

Nevada Humane Society

Guide to Your New Cat



Thank you for adopting your new cat from Nevada Humane Society!

Not only have you helped save a life, but you are about to embark on one of the most rewarding personal experiences—sharing your life with a cat!

Nevada Humane Society • 2825 Longley Lane Ste B, Reno, NV 89502
(775) 856-2000 • info@nevadahumanesociety.org • www.nevadahumanesociety.org

Congratulations!

There are 60 million pet cats in the United States and, now that you have adopted a cat from the Nevada Humane Society, you've made it 60 million plus one. Once you've outfitted yourself with some basic supplies and a little helpful advice, you'll see how rewarding it can be to live with one of these wonderful animals, the pet of choice since 3500 B.C.

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What You'll Need

- Cat litter box, litter, and litter scoop
- Food dish
- Water dish
- Scratching post
- Cat food
- Cat toys
- Cat brush
- Catnip (optional)

Getting Acquainted

Cats have a well-earned reputation for being curious, independent, and sensitive. They are so sensitive to their surroundings, in fact, that they require a great deal of adjustment to new environments. You can do a lot to help your cat companion feel secure in his or her new home.

Your Cat's New Home

Keep the cat in the carrier until you have brought the carrier into a quiet room where the cat can be confined for a day or two (kittens adjust very quickly and generally do not need to be confined). This will be your cat's "safe" room. Have a litter box prepared in that room, as well as a scratching post and bowls of food and water.

If you want your cat to feel especially at home, purchase (or make) a cozy cat bed ahead of time and place it in the safe room too. Be sure that all the windows and doors in your house are closed, that loose electrical cords have been secured, and that any spaces behind appliances or large pieces of furniture are blocked off.

Once in the safe room, open the carrier and let the cat come out in his or her own time. Keep noise and bustle in your house to a minimum while the cat orients herself.

Stay quietly in the room while the cat explores, offering attention and gentle stroking if she seems to want it. If your kitty prefers to hide under the bed or in some other quiet spot, it's best to let him stay there until he decides to come out on his own.

It's usually best to keep the door to the room closed for a couple of days while the new kitty adjusts, especially if there are other animals in the house. If you have other pets, you can help your current animals adjust to the newcomer by bringing the cat carrier out of the room and allowing them to sniff it.

If you don't have other pets, it's alright to leave the door to the cat's room slightly open when you leave, but don't be surprised if your cat stays in one spot for several days before going exploring.

Hiding

Hiding is normal. Some cats spend their first few days, weeks, or even months in a new home in hiding, usually under beds or in closets. Hiding is how some cats adjust to their new environments, and it does not mean that the cat is unaffectionate, unsocial, or sick.

Few cats can repress their curiosity enough to stay under a bed for more than a few days, but if your cat requires more hiding time, make sure she's getting food and water and is getting out at some point to use the litter box.

Do not attempt to forcibly pull or drive a cat out from a hiding place, as this will only intensify her fears and make her adjustment harder.

Introducing Your New Cat to Other Pets

Pets enjoy each other's company. A pet with a playmate can get more exercise, stimulation, and companionship. But sometimes it takes a while for them to realize the wonderful advantages they're about to enjoy.

If you have other cats or a dog living with you, it is best to keep the new cat confined in the "safe" room for a few days while your established pets get used to his smell and vice versa.

Remember, your established pets can experience jealousy and other complex emotions. Be careful not to neglect your old friends in your excitement over the new cat. Nothing will irritate them more than seeing all the hugs and attention that they are used to getting being lavished on a newcomer. Tip the scales of treats and praise in favor of the resident pets.

Feeding all the animals before the meeting can put everyone in a more relaxed mood for the initial meeting.

Introducing a cat to other cats

When you bring cats together for the first time, it would be best to choose a day when you can be around the house, encouraging friendly behavior with praise and affection.

The very best way to introduce a cat to other cats is to do it gradually over the course of a few days.

