

Keeping Cats Indoors

What *you* can do to keep them *happy and healthy*

Our unique feline companions

In the wild, cats hunt for food, hide from predators (often by climbing), and defend their home territories. Indoors, these behaviors may look hostile (biting and scratching) or spiteful (climbing, spraying, marking), and we may not like them. The keys to enjoying cats in our lives are to provide acceptable outlets for their natural behaviors and reduce their exposure to threats.

Cats are unique in a number of ways

Cats do not have a daily sleep-wake cycle and may want to sleep or play at any hour of the day or night.

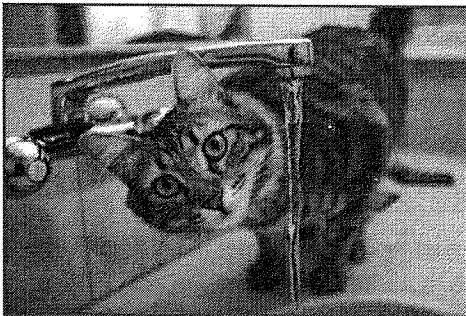
Dogs and primates (humans) are cats' natural predators. By understanding this, we can learn to "get along."

Cats are not a pack species such as dogs and humans. This makes them more independent and self-contained and also means they learn differently, which can put them at risk for conflict with others.

These checklists describe the indoor resources cats need to live happy and healthy lives. More extensive information is available at: indoorpet.osu.edu

When making changes, start with what is easiest!

What *you* can do to keep them *happy and healthy*

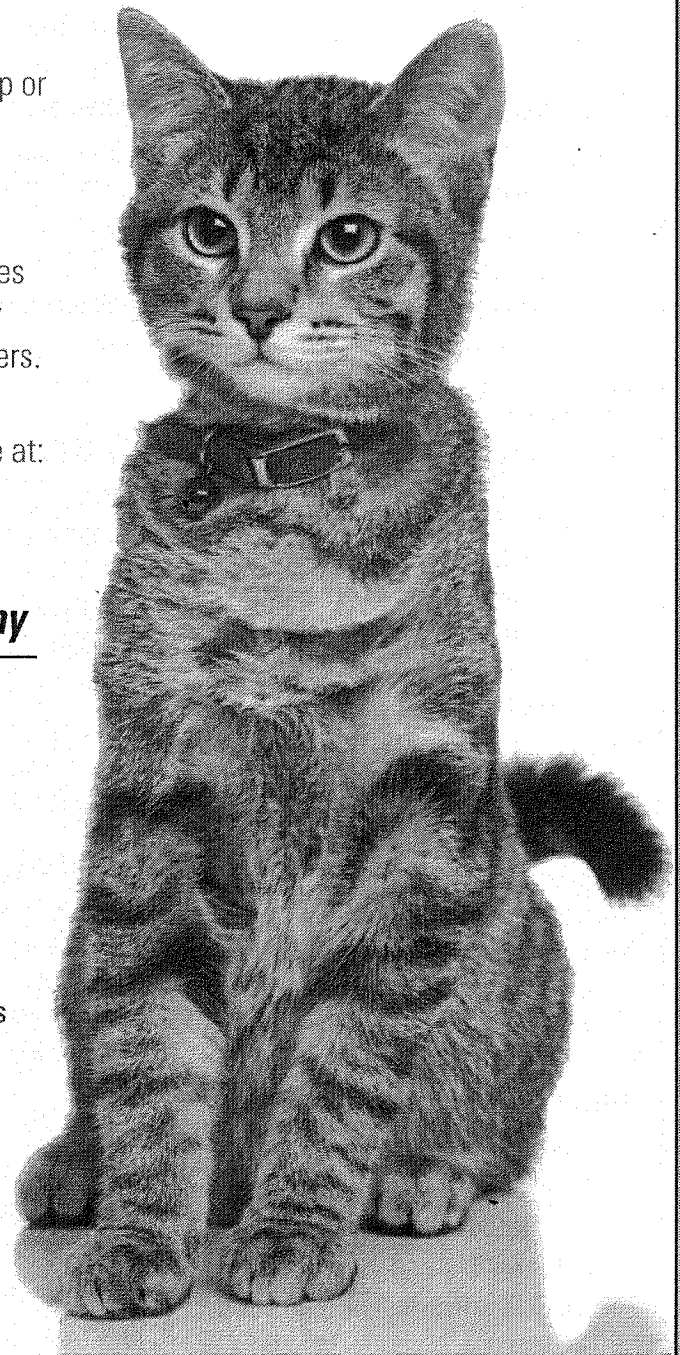


We developed this resource checklist to help you learn what indoor-housed cats need to enjoy their lives with you. Essential resources include:

