



HAPPY INDOOR

# CATS



3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

**IF YOU ARE THINKING OF GETTING A CAT, OR ALREADY HAVE ONE,  
THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW...**

## CATS AS COMPANIONS

**B**ringing a pet into your life is an important decision that involves a lifelong commitment to the animal's well-being. Pets provide companionship and entertainment, but they also require time, money and compassion, so please make sure you are prepared for the responsibility. Cats can live up to 15 years or more.

Humane Society and SPCA animal shelters are the best place to adopt a cat. Most animal shelters (unfortunately) have an endless supply of cats and kittens waiting for a new home with responsible owners. The adoption fee usually includes vaccinations, a health check, a tattoo or microchip identification and sometimes the cost of spay or neuter surgery (something that is strongly recommended for your cat). A microchip is an electronic transponder the size of a grain of rice that is injected just under the animal's skin. The information contained in the chip is held in a database that can be accessed by calling a toll-free telephone number to locate the owner should the pet become lost outside.



*Mugsy, photo by Don Sherriff*

When you first bring your cat home don't be surprised if she hides under the couch for several days; cats often take a while to adjust to their new surroundings. They need time to stake the place out and get to know their new housemates, both human and non-human. You may consider adopting two compatible cats as they will provide great company for each other.

## SOME STATISTICS

- ❖ 52% of Canadians own pets<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Of these pet owners, 49% have cats<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Over 50,000 cats are euthanized in Canadian animal shelters every year<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ 43% of cats that come into animal shelters are

euthanized<sup>2</sup>

- ❖ Fewer than 4% of cats in shelters are reclaimed by their owners<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ The average lifespan of cats that roam free outside is 2-5 years<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ The average lifespan of indoor cats is 12.5 years<sup>3</sup>

## WHY INDOOR CATS?

Unfortunately, too many cat owners think it's best for their beloved Whiskers to prowl the neighbourhood making good use of her nine lives. However, with all the risks faced by outdoor cats, she's playing Russian roulette out there. Some of the dangers that outdoor cats face are:

- ❖ vehicles
- ❖ unfriendly dogs
- ❖ predators such as coyotes and raccoons
- ❖ other cats defending their territory
- ❖ angry neighbours who dislike cats digging and defecating in their garden
- ❖ diseases such as feline leukemia or immunodeficiency viruses
- ❖ fleas, ticks and other parasites

**Another informative resource from the CFHS!**



FACTSHEET

HAPPY INDOOR  
CATS

3<sup>rd</sup> Edition



A factsheet produced by the  
Canadian Federation  
of Humane Societies

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*The Canadian Federation  
of Humane Societies is a  
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and individuals whose  
purpose is to promote  
compassion and humane  
treatment for all animals.*

Program Director  
Shelagh MacDonald

Chief Executive Officer  
Steve Carroll

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**Canadian Federation  
of Humane Societies**

30 Concourse Gate, Suite 102  
Ottawa, Ontario K2E 7V7  
Tel: (613) 224-8072  
Fax: (613) 723-0252  
Toll Free: 1-888-678-CFHS  
e-mail: [info@cfhs.ca](mailto:info@cfhs.ca)  
Website: [www.cfhs.ca](http://www.cfhs.ca)

- ❖ sickness from eating garbage or other contaminated morsels
- ❖ harsh weather that can cause frostbite in winter or dehydration in summer
- ❖ getting lost

Another reason to keep your



*Baby & Kiki, photo by Krisztina Kozma*

cat indoors is to stop her from killing wild animals, particularly birds. Several studies suggest that domestic cats kill millions of songbirds every year. Besides, your neighbours will appreciate not having Whiskers traipsing through or relieving herself in their gardens or children's sandboxes.

Indoor cats live longer, are healthier and suffer fewer injuries and health complications than outdoor cats.

**BUT WILL WHISKERS BE  
HAPPY INSIDE?**

With just a little effort on your part, Whiskers can have everything she needs to be safe, happy and fulfilled indoors.

Think of bringing a little of the outdoor experience inside. This should include opportunities for play, rest, scratching, fresh air, outdoor viewing and companion-

ship.

Here are some tips to help your cat enjoy the great indoors:

❖ Have your cat spayed or neutered, preferably before he or she is six months old. This will reduce the risk of several health problems, minimize offensive spraying or other territorial behaviour and prevent your cat from contributing to the tragic problem of pet overpopulation. There is no reason not to spay or neuter your cat.

❖ Trim your cat's claws every few weeks. (Your veterinarian can show you how.) This will reduce her need to scratch and the potential for damage to your furniture. Scratching is a natural behaviour that cats perform to sharpen their claws, stretch their front limbs and mark their territory from glands on the bottom of their paws.

❖ Provide scratching boxes or posts that are acceptable to your cat. Stability is important to make sure Whiskers doesn't choose the solid, sturdy couch instead. Some cats are horizontal scratchers while others prefer to scratch vertically so you will need to provide the appropriate scratching places. Many cats prefer a rough surface such as sisal rope or natural wood. Entice your cat to use the designated places by sprinkling them with catnip.

