

Cat Care



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This is by request. I have had multiple people ask me for advice in caring for their pets. So I am here to tell you what I know and think. Some of it is particular to cats; some of it isn't. My hope is that it will make the lives of at least a few little furries better.

Let's start with food. Cats are pretty low maintenance, which is just one reason we love them. All they really need is food and hugs. But most of them need much better food than they get. The primary thing I have learned over the years: never give them kibble! No dry food. You may think they like to crunch it and it keeps their teeth clean, but that's all just salesmanship. Over the longterm it is terrible for them, and here is why: it destroys their kidneys because they aren't used to drinking a lot of water. In the wild, cats drink very little water, and if you feed them wet food or people food (real meat) they hardly ever drink anything. But to process dry food, they would need to drink a lot of water. And they don't. So they end up being dehydrated all the time, which over the longterm is a death sentence. It doesn't matter if you always have water for them if they don't drink it, you see. You can't *make* them drink.

I learned this the hard way. I was buying the expensive organic dry food from my local Whole Foods clone, and my oldest cat started having major problems. No one could figure out the reason, including all the vets. But as soon as I switched him over to wet food, he got better. He is fine now.

OK, the second thing you need to know is that real meat is generally cheaper than catfood. Canned petfood is not cheap, if you price it by the pound. That is why they sell it in those tiny tins, so you don't do the math. And if you are avoiding Purina to buy Organix or one of the other premier brands, like me, it is even more expensive. It is actually cheaper to feed them real chicken. You can't give them organic chicken and keep the price down, of course. You have to give them the cheapest cuts, but they don't care. I buy the sale chicken, which is usually drumsticks or necks. You don't cook it, you just warm it up to body temperature (not with a microwave), so they aren't eating it ice cold. And you

don't cut it up, either. They need to chew it up. You can throw a whole drumstick on the floor and they will eat the whole thing, bone included. It is good for them. If your cat is old and has bad teeth, you can cut it up for him, but otherwise I advise against it.

Let me be clear: you not only don't need to cook it, you *shouldn't* cook it. If you cook it the bones get soft, and in that state they splinter differently. They can then lodge in your pet's throat, choking him. An animal is much more likely to choke on a cooked bone than an uncooked bone.

Another thing to know is that the meat doesn't have to be super fresh. If you have chicken that is starting to get stinky, so that you wouldn't eat it, cats won't mind at all. Dogs either. Their stomachs are much stronger than ours, and they don't get salmonella. The acids in their stomachs kill salmonella, I guess. In the wild they come back to carcasses for weeks. So don't throw that meat out, give it to your animals. If there is something really wrong with it, they will know. They can sniff it and know whether it is edible, unlike you.

I do have wet food in the cupboard, for times when I am out of chicken or otherwise don't feel like fooling with meat. But I never give them the cheap stuff. The brands that are available at my local store that I buy are Organix, Wellness, and I-and-Love-and-You. They are a bit better than the alternatives. Cats don't need grains, peas, pumpkins, soybeans, or anything like that. Basically you shouldn't feed them anything they wouldn't eat in the wild, and they are not eating pumpkins in the wild. If they need a bit of grass, they can eat that on their own.

It is also good to give your cats organ meats like livers and hearts. Most stores will have chicken livers and some will have hearts and other things. Limit liver to about a dime sized portion a day. They are eating mice and birds in the wild, not whole chickens, so you can overdo it on liver pretty fast. If your cat isn't eating any bones, you may need to mix in some bone meal with his wet food.

The natural remedy for intestinal worms is organic pumpkin seeds, ground up in a coffee grinder. Just add a thimble-full to wet food for a week. Stir it in really good or they will refuse it.

The natural remedy for fleas/mites in the ears is cider vinegar mixed with an oil like coconut or olive. The oil drowns the fleas or mites and they also hate the vinegar. You only put it on the outer ear, especially anywhere that is crusty. A little vinegar on the neck fur keeps bugs off their heads. The natural remedy for ticks is the same, but mostly you just have to pick them off by hand. Don't use collars or sprays or talcs, which are poisoned. You can also add cedar chips to their bedding, inside or outside. That helps a lot. It is much better than spraying your yard with some poison, which is bad for you, your kids, and your pets. Also bad for the birds, of course.