Start by showing the resident cat (or cats) the new cat's carrier or bedding that the cat has been sleeping on while the new kitty is still secure in his or her safe room. Likewise allow the cat to check out items that your other cat or cats play with or sleep on.

Next switch their spaces, allow the cat out into a room the other cats usually frequent and meanwhile let your other cats explore and sniff around the cat's room while he or she is exploring their turf.

It sometimes helps to put the new cat in the carrier and let the other kitties inspect the newcomer through the carrier. Another strategy is to encourage the cats to interact by playing under the door or by allowing them to see each other from a distance, perhaps separating them with a baby gate or other screen barrier.



Remember—feeding all the animals before these meetings can put everyone in a more relaxed mood.

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The last step is supervised time together. You'll want to keep an eye on the cats their first few times alone together.

If they hiss a bit or do not hit it off right away, don't be discouraged. Over time, the cats will work things out. If they become aggressive, just give them a bit of time apart and try again in a day or two.

Introducing a cat to a dog

A dog meeting a new cat should always be leashed.

You will need to carefully supervise the first encounters, and watch your dog for signs of aggressive behavior towards the cat. Curiosity is normal, but a dog who lunges at a cat is not safe to be off-leash with the cat. If your dog gets on well with the cat, but the cat shows you that she's feeling threatened during this experience, let her retreat to her "safe" room until she's willing to try again.

The very best way to introduce a cat to dogs is to do it gradually over the course of a few days.



Start by showing the dog (or dogs) the cat's carrier or bedding that the cat has been sleeping on while the cat is still secure in his or her safe room. Likewise allow the cat to check out items that the dog or dogs play with or sleep on.

Next allow the cat out into the area the dogs usually reside in and meanwhile let the dogs explore and sniff around the cat's room while he or she is on the other side of the door, exploring their turf.

Then you can put the cat in the carrier and the dog on a leash and allow them to see each other. It is important to keep the dog under control at all times and not allow him to overwhelm the cat by rushing up to the carrier.

Feeding all the animals before these meetings can put everyone in a more relaxed mood.

The last step is the supervised meeting with the dogs leashed and under control at all times and the cat out of the carrier.

Go slowly and take your time – it is important that the cat not feel threatened by the dog and it is equally important the dog learn to accept the cat as part of the family or pack.

Never leave the new cat alone with the dogs in the same space without supervision until you know that they are getting along well.

Kids and Cats

There is no reason why young children and cats cannot be the best of friends, so long as your kids understand some simple facts about cat behavior.

Read the section "How to Meet and Greet a Cat" aloud to your children and discuss it with them, and keep in mind these important reminders:

1. Cats do not like to be squeezed, picked up by the neck or have their tails pulled. Cats are sensitive to loud noises and sudden movements and will feel threatened if they are chased or lunged at.
2. Cats do not like to be disturbed while they are eating.
3. Most cats do like to be scratched gently under their chins or behind their ears and enjoy having their coats brushed.

How to Meet and Greet a Cat

Cats sometimes feel threatened, over-stimulated, or nervous when someone new approaches them. To try and make your introduction go smoothly, always approach a cat slowly and politely.

- Talk to the cat first. Cats are soothed by quiet gentle voices.
- Sit down and wait for the cat to come to you. Hold out your hand slowly for the cat to sniff.
- See if the cat will let you scratch him gently under the chin.
- Don't pet the cat's tummy, this is threatening to many cats.
- Even a friendly cat will scratch or nip when anxious or over-stimulated, so it is important to recognize when a cat is irritated. Most cats will give you "signals" if they have had enough.

The signs of irritation to watch for include a hiss or long, drawn out meow, flattened ears, wide open eyes, and/or a twitching tail. Also, watch out if the cat refuses to make eye contact, tightens or flattens his body, walks away, or refuses to sniff your hand. If you notice any of these signals, stop and give the cat some space.



Kitty Colds

Most cats find change to be stressful. The experience of living in a shelter is stressful for cats and, while your new kitty is no doubt happy to be going into your home, he or she may experience even this positive change as a bit stressful.

