



## Keeping Your Cats Safe



Cats are America's most popular pets, but they are also the pets most likely to die prematurely from diseases, poisons, attacks by other animals, abuse by humans, or speeding vehicles. The reason is simple: Owners often don't realize that allowing their cat to roam outdoors can be a one-way ticket to trouble. Approximately 5 million to 7 million companion animals enter animal shelters nationwide every year, and approximately 3 million to 4 million are euthanized (70 percent of cats). Of these, less than 2 percent of cats are returned to their owners. Most of these were identified with tags, tattoos, or microchips. Only 10 percent of the animals received by shelters have been spayed or neutered. About 75 percent of owned pets are neutered. To help keep your cats safe, please keep them inside your home and please spay or neuter them. This is why.

### Why Keep Your Cat Inside Your Home

Millions of cats suffer and die because their owners give them free reign to roam the neighborhood. The vast majority of these owners aren't cruel or thoughtless; many love their animals as much as the rest of us. They just believe that cats are happiest outdoors. In fact, many cat caregivers acquired their felines by "taking in" or caring for someone's cat who was allowed to stray.

#### A Dangerous Tradeoff

When cats are left outside unsupervised, their freedom to roam comes at a cost because they have a vastly increased chance of being injured, becoming ill, or even dying. The estimated average life span of a free-roaming cat is less than three years—compared to 15–18 years for the average indoor-only cat. Even the cat who only occasionally ventures outdoors unsupervised can fall victim to automobiles, predators, disease, and other hazards. In fact, two out of three veterinarians recommend keeping cats indoors, most often citing dangers from vehicles and disease. Some communities are adopting ordinances aimed at encouraging owners to confine their cats—just as they do their dogs.

#### Home Is the Best Habitat

Cats sleep approximately 70% of the time and given the proper space, can entertain themselves with windows to look out, scratching posts, toys, and other pets in your home. There are lots of things that you and your cat can do together for fun – playing, grooming, snuggling, etc. You will have longer to enjoy one another if you keep your cat safely confined in his natural habitat: the home you share.

### Why Spay or Neuter Your Cat

Removing the reproductive organs of a male or female animal is called neutering. Specifically, the procedure for females is called spaying. The procedure for males is called castration, but is also loosely referred to as neutering. Kittens may be spayed or neutered when they are as young as 2 to 4 months old. Although the obvious benefit of spaying and neutering is prevention of accidental, unwanted pregnancies and litters, these procedures can benefit pets and owners in other ways as well. The Friends offer low cost feline spay and neuter vouchers at the start of each year. See Service on our web site.

#### Physical and Behavior Benefits of Spaying

Most female cats become sexually mature around 6 to 9 months of age. Spaying a cat before her first estrus cycle (or "heat") substantially reduces her chance of developing ovarian or uterine cancer. Spaying early may also reduce her risk of developing breast cancer (the second most common malignancy in pets). In addition, spayed pets will not develop pyometra (an infection in the uterus), which can be life threatening and require emergency surgery. Pyometra is common in older, unspayed females. Pregnancies that occur when females are very young can adversely affect their health and the health of their offspring. Behavior also benefits from spaying. During the stage of the heat cycle when females are receptive to males, they may attempt to escape from the house or they may attract unwelcome male suitors. Females may also begin marking their territory with urine, especially if there are other pets (male or female) in the household or immediate neighborhood. Female cats in heat may pace incessantly and engage in plaintive meowing. Spaying your female can help prevent many of these undesirable behaviors.

#### Physical and Behavioral Benefits of Neutering

Male cats usually become sexually mature between 4 and 7 months of age. Neutering substantially reduces the chance of males developing testicular cancer and can help prevent development of perianal tumors and some diseases of the prostate. As males mature, they become increasingly protective of their territory. Undesirable behaviors associated with territorial protection include aggression toward other animals (particularly males) that enter a male's self-established territorial boundaries and urine marking of those boundaries. Fights caused by territorial aggression often result in severe injury to one or both animals involved. Stains and odors resulting from urine sprayed on walls, carpets, and furniture can be difficult to impossible to remove. Intact (unneutered) males will also actively seek out receptive females, which means that roaming and escape are potential problems. Research has shown that neutering may prevent or effect positive changes in all of these behaviors.

**NOTE:** We have additional detailed information available on many of the above topics and more. Copies are available online, [www.Dearborn-Animals.org](http://www.Dearborn-Animals.org), or at the Shelter. Please feel free to call *Friends For the Dearborn Animal Shelter* with any questions you may have about your new cat/kitten at (313) 943-2697.