On a tangential issue, I also recommend you not rake the leaves in your yard. You don't really need to, since they rot into the ground naturally after a month or two, acting as fertilizer. No one rakes the leaves in the forest, and they do just fine out there. In fact, it is much better all round, since leaf cover promotes earthworms and other yummys for the birds to eat. Your yard will be richer and will then draw more wildlife. Wildlife likes wild yards with high grass and rough areas. The cats also like the cover, and they will hunt birds and mice out there. The more living things they eat the healthier they will be. No purchased food is as good for them as a mouse. Alfalfa grew naturally in my yard in Taos, and I was always fighting my landlord to leave it alone. With its purple flowers it was lovely and fragrant, and the cats loved to hide in it. But for some reason he was convinced it was an eyesore and that the city was going to come down on him for letting the yard go. To me it is just another sign of how uptight modern Americans are, not only in regard to their stupid lawns, but in regard to everything

else. They have to over-produce and over-manage everything, always fighting Nature but never working with her. My mantra is “just leave it alone”. It will be better without your stupid interference. People wonder how I have so much free time, and that is just another reason: I don't waste my time raking leaves or otherwise fighting Nature.

Any injuries should be disinfected, and I have found the best way is hydrogen peroxide for two minutes followed by a salt-water rinse. Same thing I use for myself. I use sea salt or Real salt, the full spectrum helps healing. Use sea water and you will heal twice as fast.

Now, I advise against vaccination and neutering for your pets. For the same reason I advise against vaccination and neutering for you. Vaccines are a scam, as you should know in 2022 if you didn't know in 2019. And attacking animals' reproductive organs is just gruesome and barbaric. It is immoral. You will say that intact animals cause problems. Yes, they do. It is called life. They make noise, they have sex, they fight. Humans do that, too, you know, but we don't lop them for it. Intact cats also have kittens, which are one of the great joys of life.

I will be told that won't work because we would soon be overrun by cats. In the country or small towns that isn't true: Nature still exists there and cat populations are checked by coyotes, owls, hawks, foxes, dogs, etc. As long as you let your cats out and they remain connected to Nature, Nature can check them. Only in the big cities is this a problem, and it may be that people just shouldn't have cats in big cities. If the only way you can have cats is by neutering them, I would say you shouldn't have cats. Or dogs, or anything else. That is exactly why gerbils make terrible pets, and if you have had gerbils, you know: without Nature that problem can't be solved, and you soon hit a deadend. It always ends in some horrible trainwreck, one we have to try to erase from our minds. To a lesser extent that same trainwreck happens with unfixed cats in cities, which is of course why people fix them. But it isn't much of a fix, I would say.

Better than letting some of them get eaten, you will say. But is it? I don't think so. Yes, if you don't neuter your animals you are going to have to come to terms with the fact that not all them are going to survive. Some of them are going to get taken. But that is just the way it is. And Nature has planned for it, since that is why cats have so many kittens. Cats are extremely fertile—with far larger litters than other predators—and that is precisely because they are small: Nature *knows* the rate of loss will be high. It HAS to be high.

At any rate, in most places the question is not as dire as you are made to think. The amount of handwringing is excessive on both sides. Until recently I was living in Taos, NM, as you may know: a town of about 7,000. I lived right in the middle of town with intact female cats with no problem. I had tons of kittens and almost nobody cared. It never made the papers or came up in town council. In fact, I spread more joy in Taos than anyone else, I dare say, due to those kittens I gave away. People at Cid's market, where I gave them away, were always asking me about new kittens or telling me stories about old ones. And no I wasn't giving them to snake breeders or dog baiters. I was vetting the owners and finding good homes for them. Not all of them lived, but not all of them were expected to live. As I say, that is how Nature works. I will tell you this: whatever lives they did live were lived outdoors under the glorious Sun and Moon, in complete freedom, with no collars, no leashes, no vaccination tags, no chips, and no surgeries. As far as possible, they lived the lives they were born as cats to live.