- Fresh food and water
- Scratching and climbing structures
- Litter boxes
- Rest and relaxation, and safety
- Informed owners
- Play opportunities

Details on page 2

Because all cats are unique, we can tell what works for most cats, but not what will work for your cat. Please use these checklists to get you started, and then have fun exploring what works best for you, your cat, and your situation.



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The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center
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VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER



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Fresh food and water

Give each cat his own food and water bowl in a safe, quiet place.

Some cats prefer different shaped bowls, some like running water, and some may not like the taste of some water. Offering alternatives will let your cat show what it likes.

Change food form (e.g., dry to canned) only when both the owner and cat want to. (see "ask the cat" section under informed owners)

Once you learn what food and water your cat likes best, don't change without "asking" your cat first.

Litter boxes

Cats eliminate to fulfill a fundamental need. They also use eliminations as a way to mark their territory. Since your home is their territory, you can avoid elimination problems by providing an attractive litter box. There are four basic things to consider when setting up a litter box:

Litter box hygiene

The litter box must be scooped daily and washed weekly with mild dish detergent.

Litter box type and size

Litter boxes are available in a variety of sizes and shapes. Cats generally prefer large, uncovered litter boxes, about one and a half times the length of the cat. Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grained, unscented litters.

Litter box location and number

1. Cats need quiet and privacy when using their litter box.
2. The litter box must be easily accessible.
3. The Golden Rule is "one litter box per cat, plus one."

Informed owners

Our favorite books for cat owners:

From the Cat's Point of View by G. Bohnenkamp. ISBN: 0964460114 and perfectpaws.com/cpv.html

Cats for Dummies (2nd ed.) by G. Spadafori. ISBN: 0764552759.

Your Home, Their Territory by C. A. Tony Buffington, DVM, PhD, DACVM. The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center, The Indoor Pet Initiative

How cats are...

Cats are not "pack animals" like people and dogs, so they respond more to rewards and are more fearful of punishment (hitting, yelling, "rubbing their nose in it"). Instead, we can reward cats for doing what we want by offering food or affection. We can make areas off-limits by using sticky tape, foil, citrus scent, or upside-down carpet runners in those places.

Ask the cat!

When making changes, always offer any new article, food, litter, etc., next to the familiar one so the cat can tell you if she prefers the new one to the old one.

Scratching and climbing structures

Scratching is a natural behavior for cats. Even declawed cats retain the instinct to scratch. Scratching posts provide cats with an outlet for their instinct to scratch, and save your furniture and carpets.

Most, but not all, cats prefer scratching posts made out of rough material they can shred. Scratching posts should be stabilized to ensure that they don't move or tip over and scare your cat while she is using them.

Scratching posts should be located in "public" parts of the house that the whole family uses. In multi-cat households there should be several scratching posts, both vertical and horizontal, located throughout the house.

Rest and relaxation, and safety

Cats are at their most vulnerable while sleeping, so they prefer to rest in areas where they feel safe and secure. Cat beds can be purchased, but snug blankets and towels are just as appealing to cats and are easy to wash. The refuge should be a place where your cat feels safe and comfortable, for example a bedroom or back room. Your cat can retreat to her refuge when she wants to rest.

Play opportunities

Cat play is "pretend hunting" for birds, bugs or mice.

Some cats like toys that mimic their favorite prey, such as feather toys, play mice, or pieces of food rolled across the floor.

If your cat isn't interested in toys, he may prefer to be brushed or petted.

Don't let your cat "go in for the kill" on you!