Stress lowers our immune system response, and it's the same for cats. It's not uncommon for a kitty to develop a cold. If your kitty should start sneezing, just observe how he is doing. If nasal or eye discharge is clear, then your kitty will probably recover on her own in a few days. If the discharge should become yellow or green, give us a call, describe the symptoms, and we will provide some medication to help your kitty get over her cold.

Be sure your kitty is eating. Cats should not go for more than two days without eating food. If your kitty is passing on the food, try offering fish-flavored canned cat food to tempt him to eat.

Care and Feeding

You may have heard that cats are "finicky" creatures. But in reality, cats require very little to be healthy and happy pets.



Feeding Your Cat

We recommend a high quality (premium grade) food. At the Nevada Humane Society, we feed cats dry cat food and leave fresh water out all the time.

Many cats enjoy a treat of wet (canned) food daily.

- Feed kittens less than six months old at least three times a day;
- Kittens six months to a year old, twice daily
- Adult cats, once or twice a day.
- Some families make dry kibble available to their cats all day.

Consult with your own veterinarian about the type of food that would be best for your cat and what amount would be healthiest.

Don't feed your cat table scraps, chicken bones, raw meat, sweets, or foods containing alcohol.

Training Your Cat to use a Litter Box

Once your cat has gotten used to your house and is no longer retreating to her "safe" room, the litter box can be placed permanently elsewhere in the house. Litter boxes must be kept clean so be sure to empty the cat's litter box at least once per day, and the litter should be changed weekly.

Cats are extremely tidy creatures and would rather go to the bathroom on almost any clean surface than eliminate in a dirty litter box. If the litter box is kept clean, your cat should use the box without the need for training.

If your cat is not using the litter box or stops using the litter box and the litter box is being kept clean, read the section "Unhappy Cats" for more information and helpful hints.

Spaying or Neutering Your Cat

If all cat lovers spayed/neutered their cats, we wouldn't have so many homeless cats and kittens in our shelter every year.

There is no truth to the myth that having a litter of kittens mellows a cat's disposition or that spay/neuter causes cats to become overweight and lazy.

In fact, altering a cat reduces the risk of urinary problems and cancer later in life, curbs the cat's compulsion to roam and mark territory by spraying urine, and makes them generally better behaved with small children and other pets.

Every cat adopted from the Nevada Humane Society has already been neutered. If someone you know has a cat that has not been altered, encourage them to make an appointment for spay/neuter surgery. If you are unable to afford this, we have low-cost opportunities that may be able to help.

Letting Your Cat Outside

There is a big debate among animal shelters on whether cats should be kept indoors. On one side, an indoor cat is less likely to get lost, injured, or killed. On the other hand, if you live in a safe area, the great outdoors may improve your cat's happiness. Use your common sense.

If you are going to let your cat outdoors, wait approximately two weeks to allow the cat to get oriented and to get used to the sights and smells of his home. If you let the cat go outside right away, he is likely to wander off and get lost.

Be sure that your cat is wearing a break-away or elastic safety collar designed for cats and that it has your contact information on it.

One note of caution, declawed cats should never be allowed outdoors as they cannot protect themselves or climb to escape predators.

Keep in mind that a rambunctious cat can be perfectly happy kept indoors so long as he gets plenty of attention and exercise. Take a few minutes to play with your cat every day.

Plant some catnip in a small pot and let your cat nibble on it. Buy or make some cat toys.

One great way to keep an indoor cat happy is to provide him with a playmate and a companion—namely, another cat.

Declawing

Declawing is the surgical removal of the first joint of the cat's paw. It is an unnatural and painful way of dealing with a behavior that can be annoying to us, but is normal for cats.

Declawing can lead to stress-related behavior problems.