It is somewhat easier to have intact females than intact males. With intact females, about your only problem is a noisy traveling male occasionally and kittens. I had been told that females in heat were noisy and weird, but I didn't find that to be true. I never even noticed it, and it is because I let them out

whenever they wanted. They only get noisy and weird if they get trapped inside. If you don't see kittens as a problem, and I didn't, you don't really have any problems. You just have to find homes for them after you have had your fun, but it isn't that hard. In Taos turnover was pretty high due to the coyotes, so people always wanted kittens. The shelter ladies didn't like me since they saw me as competition, but that wasn't really true. We weren't competing since we had different clientele. They lopped and drugged their cats and kittens, so my people weren't interested in those pets. Those who came to me wanted natural kittens, and that is how I advertised them. When I was sitting outside the natural market with my basket of kittens on my bike, I had my sign that said

INTACT FREE-RANGE KITTENS

Organic
vaccine free
gluten free

People loved it, as you can imagine. I was a big hit with kids. Only a few clenched old ladies took exception to it, but I told them to bugger off.

Just so you know, it is best to keep the kittens with their mother for more than six weeks. Six weeks is a minimum time, but it is not really enough to ensure the most well-adjusted kittens. In my experience, the mother will not get tired of them until about 12-14 weeks, at which time she may begin to drive off the males. So you have a window from 8 to 14 weeks to find homes for them. After that they aren't quite as cute as they were, so it becomes harder. They are at maximum cuteness from four to ten weeks, after which they may start to get a little long and leggy.

I always gave out care pamphlets with my kittens, and most people appreciated that. It was just an abbreviated version of what you are reading now. I asked them what their living situation was and what their view on vaccination and neutering was. I wanted to be sure they didn't live on a busy street, have vicious dogs, or plan on cutting up my babies. I also didn't want them keeping them inside all the time. You will say maybe some of them lied to me, but life is not without risks. I cannot police the entire world. I can just do my best. And, as you know, I am pretty hard to lie to. I can usually spot a liar. I did refuse to give kittens to several people who gave me the creeps for various reasons. And I didn't have to tell them they were creepy. I just told them I had already promised the kitten to someone who was coming back, or something. That is what you call a white lie.

I also advise against going to the vet. Again, for the same reason I advise you to avoid going to the doctor or hospital: it is dangerous. Cats are more likely to be killed by the clinic than to die of whatever it is they have. The clinic will want to neuter and vaccinate and may get aggressive, even siccing the authorities on you or otherwise reporting you. Unless your cat is old, whatever is wrong with him is likely to solve itself within a few days. And for a lot of maladies the clinic's advice will be to drug your cat up. As with people doctors, veterinarians are in love with drugs. Drugs are a cash cow for them, and so are vaccines. The clinic is never going to recommend you use a holistic or natural approach, for instance, like pumpkin seeds for worms. They are going to go straight to powerful dewormers. Remember, animals in the wild sometimes suffer and there is no getting around it. In Taos fleas weren't a problem, but here in California my cats get their ear edges bitten for a couple of months in early summer. I try to limit that with my various salves, but in the end I can't totally solve that problem. It is just something they have to live through. They are far better off than the deer and turkey and rabbits that are all around us, eating our bushes: those wild beasts often look miserable from the various bugs. Yes, I could keep the cats indoors and use the various mainstream remedies, saving them from the itch. But I honestly think that is a *more* miserable life for them. I see others people's

cats sitting in the window all day, wishing they could go outside, and I won't keep my furries in jail. I know what my choice would be, and I think it is their choice as well.

One thing you can do to skirt the rules is collect old vaccination tags, and put them on your pets only when you travel or go to the vet. I have found that often keeps the authorities off your back. No one is going to actually read the tag or call it in, they just do a quick visual. And if the date is off by several years, that doesn't matter either: no one can tell how old a cat is, in most cases, not even a vet. A cat looks the same from 2 to 10.

I have seen it advised online that animals shouldn't sleep with you. Baloney. I always have at least one cat sleeping with me or sitting on me, and I never get fleas or ticks from them, though they are outside all day and night. The purring is great for you, calming you and resetting all your internal clocks. Their spit is magic as well, and I use it as medicine. If I have a spot that won't heal on my face, I get my cat to lick my finger and then put it right on the sore. It's better than sea water or human spit.

I said above that intact females are a bit easier to have in a town than males. This is because males are very territorial and will fight for females. They will fight even if they are fixed, but the intact males go to town. Right now I have two intact males, half-brothers from separate litters, both young, and I have to keep them separated. This isn't recommended, for good reason, and I will probably have to place one on a farm nearby. But since there are no intact females around here, my guys don't travel and get into trouble. So things aren't that difficult. It is manageable. Both of them love me to pieces (as I do them) and so they try to oblige me. I have a third male, a ten-year-old fixed guy that my ex saved from the shelter, but they don't fight with him. He is actually dominant over the biggest of my intact brothers, which is strange, since the younger guy would destroy him.

