
Guide to Your New Cat



Macleon Animal
Adoption Center
Enhancing compassion through education

About the Maclean Animal Adoption Center

The Maclean Animal Adoption Center was formed in 2002 as a non-profit 501(c)(3). Our mission is **fostering a caring community for animals by**

- **providing shelter,**
- **advancing animal welfare,**
- **promoting the bond between animals and humans through innovative programs, education and service.**

The Maclean Animal Adoption Center is designed as a community building with significant space dedicated for the use of educational programming. Improved animal welfare is dependent on availability of resources and quality instruction. Education is the cornerstone of the Maclean Animal Adoption Center. Our services and educational programming afford citizens the opportunity to obtain the information and comprehensive instruction necessary to make a positive contribution to current and future animal welfare within North Central Montana.

“To educate our people, and especially our children, to humane attitudes and actions toward living things is to preserve and strengthen our national heritage and the moral values we champion in the world.” ~John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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Need Help With Your New Pet?

If you need help with understanding and resolving problems with your cat, give us a call. One of our Animal Help Desk staff or volunteers will be happy to help. Call us at (406) 727-7387 and we will get back to you within 48 hours. If you need urgent medical assistance, call your veterinarian immediately.

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Thank You!

Thank you for adopting your new cat from the Maclean Animal Adoption Center. Not only have you saved a life, but you are about to embark on one of the most rewarding personal experiences—sharing your life with a cat!

There are 86 million pet cats in the United States and now that you have adopted a cat from the Maclean Animal Adoption Center, you've made it 86 million plus one. Once you've outfitted yourself with some basic supplies and a little helpful advice, you'll see how rewarding it can be to live with one of these wonderful animals, the pet of choice since 3500 BC.

What You'll Need

- Cat food
- Food dish
- Water dish
- Scratching post
- Cat bed
- Cat toys
- Cat brush
- Cat carrier
- Catnip (optional)
- Litter
- Litter box
- Litter scoop

Getting Acquainted

Cats have a well-earned reputation for being curious, independent, and sensitive. They are so sensitive to their surroundings, in fact, that they require a great deal of adjustment to new environments. You can do a lot to help your cat companion feel secure in his or her new home.

Your Cat's New Home. Keep the cat in the carrier until you have brought the carrier into a quiet room where the cat can be confined for a day or two. Ideally, this should be a room the cat will have access to in the future, as well. Kittens adjust very quickly and generally do not need to be confined. This will be your cat's "safe" room. Have a litter box prepared in that room, as well as a scratching post and bowls of food and water.

If you want your cat to feel especially at home, purchase (or make) a cozy cat bed ahead of time and place it in the safe

room. Be sure all windows and doors in your house are closed, loose electrical cords have been secured, and any spaces behind appliances or large pieces of furniture are blocked off.

Once in the safe room, open the carrier and let the cat come out in his or her own time. Keep noise and bustle in your house to a minimum while the cat orients herself.

Stay quietly in the room while the cat explores. Offer attention and gentle stroking if she seems to want it. If your cat prefers to hide under the bed or in some other quiet spot, it's best to let him stay there until he decides to come out on his own.

It's usually best to keep the door to the room closed for a couple of days while the new kitty adjusts, especially if there are other animals in the house. If you have other pets, you can help your current animals adjust to the newcomer by bringing the cat carrier out of the safe room and allowing them to sniff it.

If you don't have other pets, it's alright to leave the door to the cat's room slightly open when you leave, but don't be surprised if your cat stays in one spot for several days before going exploring.



Hiding. Hiding is normal. Some cats spend their first few days, weeks, or even months in a new home in hiding, usually under beds or in closets. Hiding is how some cats adjust to their new environment and it does not mean that the cat is unaffectionate, unsocial or sick.

Few cats can repress their curiosity enough to stay under a bed for more than a few days, but if your cat requires more hiding time, make sure she's getting food and water and is getting out at some point to use the litter box.

Do not attempt to forcibly pull or drive a cat out from a hiding place, since this will only intensify her fears and make her adjustment harder.

Kids and Cats

Adult supervision when children are interacting with cats is very important, especially when you do not know the cat's prior history with children. However, there is no reason why young children and cats cannot be the best of friends, as long as your kids understand some simple facts about cat behavior.

Read the below section "How to Meet and Greet a Cat" aloud to your children and discuss it with them. Keep in mind these important reminders:

- Cats don't like to be squeezed, picked up by the neck or have their tails pulled. Some cats don't like to be picked up at all.
- Cats are sensitive to loud noises and sudden movements and will feel threatened if they are chased or lunged at.
- Some cats do not like to be disturbed while they are eating.
- Most cats do like to be scratched gently under their chins or behind their ears and they enjoy having their coats brushed.