Cats scratch in order to maintain their nails, to stretch and exercise, and to mark their territory. This natural behavior just needs to be directed toward an appropriate scratching post. There are many good scratching outlets for a cat, some prefer sisal, carpeted, or wooden cat trees, others like cardboard scratch pads. At the same time you will want to make the furniture or rugs the cat may be selecting "unattractive" for scratching purposes. There are many ways to do this, including hanging aluminum foil, citrus sprays, a strategically placed cat tree, or even draping a cloth over the target area.



We can also show you how to trim your cat's nails to prevent damage to furniture.

If you want a declawed cat, we have many lovely cats who have already been declawed and we would be happy to introduce you to them at the shelter.

Keeping Your Cat Healthy

All cats adopted from the Nevada Humane Society have received their initial vaccinations. They have also been treated for worms and have been screened for general health.

We encourage you to establish a relationship with a local veterinarian and take your cat in for a check up.

It is true that cats have independent natures, but in reality your cat is entirely dependent on you for his health and well-being. A cat who receives adequate nutrition and who receives periodic veterinary examinations will most likely live longer.

Keeping Your Cat Flea-Free

For the most part fleas are not a problem in northern Nevada, but should you move to another part of the country, this information may be helpful.

Flea collars are expensive and largely ineffective. By contrast, frequent vacuuming of your household and laundering of your cat's bedding can go a long way to reducing fleas. In addition, there are some good products that can be applied as little as once a month that can virtually eliminate fleas on your cat. Talk to your veterinarian.

Handling Your Cat

Most cats who are handled with gentleness and respect will reward their caretakers with affection. Some cats, however, can be a little under-socialized or get over-stimulated. Never correct a cat's behavior by hitting or slapping her—that will only teach the cat to dislike and fear you. Read the section “Unhappy Cats” for more information on correcting unwanted behaviors.

Unhappy Cats

“Why is my cat misbehaving? Is he angry with me?”

Cats are not naughty or mean-spirited. When a cat “acts up” or develops perceived behavior “problems” caregivers should keep in mind that the cat is most likely trying to tell them that something is wrong. Punishing a cat is really nothing more than blaming the victim.

Telling ourselves that our cat “knows better” because he is acting “guilty” is not only untrue, it is little more than justification for our own anger.

If there is one rule in the world of cat behavior, it is that physical punishment does not work and can quickly lead to defensive and fear-based aggressive behavior.

Correcting behavior “problems” in cats should only be done with positive reinforcement. In the case of litter box problems, for example, even verbal correction tends to exacerbate the problem because the cat is already reacting to some type of stress (whether medical or environmental) and punishment just adds to the stress. The most important thing is to figure out what is troubling the cat and then to change the circumstances. In many cases, the answer is simply avoiding those things that cause the cat's undesired behavior.

Whatever the “problem,” you should not wait to get help. The longer the unwanted behavior goes on, the more likely it may become a habit and harder to change.

If you need help with understanding and resolving any behavior problem with your cat, give us a call. One of our Animal Help Desk staffers or volunteers will be happy to help. Call us at 775-856-2000 x 200 or e-mail us at info@nevadahumanesociety.org and a trained behavior specialist will get back to you soon!

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: “I just adopted a cat and she won’t come out of hiding. What should I do?”

A: Hiding is the most commonly encountered “problem” among new adopters of adult cats. It is normal for a cat to hide when introduced to a new environment.

Usually, the cat will come out on his own after a day or two, but some cats can hide for as long as a month. Make sure the cat has access to food, water and a litter box, and give him time to feel “safe” in his new home.

Never force the cat out from hiding, this will only add to his fears. Spend some time every day in the room where the cat is hiding, sit down on the floor, and speak slowly and softly. Let him get used to your voice and smell.

**Q: “Why is my cat missing the litter box?”
OR “Why is my cat spraying in the house?”**

A: If a cat is having litter box problems, he or she must be seen by a veterinarian.

The cat may be having some pain or discomfort of which you are unaware. As a result, the cat may be avoiding the litter box in order to have a more comfortable place to eliminate such as a bed, carpet or even the sink. Only a veterinarian can rule out medical problems.



