

Code of Practice
for the Welfare of

Cats



Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
Tel: 020 7238 6000
Website: www.defra.gov.uk

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Contents

Animal Welfare Act 2006

Introduction to the Code 1

The Code of Practice 1

Section 1: The need for a Suitable Environment 2
Making sure your cat has a suitable place to live

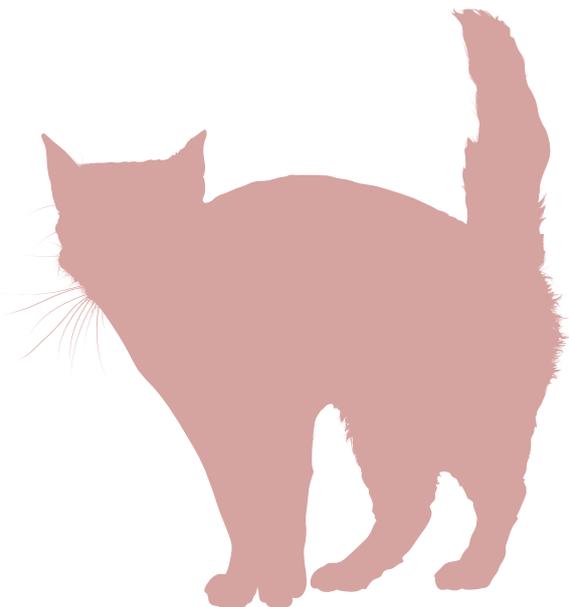
Section 2: The need for a Suitable Diet 3
Making sure your cat has a healthy diet

Section 3: The need to be able to Exhibit Normal Behaviour Patterns 4
Making sure your cat behaves normally

Section 4: The need it has to be Housed With, or Apart From, Other Animals 5
Making sure your cat has appropriate company

Section 5: The need to be Protected from Pain, Suffering, Injury and Disease 6
Making sure your cat stays healthy

Annex 1 – Sources of further information 8



Animal Welfare Act 2006

Introduction to the Code

This introduction, which is not part of the Code, tells you about the Code and provides advice on owning a cat.

Owning and caring for a cat can be a source of great enjoyment, but you should be aware that cat ownership is a major responsibility. Typically, cats live for about 14 years, but some live much longer than this. Consequently, you should think carefully about all factors that will affect your ability to care for a cat and whether a cat is suitable for you. Would you be able to provide for all of a cat's needs? You will need to consider the size and location of your property, and the financial and time implications of having a cat as a pet. Caring for a cat can be expensive and you should consider whether, for instance, you would be able to afford the cost of routine and unexpected veterinary treatment, or the cost of pet health insurance.

There is no one "perfect" way to care for all cats because every cat, and every situation, is different. It is up to you to find out what your cat's precise needs are and how to meet them. However, under Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the Act) you must take all reasonable steps to ensure that you meet the following needs that your cat has, which are set out in the Act as follows:

- (a) its need for a suitable environment;
- (b) its need for a suitable diet;
- (c) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- (d) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and
- (e) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Under the Act you are always responsible for your cat's needs. Furthermore, if you are a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 16 years old, you are responsible for any animal that child is in charge of or owns. If you are unable to care for

your cat at any time, you must make arrangements for another suitable person to look after it on your behalf. It is important to remember that you remain responsible for your cat's needs, even when you are away. The person with whom you leave your cat will also be legally responsible for your cat's welfare in your absence.

If you own, or are responsible for, a cat and fail to meet its welfare needs or cause it unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Act.

The Code of Practice

This Code of Practice (the Code) applies to all cats.

The purpose of this Code is to provide practical guidance to help owners of cats comply with the provisions of Section 9 of the Act. It does not tell you precisely how to care for a cat, but summarises important things you should consider when making decisions about how best to care for your cat.

Breach of a provision of this Code is not an offence in itself but, if proceedings are brought against you for an offence under Section 9 of the Act, the Court will look at whether or not you have complied with the Code in deciding whether you have committed an offence.

If you are unsure about anything to do with the care of your cat you should always seek advice from an expert. Throughout this Code the term "vet" will be used to refer to a veterinary surgeon. You will also find reference in the Code to "other suitably qualified cat care specialists". These are people who, through qualification and experience, can provide expert advice on cat welfare. Examples include veterinary nurses, animal behaviourists and staff at animal welfare organisations.

Other sources of information are listed in Annex 1. You can find out more about the Act and other legislation relating to cats at www.defra.gov.uk. You can find more advice and information on how to look after your pet, including how to get a pet passport, at www.direct.gov.uk.

Section 1: The need for a Suitable Environment

Making sure your cat has a suitable place to live.