Anyway, though two of them are intact males, I can pick them all up and cuddle them endlessly, even turning them over on their backs—which is supposed to be a no-no. But if you get them used to it from a kitten, they learn to like it. My Thai cat rolls on the ground whenever I walk up to him, wanting me to rub his belly. The older male would ride around in my arms all day if he could. He hates to get down. They all squabble for the privilege of sitting in my lap when I am at my computer for hours. Most of these papers were written with a cat asleep in my lap, so I guess we can give some credit to Bastet, especially for ones like this.

Do I brush my cats' teeth? I do not. But I never feed them any people food except meat or eggs. So they never get any sugar or even starch. No bread. I see people letting their cats eat all kinds of garbage on Youtube, and like dogs they *will* eat things like that, especially cheese pizza or chips. But you shouldn't do it. That is what ruins their teeth, and yours. You have to brush your teeth not just because of the sugar you eat, but also because of the grains. The starches.

They also don't need milk or anything made from it like cheese. Most cats are lactose intolerant. Fish is OK, but only in moderation. Same reason you shouldn't eat too much of it: much of it is high in heavy metals like mercury. This is especially true of tuna, and somewhat less so of salmon. Something like wild trout is perfectly OK. Fish is mostly very good for them, since it is nutrient dense and high in good fats, but again, the toxins make it something they shouldn't eat very often.

Do I trim their claws? Nope, they need them. And yes, you can tell by looking at my hoodies, which are shredded on the shoulders by the older male, who can't stop clawing me. I live with it. I can buy more hoodies. I don't let them claw the furniture though. They get a loud voice command, which they understand. That is all the warning they get, and if they don't stop immediately they get tossed outside,

where they can sharpen their claws on the fencepost. They also get swatted occasionally, if they are really bad. I just cuff them on the nose or rump, but of course don't hurt them. They know what that means because it is what they do in the wild, to enforce their own discipline. Just watch lions with their cubs. Besides, cats, like all animals, are way tougher than we are. You may think you could destroy a cat with one punch, but you couldn't. In many cases, a cat would kick your ass, if it came down to it. You have probably watched the males fight: you wouldn't want to be a part of that. They are so fast it is just a blur.

Do I brush them? No, though two of them are longhaired. They take very good care of themselves. At the end of the summer I have to pick burrs from the young longhaired one who likes to roam through the bushes. The older longhaired one stays close to the house. But that and picking a few ticks is about all the grooming I have to do. In Taos I didn't even have to do that.

Raising kittens is a breeze as well, since the mother does all the work. All you need is a cardboard box. For a while I had two mamas, a mother and her daughter, and they were a bit jealous of one another. Or, the mother was jealous of the pretty daughter—just like people, you know. But they got along. I made them. The daughter wasn't as smart and I had to watch her when she was heavy. She might drop a kitten somewhere and leave it. I had to help her a bit. I would hear the kitten crying and would put her in the box with it. Then she would continue having her kittens and I would talk to her and pet her. She would calm down and the instincts would turn on. One time she dropped two of them on the front porch and when I found them they were already cold and barely breathing. I thought they were dead. But since they weren't stiff I took them in the kitchen and made a warm bath for them. They came back to life and were fine. She hadn't rejected them, she was just confused. Sometimes she tried to have them in my bed, and I would have to move them all down to the box.

Another time I remember she didn't know about licking their eyes open, when they were about two weeks old. One of them had heavy eye goop and his eye was stuck shut for a couple of days. I tried to tell her what to do, but she wasn't getting it, so I did it myself. I was worried that my spit wasn't as clean as hers, but it turned out alright: he didn't get an eye infection or anything.

Kittens are magnificent, not least of all because they are so trusting. Just think how you would react if this giant hairless beast with strange smells was invading your nest. But after a few days of uncertainty, they quickly take to you. If you pick them up when they are blind, in their first days, they cough a little, and it is clear they don't like you. Your smell and touch is hateful to them. But once they get used to your voice, they stop coughing at you. I think they also hear that mama is not scared of you, so their fear dissipates. By the time their eyes open you are already like a daddy, and by the time they can walk they will run out of the box to greet you. It is one of the sweetest things you will ever experience.