

Plan to spend time training your cat so that it becomes comfortable with handling and grooming, and learns how to play and interact appropriately with people. Provide different kinds of play with a variety of toys, balls, or even a climbing tower. Kittens need frequent attention to socialize them to people and acquaint them with new things. These experiences are best provided before the kitten is 9 weeks of age.

If you already have a cat and wish to add another, matching personality types and a staged introduction may help the transition go more smoothly. For example, quiet cats should be matched with those of similar temperament. When another cat or kitten enters the home, introductions should be supervised and proceed slowly with periods of separation until each cat learns to accept the other. If problems arise, consult your veterinarian for help.

Appropriate toileting areas are essential when multiple cats live together. This means at least one more litter box than the number of cats placed in more than one location. Food, water bowls, scratching posts, and resting areas should also be spaced throughout the home.

To ensure they live long, healthy lives, cats require regular veterinary medical checkups. Ask your veterinarian about a vaccination program and other preventive medical care appropriate for your cat's lifestyle and to protect against disease risks in your area. Cats are good at concealing when they don't feel well, and your veterinarian can also help you learn how to detect subtle signs of illness.

#### WHEN YOU ACQUIRE A PET

You accept responsibility for the health and welfare of another living thing. You are also responsible for your pet's impact on your family, friends, and community. A pet will be part of your life for many years. Invest the time and effort necessary to make your years together happy ones. When you choose a pet, you are promising to care for it for its entire life. Choose wisely, keep your promise, and enjoy one of life's most rewarding experiences!



## — KITTEN TIPS —

- Eight to nine weeks is considered the ideal time for a kitten to move into a new home.
- Preventing unplanned litters is an important part of responsible pet ownership. Talk to your veterinarian about the best time to have your kitten spayed or neutered.
- Talk to your veterinarian to determine how to best care for your cat, including preventive health care, socialization, and training.
- When possible, meet the kitten's parents — their physical and behavioral characteristics may provide a clue as to how your kitten will be as an adult.
- If you already have a pet (or more than one pet) and plan to get a cat, remember that your other pets may be less enthusiastic about your new addition than you are. Ask your veterinarian about the best ways to introduce your pet to its new animal family.
- String is NOT a good toy for cats. If a cat eats string (or ribbon), it can develop life-threatening intestinal problems. There are many safe toy alternatives available at pet stores.

For more information, visit:

[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)

**American Association  
of Feline Practitioners**

[www.catvets.com](http://www.catvets.com)



[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org) | 800.248.3862

# SELECTING A CAT

*Brought to you by your veterinarian  
and the American Veterinary Medical Association*



# PETS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART

of the American household. Your pet-owning experience will be most enjoyable if you carefully consider which pet best suits your family, home, and lifestyle. The primary reason cats are given up to animal shelters is unfulfilled expectations, so make an informed decision. Take time, involve your family, and give careful consideration to the following questions before selecting a cat.

## WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT CATS?

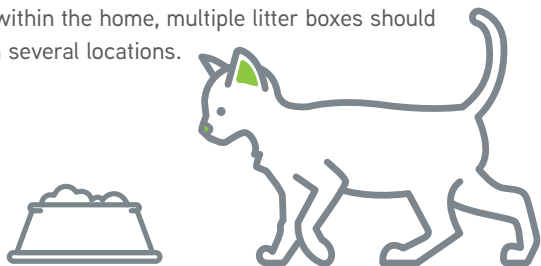
Cats make wonderful companions. Their entertaining antics and affectionate behaviors have endeared them to millions of owners for thousands of years. Easily housetrained and relatively low maintenance, cats make good indoor pets and most will readily adapt to a variety of households.

## WHAT CHOICES DO YOU HAVE IN CATS?

Purebred and mixed-breed cats come in a variety of shapes (head, ears, body, and tail), sizes, colors, personalities, and hair coats. Purebred cats have been selectively bred to enhance certain physical and behavioral characteristics that some owners find desirable, while mixed-breed cats have varied characteristics and also make wonderful pets. Veterinarians can provide you a lot of valuable information even before you acquire your cat, and some veterinarians choose to specialize in feline medicine or provide a feline-friendly clinic environment.

## WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF CATS?

Feeding, social interaction, exercise, play, and elimination are daily needs that must be met if you want a healthy, happy cat. Some cats have long or thick hair coats that require daily grooming to prevent matting and skin irritation. To reduce the risk of injury and disease, cats should be kept indoors and provided with an enriched environment that includes lots of opportunities for positive interactions and play. A cat's litter box must be kept very clean so that the cat continues to use it. If there are multiple cats within the home, multiple litter boxes should be available in several locations.



## WHO WILL CARE FOR YOUR CAT?

As the owner, you will ultimately be responsible for your cat's food, shelter, exercise, and physical and mental health for the rest of its life. While families should involve their children in caring for a pet, youngsters need the help of an adult who is willing, able, and available to supervise the daily care of a cat. You should make arrangements in advance for your cat to be cared for during planned or emergency absences.

## DOES A CAT FIT INTO YOUR LIFESTYLE?

Cats can adapt to most types of housing if proper accommodations, food, grooming, and exercise opportunities are provided. To help decide if a cat is the right pet for you, answer the following questions:

- Do you have the time to devote to providing for a cat's needs for care and attention?
- Do you rent or do you own your home? If you rent, does your lease allow you to keep one or more cats?
- What future changes might occur in your living situation that would affect your ability to keep your cat in years to come?
- Can you adapt your home to allow a cat to express normal behaviors such as exploration, predatory play, and scratching in an acceptable way?
- How long is your work day? Do you frequently have obligations after work that would interfere with caring for your kitten or cat?
- Do you have other pets? Will your new cat get along with your existing pets?
- Do any family members have allergies to pet hair or dander or are likely to be intolerant of normal cat behavior?
- Are you prepared to meet the grooming needs of a cat – whether at home or at a professional grooming facility?
- Are you prepared to provide appropriate veterinary care throughout your cat's life to help prevent and treat illness or injury?

## SHOULD YOU GET A KITTEN, OR AN ADULT CAT?

Kittens require additional time for litter box training and socialization, as well as more frequent feeding and supervision. If you can't make this commitment, consider purchasing or adopting an adult cat that is most likely litter trained and will usually adapt well to a new home. Breeders, rescues and shelters should be familiar with every cat they are placing and able to match you with a cat whose temperament and needs are a good fit for your family.



## CAN YOU AFFORD A CAT?

The purchase price for a cat can vary tremendously by breed and source, and will just be your initial expense. Cats need high quality food, proper housing, mental stimulation (e.g., toys, playtime), and regular visits to a veterinarian for preventive care. Other costs may include emergency medical treatment, grooming, boarding, identification, licensing, sterilization (spaying or neutering), and accessories. Today, pet health insurance is readily available and may help you defray unexpected expenses resulting from illness or injury.

## WHERE CAN YOU GET A CAT?

Purebred kittens and cats can be purchased from reputable breeders. Both mixed-breed and purebred kittens and cats can be adopted from animal shelters and rescue organizations. If you have the necessary skills and experience you might consider adopting a cat with special medical or behavioral needs.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A HEALTHY CAT?

A healthy kitten or cat has clear, bright eyes and a clean, shiny hair coat. It should not appear thin, overly fat, or show signs of illness, such as nasal discharge or diarrhea. When choosing a cat, pick one that is active, inquisitive, and seeks affection and attention from people. Sometimes cats are uncomfortable in noisy or unfamiliar environments, so keep that in mind during your evaluation. An adult cat should allow handling and petting without hissing or scratching. A kitten should be relaxed when picked up and handled. The best age at which to obtain a kitten is when it is between 7 and 9 weeks old. Your veterinarian can also provide information about health conditions and behaviors that may be common in a particular breed or type of cat you are considering.

## WHAT MUST YOU DO TO PREPARE FOR YOUR CAT?

Before bringing your new cat home, ensure all members of your family welcome this new addition. Prepare places for it to eat, sleep, and eliminate and have ready the necessary accessories such as a litter box, litter, toys, and food and water bowls. Pet-proof your home by keeping toxic chemicals and plants out of reach, and make sure windows are securely screened when open so that your cat cannot escape. Be sure to provide appropriate scratching materials, such as a scratching post, so your cat can stretch and maintain healthy claws without damaging your furnishings.