What your cat needs

All cats, including those that live predominantly outdoors, need a safe and clean environment and protection from hazards. Some examples of hazards include household chemicals, poisonous plants and open windows or balconies in high buildings, which your cat might try to get out of.

All cats need a safe, comfortable place to rest undisturbed. Some cats, such as farm cats that live outdoors, need access to a safe shelter. Living in a cold or wet place, without shelter, can cause a cat to suffer. A cat must be able to avoid things that scare it, including other cats and they all need a place to hide where they feel safe. They often feel safest when high up. If unable to hide and avoid threats, your cat may suffer anxiety and chronic stress, which can lead to illness.

Cats are naturally curious. They are athletic animals and need opportunities to run, jump and climb. If a cat is bored, and does not have enough to do, it may suffer.

Cats are naturally clean animals and need regular, easy access to an appropriate place to go to the toilet. They do not like to use heavily soiled areas. Some cats need to use an indoor toilet area, for example a litter tray.

Cats are territorial and become very attached to places. They are naturally frightened of unfamiliar places and smells. For example, if you move your cat to a new home, it may be frightened by the presence of cats that have already established territories in the area.

What you should do:

- Provide your cat with a safe, comfortable, dry, draught-free, clean and quiet place where it can rest undisturbed.
- Take all reasonable steps to protect your cat from hazards indoors and outdoors.
- Make sure your cat has constant access to safe hiding places, where it can escape if it feels afraid.
- If your cat does not go outside, make sure it has plenty of activities to do and enough space to exercise, climb and play indoors.
- Your cat should be provided with a suitable toilet area, that is quiet and easily accessible.
- Before you move your cat, you should gradually get it used to a secure cat carrier. Putting familiar smelling items in the carrier and any place you move your cat to can help it feel at ease.
- If you have any concerns about moving to a new home, or transporting your cat, you should consult a vet or other suitably qualified cat care specialist.
- Make sure that any place you leave your cat is large enough to ensure at all times a comfortable area with effective ventilation and temperature control and that your cat is able to move around to ensure its comfort, avoiding becoming too hot or too cold.
- Do not leave your cat unattended in any situation, or for any period of time, that may cause it distress.

Section 2: The need for a Suitable Diet

Making sure your cat has a healthy diet.

What your cat needs

Cats need fresh drinking water at all times. Without water to drink a cat will become distressed and seriously ill.

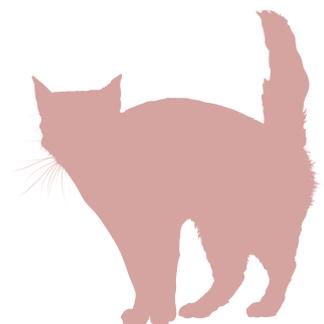
Cats need a well-balanced diet to stay fit and healthy, and they all need foodstuffs that can only be derived from meat-based products. Individual dietary needs depend on many factors including age, activity and state of health. Some cats have special dietary needs. For example, pregnant and nursing cats, young growing cats, old cats and cats that are ill.

Cats generally prefer to eat several small meals each day. How much food a cat needs depends on its age, the type of food, bodyweight and level of activity. If a cat eats more food than it needs, it will become overweight and may suffer. If you underfeed your cat, it will lose weight and may become ill. Healthy adult cats should maintain a stable body weight that is neither too thin nor too fat. Your vet can advise on the correct weight for your cat.

Many cats will not eat if their food is placed too close to their toilet site or something they are frightened of.

What you should do:

- Provide your cat with fresh clean drinking water at all times.
- Make sure your cat eats a balanced diet suitable for its individual needs.
- If you are uncertain of the diet your cat needs, take advice from your vet or other suitably qualified cat care specialist.
- Read, and be guided by, the feeding instructions relating to any cat foods you buy. Adjust how much you feed your cat to make sure it does not become underweight or overweight.
- Be aware that any change in the amount your cat eats or drinks may be a sign of ill health.
- Feed your cat every day, preferably splitting the daily ration into several small meals throughout the day, unless advised otherwise by your vet.
- Position your cat's food and water well away from the litter tray, or things that it finds frightening.
- Any changes to your cat's diet should be made gradually.



Section 3: The need to be able to Exhibit Normal Behaviour Patterns

Making sure your cat behaves normally.

What your cat needs

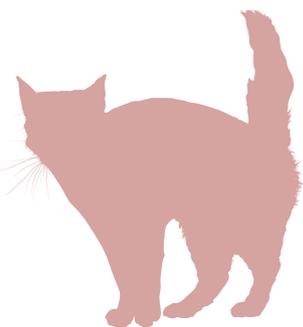
How a cat behaves depends on its age, personality and past experiences. Most cats are playful animals and enjoy socialising with people. Cats like to play with toys and those that do not go outside often play at hunting indoors. However, some cats, especially those that live outdoors, may be less sociable with people and other animals.

