

Responsible cat ownership

Cats make fantastic pets, even when at times they have a mind of their own and treat their owners more like staff than masters!

However, it is important to have some rules to improve the welfare of your cat as well as to preserve our native wildlife.

Desex your cat

Pet cats should be desexed by six months of age, which is when they start to reach sexual maturity. The surgery is routine in both males and females and can be performed as day surgery at most vet hospitals. The cost of the surgery is heavily subsidised by vet hospitals to encourage pet owners to be responsible and go ahead with the procedure. There are many benefits including reduced fighting and spread of disease, less unwanted litters of kittens and reducing the feral cat population.

Microchip your cat

Microchipping is a legal requirement for all cats born after July 1999 and has saved many lives by reuniting lost cats with their owners. A microchip is not a tracking device. It is a barcode inserted just below the cat's skin. This can be easily scanned to reveal a number that can be entered into a database by vets and authorised council officers to reveal the owner's details. Cats have been known to travel long distances which can lead to disorientation, meaning they sometimes present in a bad state at the pound or vet hospital. A microchip enables cats that are lost or injured to be reunited with their owners.

I encourage all owners to

check their cat is registered with their local council (a separate process to micro-chipping) and that the correct details are listed. Don't wait until it's too late!

Vaccinate your cat

Cat flu can be caused by a herpes virus. This means if the virus is contracted, it can reappear at any time in your cat's life (often triggered by stress). It is a highly contagious disease and can cause death in young kittens with poor immune systems. Vaccinating protects not only your cat, but also other cats in the environment by reducing the ability of the virus to spread. This is known as herd immunity.

Keep your cat exclusively indoors from dusk till dawn

Most cat fights, road trauma and hunting of our native wildlife occurs after dark. So there are great benefits in a kitty curfew, both for the environment and your cat's safety.

This means that all cat owners need an indoor litter tray that can be easily accessed by your kitty overnight to prevent accidents. Cats will readily adapt to using a tray but there are a few simple rules to make it a desirable toilet for your cat:

- Use a large plastic litter tray without a lid or liner.
- Fill with at least 5-10cm of cat litter so your cat can dig.
- Provide one litter tray per cat, plus an extra one to



reduce the risk of spraying.

- Clean regularly with hot soapy water. Cats are very hygienic and like their human counterparts, they prefer a clean toilet.
- Place tray in an easily accessible yet private, quiet area.

Indoor cats can be happy too! Check out the *Indoor Cat Initiative* website at www.indoorpet.osu.edu/cats or type *Indoor Cat Initiative* into your search engine for ideas.

Consider an outdoor cat enclosure

Cats naturally like to roam and explore their environment and in doing so, can risk getting into fights or accidents. A cat enclosure that attaches to the house can allow them outdoor access without being able to wander off. There are a few companies that build amazing cat enclosures, for example www.catwalkcity.com.au and www.catmax.com.au.

Collar, tag and bell

Since cats with outdoor access wander beyond the fence line in most house-

holds, a collar, tag and bell immediately identifies the cat and the owner can be easily contacted. A bell can also reduce the cat's hunting success. Ensure the collar has elastic or a quick release function in case it gets caught on a tree branch.

Limit the number of cats in your household

It is generally not recommended to own more than three cats due to the substantially high risk of urine spraying and anxiety issues that arise from multi-cat households. Cats are highly territorial and do not like to be crowded by too many other cats. Too many cats in the one household can create stress and subsequent health problems such as bladder disease and behavioural issues.



VET TALK. By
Dr Gretta Howard
Veterinarian

Twitter: @DrGrettaVet

BVsc (Hons) (Uni. Syd), MVs (Sm. Anim. Prac.), MANZCVS (Sm. Anim. Med.), MRCVS