Most litter box issues are due to medical problems such as urinary tract infections, bladder infections, constipation, diarrhea, or cystitis. All of these conditions are treatable and, once treated, most cats will go back to using their litter box.

If a veterinarian rules out a medical problem, make sure the cat is spayed or neutered as spraying can be caused by a cat marking territory or seeking a mate.

Make sure the litter box is kept clean.

Never yell at the cat, hit or slap the cat, or rub the cat’s face in his urine. This will only add to the confusion and may actually intensify the behavior.

Read the section “Unhappy Cats” for more information.

Q: “Why does my cat sometimes vomit?”

A: Sometimes an otherwise healthy cat will make coughing sounds until she vomits a clumpy, fibrous mass of hair mixed with fluid. Usually, these are hairballs created in your cat’s stomach from the hair she ingests while grooming herself.

Brush your cat frequently to reduce the amount of loose hair on her coat. You can also buy hairball gel for your cat at any pet supply store that enables the cat to pass the hairball through elimination rather than vomiting.

A cat may vomit for reasons other than hairballs. If your cat is persistently retching or coughing, you should have your veterinarian examine her.

Q: “My cats just started fighting with each other, what should I do?”

A: Cats are naturally territorial animals, and need time to adjust to a new cat in the home.

Even cats that have lived together for years may suddenly experience problems. If cats are fighting, you should not let the fighting continue—but should never punish the cats.

Read the section “Unhappy Cats” for more information.

Confine the cats to separate locations (giving each cat a "safe" place) with all their necessary items and speak to a behaviorist or slowly reintroduce them as discussed in the beginning of this brochure. Most cats will work it out.

Q: “Should I declaw my cat to get her to stop scratching the furniture?”

A: No. Declawing is the surgical removal of the first joint of the cat's paw. It is an unnatural and often painful way of dealing with unwanted behavior; and one that can itself lead to stress-related behavior problems.

Cats scratch in order to maintain their nails, to stretch and exercise, and to mark their territory. This natural behavior just needs to be directed toward an appropriate scratching post. There are many good scratching outlets for a cat, as well as ways to make the furniture or rugs "unattractive" for scratching purposes such as hanging aluminum foil, citrus sprays, a strategically placed cat tree, or even draping a cloth over the target area.



You can also learn to trim your cat's nails to prevent damage to furniture. Or you could purchase nail caps for your cat from your veterinarian or online.

Need Help with Your Pet?

If you need help with understanding and resolving any behavior problem with your cat, give us a call. One of our Animal Help Desk staffers will be happy to help. Call us at 775-856-2000 x 200 or e-mail us at animalhelp@nevadahumanesociety.org and our trained staff will get back to you soon!

Your Contract With Your New Cat

We, the _____ family, believe that our cat, _____, is a full member of the family. This means that he/she has the right to be cared for and loved.

Each person in the family agrees to help take care of our new cat and treat him or her with kindness, patience, love, and respect.

We know that caring for our cat means responsibilities and jobs that must be done every day. We will give our cat proper food and fresh water every day.

We know that it costs money to take proper care of our cat. We will bring our cat to a veterinarian for regular check-ups and when he or she gets sick or injured.

We promise to spend time with our cat every day to show him or her how much we love him/her.

We promise to love and care for our cat throughout his/her lifetime. We know that cats can live for up to 20 years and we will make every effort to keep our cat, no matter what changes life may bring. If we cannot keep our cat, we will make every effort to find him or her a loving, new home or we will bring him other back to the Nevada Humane Society.

Parents' Signatures:

Children's Signatures:

About the Nevada Humane Society

The Nevada Humane Society was funded in 1932 as a shelter of hope.

Our mission is to:

- Care for companion animals in need and to find a loving home for every healthy and treatable animal in Washoe County;
- Foster an enriching, positive relationship between people and their pets, through community involvement and example;
- Share the benefits that animals bring to our lives and community.