Cats sleep for many hours of the day, but when they are awake they need opportunities to exercise and play. Additionally, all cats need an appropriate scratching place, high enough to allow them to stretch out fully, to mark their territory and condition their claws.

Any change in behaviour may indicate that your cat is distressed and needs help. (You will find more information in section 5 of the Code.)

What you should do:

- You should ensure your cat receives enough mental, social and physical stimulation to satisfy its individual behavioural needs.
- Provide your cat with safe toys and regular opportunities to play with friendly people and by itself.
- Ensure that your cat is able to rest undisturbed when it wants to.
- Make sure your cat has opportunities to exercise each day to stay fit, happy and healthy. If your cat does not go outside, provide suitable indoor activities to keep it active.
- If you are unsure how much exercise is right for your cat, take advice from your vet or other suitably qualified cat care specialist.
- Provide your cat with somewhere to scratch, such as a sturdy scratching post.
- Make sure that your cat can reach all the things that it needs (e.g. bed, food, water, litter or outdoors) without having to get too close to things, people or other animals that may scare it.
- You should know how your cat behaves when fit, healthy and happy. If its behaviour changes or becomes a problem it could be distressed, bored, ill or injured and you should seek advice from a vet or other suitably qualified cat care specialist.
- Never shout at or punish your cat. It will not understand and will just become more nervous or scared.
- You should only use positive reward-based training, and avoid harsh, potentially painful, training methods.



Section 4: The need it has to be Housed With, or Apart From, Other Animals

Making sure your cat has appropriate company.

What your cat needs

Adult cats show variable degrees of sociability and although some cats may be friendly with other cats, usually those they have grown up with, others will prefer to be on their own. Cats that are friends generally groom and rub against each other and share the same bed. However, many cats are happier living without other cats and can be reluctant to accept new cats. A cat may suffer if it cannot avoid other cats it does not like. Introducing cats in a patient, careful way can increase their chances of living together happily. However, keeping too many cats together can result in a stressful and unhealthy environment, which may make it difficult for you to meet the individual needs of your animals.

Cats that are treated kindly from an early age usually learn to see people as friends. Socialisation with people, and other animals it is likely to come into contact with, is an essential part of early learning for a kitten. In early life, the more kittens get used to people, noises, objects and other animals, the less likely they are to find these frightening as adults. Unless introduced early in life, cats will usually be scared of other animals such as dogs.

What you should do:

- If your cat likes people, provide regular contact with them even when you are away.
- Before getting a second cat, think carefully how your existing cat will respond to company. Check that you will be able to look after each animal properly and seek advice on the best way to introduce the new cat into the home.
- If you have cats that are not friends, make sure they have the opportunity to avoid each other and that they can access everything they need (e.g. food, water, outside space, litter tray, rest area) without having to pass one another too closely.
- Do not force your cat to interact with people or animals that it does not like, and make sure it can avoid them.
- If more than one cat shares a living space, provide sufficient extra resources (e.g. toys, beds, litter trays and hiding places) and give them enough space so that they can get away from one another if they want to.
- When you are away, make sure your cat is properly cared for by a responsible person. When someone else is looking after your cat he or she also has a legal responsibility to ensure its welfare and you should ensure that the person understands its needs and any special requirements that it may have.
- Never leave your cat unsupervised with another animal or person who may harm or frighten it.
- Ensure that cats in your care are handled properly and are not stressed or endangered by other adults, children or animals.

Section 5: The need to be Protected from Pain, Suffering, Injury and Disease

Making sure your cat stays healthy.

What your cat needs

Cats feel pain and have similar pain thresholds to people. Individual cats show that they are in pain, frightened or suffering in different ways. For example, some cats may become withdrawn and hide or change their eating and drinking habits, whereas others become restless or aggressive. Others develop unwanted habits, such as spraying or not using the litter tray. Other signs that your cat may be suffering from long-term stress include high levels of grooming or pulling hair out, withdrawal and a hunched posture. Cats that are insecure or stressed for long periods are more likely to become unwell.

Cats, like us, benefit from regular health care. Long-haired cats and some others need help with grooming to avoid mats in the coat.

