



SAFETY FIRST

Every new parent instantly views their home as a potential death trap for the child they have just brought in to the world but we rarely consider or recognise the potential harm that can befall our furry children in their daily lives. Here we highlight some of these hazards and explain how some simple steps can reduce the risks to your cat.

cat protection society
OF NSW 

103 Enmore Road Newtown NSW 2042

t 02 9519 7201 or 02 9557 4818

e info@catprotection.org.au | www.catprotection.org.au



Identification

In NSW it is a legal requirement that all cats are microchipped and registered. It is very important that you remember to always keep your details up to date, visit www.petregistry.nsw.gov.au to check your cat's registration details. If your cat is ever lost this is sometimes the only way of getting them back. You should also consider a (safe) collar and a name tag for your cat, especially if your cat goes outside.

Desexing

Desexing does more than prevent your cat from breeding and contributing to feline overpopulation; it has numerous health and welfare benefits. Undesexed male cats can become aggressive towards people or other pets; can roam vast distances in search of a mate exposing them to the risk of traffic; will fight other male cats increasing their risk of abscesses and viruses; and have an increased risk of diseases and cancers of the reproductive organs.

Undesexed female cats have an increased risk of diseases and cancers of the reproductive organs and when in oestrous (on heat) will attract entire males increasing their risk of contracting transmittable viruses. Early-age desexing prevents the development of unwanted behaviours such as spraying.

Fleas and worms

There are a number of reasons you need to treat your cat for fleas and worms. Firstly, flea bites will cause your cat discomfort. When your cat is scratching they are trying to relieve this irritation. Some cats can be very allergic to flea bites causing severe dermatitis, hair loss and over-grooming. Secondly, fleas are feeding on your cat's blood which can cause severe blood loss, or anaemia, and in the case of small kittens or older cats, can kill them. As flea larvae can feed on tapeworm eggs, this can make the flea a host for tapeworm. The flea can pass the tapeworm on to your cat, or you.

As worms feed on the nutrients from your cat's food, or worse your cat's intestinal tissue, this can mean your cat isn't receiving all the nutrients they need to survive. Severe worm infestations can kill very young kittens and elderly cats. It is also important to treat your cat for worms to stop the possible transmission of worms to other pets or humans.

If your cat has fleas, you need to make sure the environment the cat lives in is treated to kill any larvae or eggs that may be around. Vacuum regularly to prevent the eggs hatching. Treating your cat is very simple with Bayer Advocate, a spot-on liquid combined flea and worm treatment. Alternatively, use Bayer Advantage once a month for fleas in conjunction with Profender liquid or Drontal tablets every three months for intestinal worms.

Vaccinations

Kittens need to be vaccinated at 8 weeks old and again at 12 weeks old. After this your cat will need regular vaccinations but the frequency will depend on the type and your cat's needs. Talk to your vet about an appropriate vaccination schedule – the needs of an indoor-only cat will be different from cats who go outside or who are frequently boarded. Vaccinations are an important part of cat care and protect against a number of different diseases.

Food

Always aim to feed your cat the best quality food you can afford. We feed and recommend Hill's Science Diet, as it provides all the nutrients a cat needs. Follow the feeding guide on the food packaging to give your cat the right amount. Check the label on packaged food – it should be 'complete and balanced'. Foods marked as 'complementary' are not nutritionally complete and balanced and should only be fed as an occasional treat. Avoid over-feeding your cat as this can lead to obesity and health problems, including diabetes.

Not all the food we consume is safe for your cat to eat. Ensure all food scraps are placed in the bin or away from your cat's reach. Remember cats can jump onto things like the table or kitchen bench so make sure your cat cannot get to the food and train your cat to stay off surfaces where food is prepared and eaten.

Some of the foods cats shouldn't eat are:

- Milk
- Cooked bones
- Chocolate, coffee or caffeine
- Grapes or raisins
- Mushrooms
- Onions and garlic
- Yeast
- Sugary or fatty foods
- Potato and tomato (especially tomato leaves)
- Fruit and vegetable seeds
- Mouldy or spoiled food
- Table scraps
- Dog food
- Alcohol

Toys

Always check your cat's toys. Throw away any that are broken or damaged as they can cause a choking hazard for your cat. Be careful when making toys and when playing with string or wool with your cat as many cats will chew on it and eat it, causing bowel obstructions.

