

## Are you ready for a cat?

Cats are wonderful companions and they can bring many years of fun, joy and unconditional love to your home. But before you bring home a cat, there are some things you need to consider:

First, are you ready for a cat? Do you live in a place where cats are allowed? Can you afford the veterinary care your cat needs in order to stay healthy? Will your other animals and human housemates be able to tolerate a new cat? Are you willing to commit to a relationship that can last well over 10 years?

Second, what kind of cat do you want? Do you want a kitten or an adult cat? A male or a female? If you adopt a kitten, make sure he or she is at least 10 weeks old. Kittens are not fully weaned until they are 8 weeks old. A kitten younger than that will need a lot of extra help to grow healthy and strong.

Before you bring your cat home, make sure you have all the basics.

- You will need a litter box, cat litter, cat food and dishes for food and water. Avoid plastic dishes; they tend to get scratches that trap food particles and odours. Stainless steel or ceramic dishes are best.
- You will need a cat carrier to bring the cat home and for safe travel to vet appointments.
- Make sure you have a variety of toys for your cat to play with.
- You can buy a cat bed, too, but your cat will be quite content with a cardboard box lined with a pillow and a nice, soft fleece blanket.
- Find a veterinarian before you bring your cat home. Ask cat-owning friends or co-workers who their vet is and what they like about him or her. Visit the vet clinic yourself to check out the environment. If you call ahead, you may be able to talk to the veterinarian for a few minutes.

Once you bring your cat home, make an appointment with your vet for a checkup. This is a good chance for you to get to know the vet and for your vet to get to know your cat. Your vet is the second most important person in your cat's life, so it's very important that you feel good about your veterinarian and how he or she treats your cat. It's also important that you feel you can ask questions and get answers, and that your vet treats you well, too.

When it comes to veterinary treatment, there are two things you must do:

- 1) Get your cat vaccinated and have your cat spayed or neutered. This simple procedure will help you avoid unpleasant problems like urine spraying, fighting, roaming, yowling, calling of female cats in heat, and unwanted kittens. Unspayed female cats have an increased risk of cancer of the uterus and mammary glands.
- 2) Please don't have your cat declawed. Declawing is more than just "clipping the toenails." The whole first joint of each toe is amputated. It's like having the tips of all your fingers cut off. The recovery from the surgery is long and painful. Train your cat to use a scratching post and learn how to trim your cat's claws, and you will be able to avoid scratching-related problems.

Give your cat the highest quality food you can afford. Grain free wet food is the recommended diet for all cats as they are strictly carnivores. Good nutrition is the key to good health. Spend time with your cats. Cats are not the solitary creatures they were once thought to be. In order to be happy and healthy, they need companionship and love. Play with your cat a couple of times a day using a "thing on a string" toy. Move it around as if it's a mouse or an insect, and watch your Mighty Hunter massacre it again and again. Cuddle with your kitty and learn where he or she likes to be petted. There's nothing as heart-warming as the sound of a contented cat's purr.

Adopting a cat is a long-term commitment. The average lifespan of a well cared-for cat is 12 to 16 years. Once you adopt your cat friend, be prepared to consider your cat in everything you do. You will have to live in animal-friendly housing, be prepared to pay for unexpected medical costs, arrange for animal care if you go away on trips, and so on. But the rewards are well worth the effort.