Cats are vulnerable to a range of infectious diseases and other illnesses. They need protection from serious infectious diseases, which can be provided by vaccination. Signs of illness include sudden changes in behaviour, such as restlessness and crying, or becoming quiet and withdrawn. Cats may stop grooming when ill and any changes in eating and drinking habits, such as lack of appetite or excessive drinking, may indicate problems. Changes in weight, either up or down should be investigated. Signs of injury include swellings, limping and evidence of pain, such as sensitivity to the touch. Other signs of illness include discharges from the eyes, ears or nose, difficulty with toilet behaviour, or sickness and diarrhoea. Cats that have eaten corrosive or poisonous substances often salivate excessively. This list is for guidance only and is not exhaustive.

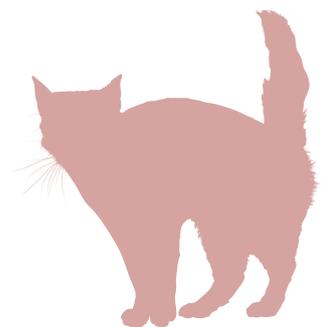
A cat which goes outside, and which can be easily identified (e.g. by microchip), is more likely to be reunited with its owner if injured or lost. It is thus more likely to receive the prompt veterinary treatment it needs if injured.

Many people choose not to breed their cat and, instead, have it neutered. Your vet can give advice about the age at which cats can be neutered and the health benefits of neutering. Un-neutered cats are more likely to fight, to catch some diseases as a result of fighting, and to be lost or run over whilst roaming. Cats frequently enter puberty at a very young age and unplanned early breeding may result in welfare problems. If you decide to breed your cat, your vet can give advice about the risks of inherited conditions that could affect the health of the kittens.

What you should do:

- Check your cat for signs of injury or illness regularly and make sure that someone else does this if you are away. You should examine your cat closely, including its coat, which should also be checked for parasites such as fleas.
- If you notice changes in your cat's behaviour, you should contact your vet and follow the advice you are given.
- If you suspect that your cat is in pain, ill or injured contact a vet promptly and follow veterinary advice regarding its treatment.
- Try to minimise fear and stress in your cat's daily life. By doing so you will decrease its risk of certain illnesses.

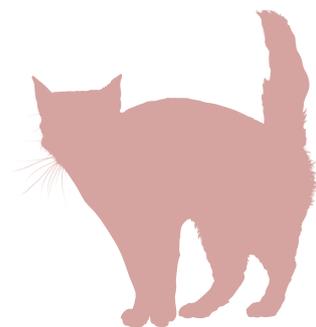
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- You should take the advice of your vet on how often your cat needs a health check and about the things that you can do to protect your cat's health.
 - Your vet is the best person to advise you about routine preventive health care, such as vaccination, neutering and treatments to control parasites (e.g. fleas and worms), as well as how to deal with any current health problems your cat may have. You should follow the advice you are given.
 - Make sure that you groom your cat without causing distress if it needs help with the care of its coat. If you are uncertain, ask your vet about grooming your cat and how often you should do this.
 - Only use medicines and drugs that have been prescribed for your individual cat. Human products and medicines intended for other animals can be dangerous to cats and sometimes fatal.
 - You should always contact your vet immediately if you are concerned that your cat has come into contact with any chemical or other substance that could be harmful. You should also be aware that cats regularly groom themselves and may ingest or come into contact with a poisonous substance when doing so.
 - Make sure your cat can be identified so that it can be treated quickly if injured when away from home, or returned to you if lost. Make sure any collars fit properly and are not harmful. If using a microchip as a form of identification, remember to keep the microchip database up to date with any changes in your contact details.
 - Seek the advice of a vet before allowing your cat to breed. You should take all reasonable steps to ensure that you will be able to find homes for kittens.



ANNEX 1:

Sources of further information

- Your vet. You can contact the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to find details of vets in your area. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF: rcvs.org.uk – the website has a “find-a-vet” facility.
- Local libraries and bookshops for up to date books on cat care.
- Websites such as:
 - Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour: www.asab.nottingham.ac.uk
 - Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors: www.apbc.org.uk
 - Blue Cross: www.bluecross.org.uk
 - British Veterinary Association Animal Welfare Foundation: www.bva-awf.org.uk
 - Cats Protection: www.cats.org.uk
 - Defra and Directgov websites: www.defra.gov.uk and www.direct.gov.uk have information on the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) and copies of the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats.
 - Feline Advisory Bureau: www.fabcats.org
 - PDSA: Peoples Dispensary for Sick Animals: www.pdsa.org.uk
 - Pet Care Trust: www.petcare.org.uk
 - Pet Food Manufacturers Association: www.pfma.org.uk
 - Pet Health Council: www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk
 - Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: www.rspca.org.uk
 - The Cat Group: www.thecatgroup.org.uk





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