avenue | 8682 3016

Whyalla

7 Cook Street | 8644 0172

Animal Welfare League

1-19 Cormack Road

Wingfield SA 5013

awl.org.au | 8348 1300

Shelters

Wingfield

Cormack Road

Edinburgh North

4 Hewittson Road

Australian Veterinary Association

(South Australian Division)

PO Box 114

Walkerville SA 5081

ava.com.au | 1300 137 309

Feline Association South Australia

felineassociationsa.com

The Governing Council of the Cat Fancy of South Australia Inc.

Advice and information on all cat matters
catfancysa.asn.au | 8321 9255

Dog and Cat Management Board

GPO Box 1047, Adelaide SA 5001

dogandcatboard.com.au | 8124 4962

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Good cats have responsible owners