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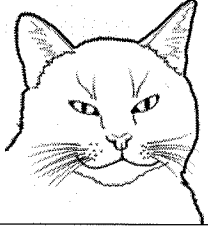

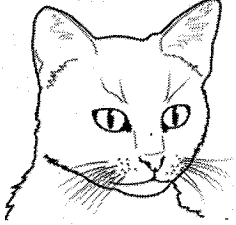
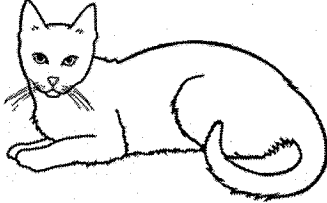
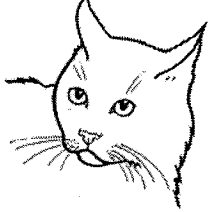
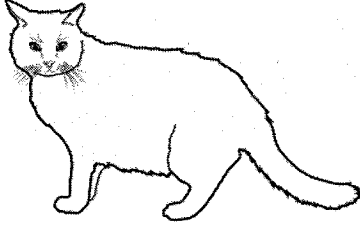
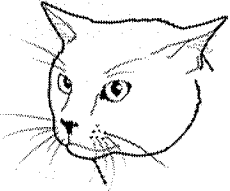
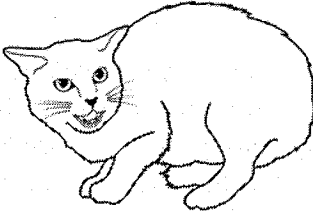
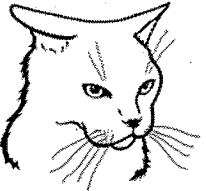
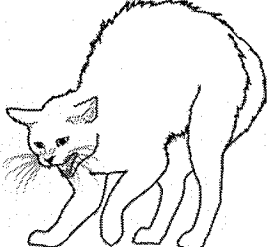

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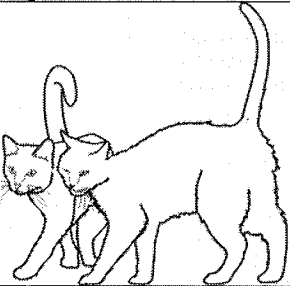
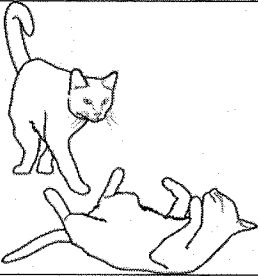
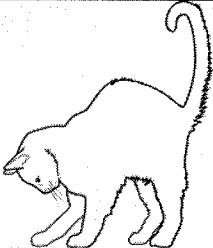
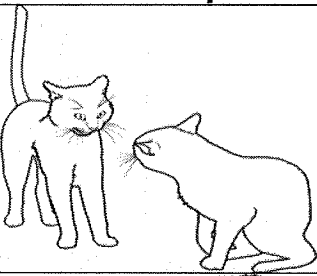
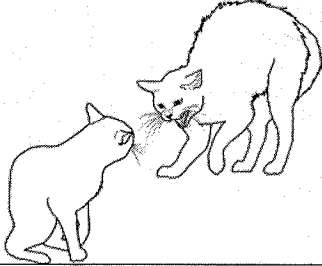
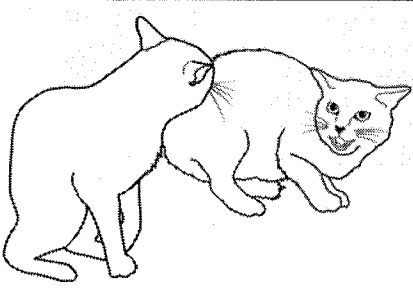


Reading your cat's "body language"

Cats use different body postures to communicate their emotions. Below are some typical postures you may observe in your cat. When observing your cat, try to get an idea of its usual attitude when alone and in contact with other animals, including people. As cats become more anxious about their surroundings, they will try to avoid contact with threats. Their score may change very quickly depending on the seriousness of the threat. The highest scores usually are seen only when escape is not possible.