❖ The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies and many veterinarians oppose declawing



as it can be a painful procedure that can cause ongoing discomfort and robs the cat of a natural defence. It should only be considered if all other options have been exhausted and it is the only alternative to euthanasia.

🐾 Cats love to perch up high and observe the world outside from a sofa by the window, a ledge attached to the windowsill, or a cat tree with perches. (Plans to make a cat tree are available on the CFHS website.) A bird feeder outside the window will provide hours of entertainment.

🐾 Supply toys that will appeal to your cat's hunting and stalking instincts. Simple items such as ping pong balls, crumpled balls of paper, or toys hanging on a string can make for great games of 'chase and pounce.' Do not leave string lying around as cats will eat it, possibly causing them serious harm. Rotate different toys to provide a variety of stimulation. Be sure you make time to play some of the games with your companion too.

🐾 Consider adding a second cat for company, especially if you work long hours. Depending on the age and personality of your cat, a buddy could be just what she needs to put some spark in her life. Keep the new cat separated from Whiskers for a few days to allow the newcomer to adjust to the new surroundings. Allow the cats to smell, hear and see each other from a distance or through a barrier before letting them get too close. Supervise their

interactions for a few days to make sure everything is going well.

🐾 A screened porch or enclosed balcony provides a perfect haven



Fogo, photo by R.E. Blake

for your cat to get fresh air in a safe environment. Cats will jump off balconies, so make sure it is properly enclosed with screening to prevent your cat from escaping.

🐾 Enclosing your backyard or a portion of it is a great way for Whiskers to spend time outdoors. But make sure she can't climb or squeeze out.

🐾 If you have the patience, you may want to try harness-training your cat. This will be easier if you begin when your cat is young. Allow the cat to get used to the harness by wearing it for a few hours every day before taking her outside. Stay close to your cat and away from traffic or other loud noises. Be prepared to dawdle and don't pull on the leash or the cat will simply lie down. Do not leave your cat tied outside on a leash unattended.

🐾 Clean the litter box every day. You should have one litter box per household cat.

🐾 You may consider bringing a little of the outside in by growing grass in a large pot as cats love the sweet taste of young grass. Most pet stores carry kits for growing kitty grass.

## **MAKING THE TRANSITION**

The easiest way to raise a cat as an indoor cat is to keep her inside from the time she is a kitten. Cats that have never been outside are generally quite happy to stay in the comfort of their indoor castle. However, if your cat has been out playing Russian roulette already, it will take a little patience and effort on your part to convince her that staying indoors is a good idea. Just as Rover would rather go tearing around the neighbourhood if given the chance, so would Whiskers. But most dog owners know this is not in the best interest of their pet. Cat owners are slowly beginning to realize this too.

The easiest time to make the transition is in late fall when the outside world isn't so enticing anyway. Make sure you have implemented as many of the above suggestions as possible. You must realize that your cat is not likely to buy into the arrangement at first and you will have to turn a deaf ear to her persistent pleas for the door to be opened. Remember you are giving your cat the gift of a longer, healthier life.

Once you have decided to make your cat an indoor cat you must



be consistent. Letting her out once in a while will only prolong the difficult stage. Make an effort to spend more time playing and interacting with her. Keeping your cat indoors gives you an opportunity to spend more quality time with her and to appreciate her unique characteristics.

### **OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS**

All cats should visit their veterinarian annually for a complete health check-up and to receive vaccinations to prevent common feline diseases. Many of these diseases are airborne so indoor cats need protection too.

Identification is another important aspect of responsible pet ownership, just in case your cat finds herself loose outside. Without a tag and permanent identification such as a microchip or tattoo, the chances of Whiskers finding her way home are remote. An increasing number of Canadian municipalities have bylaws requiring cats to be identified and prohibiting them from roaming loose outside.

Cats have been domesticated for hundreds of generations as companions to humans. Since they are no longer wild animals, they need our care and protection. In return they provide us entertainment, company and can even improve our health. So please take the time to understand them, love them and appreciate them and you will be rewarded for many years.

### **REFERENCES**

- <sup>1</sup> COMPAS Inc. (Survey sponsored by Ralston Purina Canada Inc.), March 1995
- <sup>2</sup> Canadian Federation of Humane Societies national animal shelter statistics, 2004
- <sup>3</sup> Gina Parsons, "The Inside Story," *Animals magazine*, (Massachusetts SPCA, September/October, 1996), pp. 24-27.

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## **MORE PUBLICATIONS FROM CFHS...**

Other publications available from the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies:

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  - Squirrels
  - Skunks
  - Mice & Rats
  - Pigeons
- 🐾 Giving Your Cat a Safe and Happy Home



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- Living With Companion Budgerigars
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Canadian Federation of Humane Societies  
102-30 Concourse Gate Ottawa, Ontario K2E 7V7  
1-888-678-CFHS (fax)613-723-0252 info@cfhs.ca

[www.cfhs.ca](http://www.cfhs.ca)