

# 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](http://indoorpet.osu.edu)

When making changes, start with what is easiest!

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

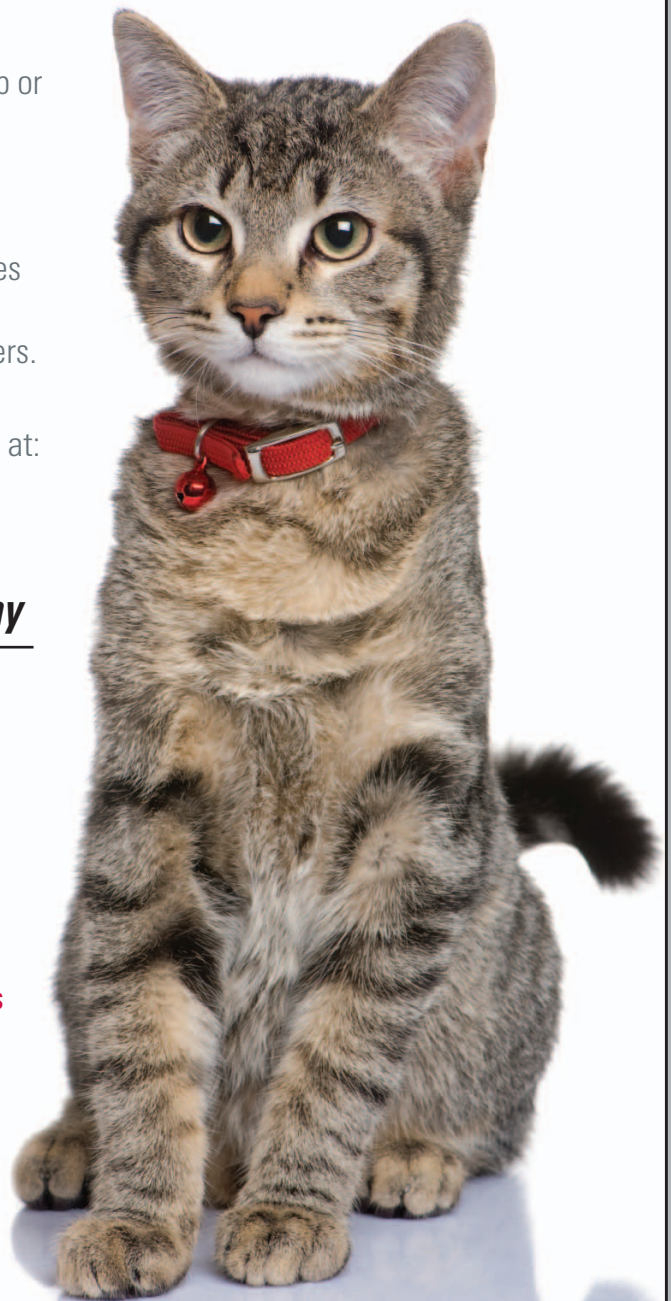


We developed this resource checklist to help you learn what indoor-housed cats need to enjoy their lives with you. Essential resources include:

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



[indoorpet.osu.edu](http://indoorpet.osu.edu)

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VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER



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

## 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](http://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!