Electrical cords

Some cats and kittens like to chew on cords. This can be a serious hazard for you, your home and your cat. Always supervise a new cat or kitten and if they have a tendency to chew cords, use cord covers to help reduce the risk of electrocution.



Parasites

Risk

Arts, crafts and stationery

Cats are naturally very curious so always be careful with small pieces of plastic, paper clips, elastic bands (some cats find rubber bands irresistible!) or other craft materials that may be in reach of your cat and be sure to pack away any sewing equipment after use to keep needles and thread out of your cat's reach. Bowel obstructions are very painful and may require surgery. If you suspect your cat has eaten any of these objects, call your vet immediately.

Poisons

Solvents, paints, as well as everyday chemicals we use around the garden and home can be hazards to your cat. Always read the label of any chemical you use and if you absolutely must use a potentially harmful substance, keep cats away from the area, especially floors, until the surface is dry and clean. If a cat walks on, or brushes against, a toxic substance they can ingest that chemical later when grooming.

Ensure chemicals are put away in a place your cat cannot reach. Remember cats like high places so a shelf up high is not always the safest place, cupboards are preferable. Most human medications are toxic to cats, so always put them away in a secure cupboard your cat cannot access.

Permethrin is a common synthetic insecticide often billed as 'safe'. It is highly toxic, often **fatal for cats**. Its toxicity in other mammals is not so great which is why it is often (misleadingly) promoted by pest control companies as 'safe'. Using mechanical methods for pest control (eg insect screens) is much safer for your pets and the environment.

If ingested, rat bait, snail bait, car antifreeze and some insecticides can cause toxic reactions or even death. Chemical burns can also occur if some of these chemicals get on the fur.

Kitchen counters

Because cats like to be up high, unless they've been trained not to, many cats will use a kitchen counter as a walkway or spot to sit and gain your attention. While some people will find this cute, it does expose the cat to potential dangers: sharp knives, naked flames, burning hotplates, boiling water, sizzling and spitting fry pans. You might think your cat is smart enough to avoid these dangers but all it takes is a moment – a fright, an embarrassingly misplaced step – and your cat could be in serious trouble. Proper training and boundary setting is an important part of feline care.

Things that open and shut

Cats are curious and also love finding hidey-holes to curl up in. Make sure you always check inside before switching on the dryer, dishwasher or washing machine. If you don't mind your cat taking naps in your wardrobe, then make it a habit to never shut the door completely so your cat can always let themselves out. Kitchen and laundry cupboards should only be opened when necessary, making sure your cat has no opportunity to climb in. When under-floor or ceiling access is needed, keep your cat secure in a different room while the trap-door/manhole is open.



Babies, children and cats

Children who grow up with pets are more tolerant of allergens, more empathetic and have better communication skills. Cats and babies or children can live happily together and pregnancy is no reason to give away your cat.

A little preparation, patience and lots of love for everyone involved is the key to ensuring your cat will welcome the new family member. Teaching children how to pat and interact safely and gently with your cat will ensure everyone stays happy and safe.

Cat enclosures and fencing

Most cats can live happily indoors. For cats who require outdoor access and for those who own their own property or receive approval from their landlord, cat-proof fencing or enclosures can greatly reduce a number of risks associated with cats who go outside.

Other cats, dogs and animals

Most neighbourhoods have stray or unowned cats, as well as some irresponsible cat owners who don't curfew their cats at night. The stray or unowned cats might not be seen in the day but they will come out at night to find food. As most of these cats are undesexed, they will fight with each other, and your cat, for territory.

Fight injuries can lead to severe wounds and infected abscesses and spread diseases such as Feline Aids/FIV and cat flu. Internal and external parasites can also be passed in faeces left by other cats or live in the dirt where a cat has buried their faeces. Desexing your cat, curfewing them overnight and installing a cat-proof fence or enclosure will help keep your cat safe from other cats.

Injuries from dog attacks are very common and can be fatal.

If your cat is used to your own dogs, they might not see other dogs as a threat. If your cat sleeps on the footpath or in your front yard, or wanders into neighbours' properties, they are at increased risk of being attacked by a dog. Ensure your fences are sturdy and your gates are secure and always encourage your cat to stay on your property.

Not only can your cat be a hazard to wildlife but the wildlife can also be a hazard to your cat. If your cat does go outside, you should provide deterrents such as bells and reflector collars, to stop your cat catching birds and small mammals.