How to Meet and Greet a Cat. Cats sometimes feel threatened, over stimulated, or nervous when someone new approaches them; in an attempt to try and make your introduction go smoothly, always approach a cat slowly and politely. Here are the steps to follow:

- Talk to the cat first. Cats are soothed by quiet, gentle voices.
- Sit down and wait for the cat to come to you.
- Hold out your hand slowly for the cat to sniff.
- See if the cat will let you scratch him gently under the chin.
- Don't pet the cat's tummy, since this is threatening to many cats.

Even a friendly cat will scratch or nip when anxious or over stimulated, so it is important to recognize when a cat is irritated. Most cats will give you "signals" if they have had enough.

The signs of irritation to watch for include a hiss or long, drawn-out meow, flattened ears, wide open eyes, and/or a twitching tail. Also, watch out if the cat refuses to make eye contact, tightens or flattens his body, walks away, or refuses to sniff your hand. If you notice any of these signals, stop and give the cat some space.

Introducing Your New Cat to Other Pets

Pets enjoy each other's company. A pet with a playmate can

get more exercise, stimulation, and companionship. But sometimes it takes a while for them to realize the wonderful advantages they're about to enjoy.

If you have other cats or a dog living with you, it is best to keep the new cat confined in the safe room for a few days while your established pets get used to his smell and vice versa.

Remember, your established pets can experience jealousy and other complex emotions. Be careful not to neglect your old friends in your excitement over the new cat. Nothing will irritate them more than seeing all the hugs and attention that they are used to getting being lavished on a newcomer. Tip the scales of treats and praise in favor of the established pets.

Feeding all the animals before the introduction can put everyone in a more relaxed mood.

Introducing a Cat to Other Cats. When you bring cats together for the first time, it is best to choose a day when you can be around the house, encouraging friendly behavior with praise and affection.

The very best way to introduce a cat to other cats is to do it gradually over the course of a few days.

While the new cat is secure in his or her safe room, start by showing the resident cat (or cats) the new cat's carrier or bedding that the she has been sleeping on. Likewise, allow the new cat to check out items that your other cat or cats play with or sleep on.

Next, switch their spaces, allowing the new cat out into a room the other cats usually frequent. While the new cat is exploring the established cats' turf, let your other cats sniff around the new cat's room.

It sometimes helps to put the new cat in the carrier or a wire crate and let the other kitties inspect the newcomer through the carrier.

Another strategy is to encourage the cats to interact by playing under the door or by allowing them to see each other from a distance.

The last step is supervised time together. You'll want to keep an eye on the cats the first few times they are alone together.

If they hiss a bit or do not hit it off right away, don't be discouraged. Over time, the cats will work things out. If they become aggressive, just give them a bit of time apart and try again in a day or two.

Introducing a Cat to a Dog. A dog meeting a new cat should always be leashed. You will need to carefully supervise the first

encounters and watch your dog closely for signs of aggressive behavior toward the cat. Curiosity is normal, but a dog that lunges at a cat is not safe to be off-leash with the cat.

If your dog gets along well with the cat, but the cat shows you that she's feeling threatened during this experience, let her retreat to her safe room until she's willing to try again.

The very best way to introduce a cat to dogs is to do it gradually over the course of a few days. If you have more than one dog, introduce the dogs one at a time so you don't overwhelm the cat. While the cat is secure in his or her safe room, start by showing the dog the cat's carrier or bed-ding that the cat has been sleeping on. Likewise, allow the cat to check out items that the dog plays with or sleeps on.

Next, switch their spaces, allowing the cat out into the area the dog usually resides in. While the cat is exploring the dog's turf, let the dog sniff around the cat's room.



Then you can put the cat in the carrier and the dog on a leash and allow them to see each other. It is important to keep the dog under control at all times and not allow him to overwhelm the cat by rushing up to the carrier.

The last step is a supervised meeting with the dog leashed and under control at all times and the cat out of the carrier. Go slowly and take your time. It is important that the cat not feel threatened by the dog and it is equally important that the dog learn to accept the cat as part of the family or pack.

Until you know that they are getting along well, never leave the new cat alone with the dog in the same space without supervision. Remember: Feeding the animals before these meetings can put everyone in a more relaxed mood.



Kitty Colds

Most cats find change to be stressful. The experience of living in a shelter is stressful for cats and, while your new cat is no doubt happy to have a home, he or she may experience even this positive change as stressful.