Score	Body Postures		Head Postures	
1 Relaxed	<p>Activity – sleeping or resting, alert or active, may be playing</p> <p>Body -- lying on side, on belly or sitting; if standing or moving, back horizontal</p> <p>Breathing – slow to normal</p> <p>Legs – bent, hind legs may be laid out; when standing extended</p> <p>Tail – extended or loosely wrapped; up or loosely down when standing</p>		<p>Head – laid on surface or over body, some movement</p> <p>Eyes – closed to open, pupils slit to normal size</p> <p>Ears –normal to forward</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds –none, purr</p>	
2 Alert	<p>Activity - resting, awake or actively exploring</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back is horizontal</p> <p>Breathing – normal</p> <p>Legs – bent; when standing extended</p> <p>Tail – on body or curved back; up or tense downwards when standing; may be twitching</p>		<p>Head – over the body, some movement</p> <p>Eyes – open normally, pupils normal</p> <p>Ears – normal or erected to front or back</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds –none or meow</p>	
3 Tense	<p>Activity – resting or alert, may be actively exploring, trying to escape</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back of the body is lower than the front ("slinking")</p> <p>Breathing – normal</p> <p>Legs – bent, hind legs bent and front legs extended when standing</p> <p>Tail – close to body; tense downwards or curled forward, may be twitching when standing.</p>		<p>Head – over the body or pressed to body, little or no movement</p> <p>Eyes – wide open or pressed together, pupils normal to partially dilated</p> <p>Ears – erected to front or back</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds – none, meow, or plaintive meow</p>	
4 Anxious	<p>Activity – alert, may be actively trying to escape</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back of the body is lower than the front</p> <p>Breathing – normal or fast</p> <p>Legs – under body, bent when standing</p> <p>Tail – close to the body; may be curled forward close to body when standing. The tip may move up and down or side to side.</p>		<p>Head – on the plane of the body, little or no movement</p> <p>Eyes – wide open, pupils dilated</p> <p>Ears – partially flattened</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward or back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling</p>	
5 Fearful	<p>Activity – motionless, alert or crawling</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or crouched directly on top of all paws, may be shaking; if standing the whole body is near to the ground, may be shaking</p> <p>Breathing – fast</p> <p>Legs – bent; when standing bent near to surface</p> <p>Tail – close to the body; curled forward close to the body when standing.</p>		<p>Head – near to surface motionless</p> <p>Eyes – fully open, pupils fully dilated</p> <p>Ears – fully flattened</p> <p>Whiskers – back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling</p>	
6 Terrified	<p>Activity – motionless alert</p> <p>Body –crouched directly on top of all paws, shaking. Hair on back and tail bushy.</p> <p>Breathing – fast</p> <p>Legs – stiff or bent to increase apparent size</p> <p>Tail – close to body</p>		<p>Head – lower than the body</p> <p>Eyes – fully opened, pupils fully dilated</p> <p>Ears – fully flattened, back on head</p> <p>Whiskers – back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling, hissing</p>	

Cat's postures also try to communicate their emotions about other animals to them. These postures often are either friendly or conflict-related, depending on the situation at the time you observe them. Conflict related behaviors are often more subtle than those shown here, and only noticed when one learns what to look for. For example, you also might observe one cat appearing tense or anxious when another (more dominant) cat blocks access to food, litter boxes, or other resources in the home. Cat behavior can be quite complex; entire books on the subject are available. These descriptions of the basic postures are only provided as an introduction to your cat's emotions.

Friendly postures	
	<p>When cats approach in a friendly way they often hold their tail straight up, whiskers forward, and rub their chins or heads against other cats or people. Cats do this when greeting, or when confidently investigating something new.</p>
	<p>When cats want to play they may roll over and expose their bellies.</p> <p>(Females also may display this behavior during mating.)</p>
	<p>Cats also may arch their tails over the back or may move it fast when they are happy and want to play. Their pupils may be dilated (large) and ears forward. Cats with rapidly moving tails can be quite aroused, however, and it may not be a good idea to play with them as they may become aggressive and bite or scratch.</p>
Conflict-related postures	
	<p>When a cat (left cat) is about to attack, the body is held in a straight-forward position, pupils are narrow, the tail may be moving rapidly from side to side, ears are back, and whiskers are forward.</p>
	<p>When a cat is defending itself from another cat (right cat) it will lean backwards with an arched back. It may move the tail very fast, arch it over the back, or put it between the back legs. The ears are flat, pupils dilated (large), and the hairs may be erect. Cats do this to appear as large and threatening as possible.</p>
	<p>When the threat is near, the belly and legs of the defensive cat (right cat) may touch the floor. The ears and whiskers will be back and flat against the head and the teeth may be exposed. Unlike dogs, cats only expose their bellies to show submission to try to stop an attack when no escape is possible, or when the cat is at the back of a cage or under furniture and wants to be able to slash with all four paws at any hand coming toward them.</p>