Your cat can catch diseases and parasites by eating wildlife. Cats can also receive secondary poisoning, for example, from eating a poisoned rat. Baits intended for other species can be consumed by cats. Your cat can also be at risk of attack by foxes and possums. Some brushtail possums can be the size of an adult male cat and can cause serious injuries to your cat if they fight. Your cat should always be curfewed from dusk to dawn, and if allowed outside during the day, should stay within your property.

Other people

Unfortunately not all people love animals, and tragically many cats are victims of cruelty. You need to consider this if you let your cat roam. And if your cat does roam, it pays to be a good neighbour! Always be friendly and seek feedback from your neighbours about your cat's behaviour when they are not on your property – your neighbours might not appreciate your cat sleeping on their verandah or using their garden as a litter tray. This will give you the opportunity to address any issues before they become a problem. When you become friends with your neighbours, or at least show that you are a responsible cat owner, your neighbours will be less likely to want to harm your cat or could even become their guardians when you aren't there to protect them.

Traffic

The majority of traffic incidents involving animals occur at night. You should always keep your cat indoors at night. Accidents can also occur in your driveway if your cat runs out to greet you when you get home, or falls asleep under your car. Cats do not develop 'road sense' and even the smartest cat is no match for a moving vehicle.



Ticks

While it is more common to find ticks on a dog, recent vet reports have found more and more cats with ticks. They like to live in long grass, like hot humid conditions and can be found in urban and non-urban areas. A regular check of your cat, by running your hands over their body, will help you find whether there are any ticks present. A tick on your cat will feel like a wart. Signs to look out for are any type of paralysis, lethargy or lack of appetite. It is extremely important if you do suspect your cat has a tick that you take them to a vet immediately. Keeping your grass cut short can help to reduce risk. Consult your vet for advice on tick prevention that best suits your cat.

Skin cancer

Cats, just like humans, can get sunburnt. If your cat has light coloured fur on the nose or ears they are more susceptible to getting sunburnt, and in turn, getting skin cancer. White cats are the most at risk due to the light coloured fur and light pigmentation of the skin. Skin cancer in cats usually develops due to the skin being sunburnt a number of times. The sunburn causes the skin cells to become damaged and this increases the risk of skin cancer.

White cats and cats with light coloured noses, ears or eyelids should be kept inside all the time or at least during the sunniest parts of the day (11am – 4pm). Pet sunscreens or zinc can be applied to the cat's ears and nose if they do go outside but do not use human sunscreen as it is toxic to cats. Pet sunscreen needs to be re-applied regularly to maintain effectiveness: check the package directions

Plants

Flowers can brighten our home and make our gardens beautiful, but did you know that some plants can kill? If you own a cat the following plants should be avoided:

- Lilies (toxic, can be fatal)
- Tulip bulbs
- Carnations
- Daffodil bulbs
- Chrysanthemum
- Azalea
- Bird of paradise
- Mistletoe
- Ivy
- Holly
- Begonias
- Iris
- Oleander

These flowers can cause vomiting, loss of appetite and depression if ingested by cats, and ingestion of the lily (stem, leaves, flower or pollen) is very serious and can be fatal. Even brushing against the flower can cause a cat to catch pollen on their coat which is then ingested when they groom.

If you think your cat has ingested lilies or you see your cat chew or lick any part of a lily plant, take your cat to a vet immediately. While your cat may appear normal for 24-72 hours, lily toxicity causes severe renal failure which is fatal if treatment is delayed.

Moving house

Prepare, prepare, prepare! If you are planning on moving house, please read our factsheet before you begin.

Transport

Most cats find car trips quite stressful. They are fast and agile creatures who can easily evade and escape (even their loved ones) when frightened. Always transport your cat in a secure pet carrier to avoid the unthinkable.

Before placing your cat in it, ensure the carrier is undamaged. A strong or highly-stressed cat can force their way out of a broken or inferior quality carrier. Put some towels or familiar bedding in the carrier and spray it lightly with Feliway to help reduce your cat's stress.

Once your cat is in the carrier, place them on a car seat (never in the boot) and secure the carrier in place with a seat belt. This will keep your cat safely in place should you be involved in an accident. Place a towel over the carrier as the darkness will help your cat to relax. Pack spare towels in case the bedding becomes soiled.