Stress lowers our immune system response and it's the same for cats. It's not uncommon for a kitty to develop a cold or upper respiratory infection while in the shelter. If your cat starts sneezing, just observe how he is doing. If nasal or eye discharge is clear, then your cat will probably recover on her own in a few days. If the discharge becomes yellow or green, contact your veterinarian.

Be sure your cat is eating. Cats should not go for more than two days without eating. If your cat is passing over the food, try offering fish-flavored canned cat food to tempt her to eat.

Care and Feeding

You may have heard that cats are finicky creatures. But in reality, cats require very little to be healthy and happy pets.

Feeding Your Cat. We recommend a high- quality (premium grade) cat food. Have fresh water available all the time. Feed kittens less than six months old at least three times a day; kittens who are six months to a year old should be fed twice daily. Feed adult cats twice a day.

See the Humane Society of the United States website for a listing of foods and other substances that can be dangerous for cats (www.humanesociety.org; Foods that can be Poisonous to

Pets, Common Household Dangers for Pets). Call your veterinarian immediately if your cat has eaten something dangerous.

Training Your Cat to Use a Litter Box. Once your cat has gotten used to your house and is no longer retreating to her safe room, the litter box can be placed permanently elsewhere in the house. Litter boxes must be kept clean, so be sure to clean the cat's litter box at least once per day; the litter should be changed weekly.

Cats are extremely tidy creatures and would rather go to the bathroom on almost any clean surface than eliminate in a dirty litter box. If the litter box is kept clean, your cat should use the box without the need for training. If your cat is not using the litter box or stops using it, and the litter box is being kept clean, refer to the section "Unhappy Cats" for more information and helpful hints.

Spaying or Neutering Your Cat. If all cat lovers spayed/neutered their cats, we wouldn't have so many homeless cats and kittens in our shelter every year. There is no truth to the myth that having a litter of kittens mellows a cat's disposition or that spay/neuter causes cats to become overweight and lazy.

In fact, altering a cat reduces the risk of urinary problems and cancer later in life, curbs the cat's compulsion to roam and mark territory by spraying urine, and makes them generally better behaved with small children and other pets.

Most cats adopted from the Maclean Animal Adoption Center have already been spayed or neutered. If your cat has not, you will be required to pay a deposit and make an appointment for spay/neuter surgery. If you are unable to afford this, the Maclean Animal Adoption Center may have low-cost opportunities to provide financial assistance.

Letting Your Cat Outside

There is a big debate in the animal welfare community about whether cats should be kept indoors at all times. On one side, an indoor cat is less likely to get lost, injured, or killed. On the other side, if you live in a safe area, the great outdoors may improve your cat's happiness. An indoor cat obviously faces less hazards but it is up to you to use your common sense to do what is right for your cat.

If you are going to let your cat outdoors, wait approximately two weeks to allow the cat to get oriented and to get used to the sights and smells of his home. If you let the cat go outside right away, he is likely to wander off and get lost.

Be sure your cat has been microchipped before you let her outside. Also, your cat should wear a break-away or elastic safety collar designed for cats that has your contact information on it.

Two notes of caution: 1) Declawed cats should never be allowed outdoors since they cannot protect themselves or climb to escape predators, and, 2) Unaltered cats should never be allowed outdoors because of the extreme cat overpopulation problem.

Keep in mind that a rambunctious cat can be perfectly happy kept indoors as long as he gets plenty of attention and exercise. Take time to play with your cat every day. Other suggestions: Plant some catnip in a small pot and let your cat nibble on it. Buy or make some cat toys and experiment with a variety of toys to see which type your cat enjoys playing with the most.

Another great way to keep an indoor cat happy is to provide him with a playmate and companion—namely, another cat.



Declawing

Declawing is the surgical removal of the first joint of the cat's paw. It is an unnatural and painful way of dealing with a behavior that can be annoying to us but is normal for cats.

Declawing can lead to stress-related behavior problems. Cats scratch in order to maintain their nails, to stretch and exercise, and to mark their territory. This natural behavior just needs to be directed toward an appropriate scratching post. There are many good scratching materials for cats. Some prefer sisal, carpeted, or wooden cat trees; others like cardboard scratch pads.

If your cat is scratching the furniture or rugs, there are many ways to make the furniture or rugs unattractive to the cat for scratching purposes. Try hanging aluminum foil, citrus sprays, a strategically placed cat tree, or even draping a cloth over the target area. We can also show you how to trim your cat's nails to prevent damage to furniture.

If you want a declawed cat, we may have cats that have already been declawed by previous owners and we would be happy to

introduce you to them at the shelter.

Keeping Your Cat Healthy and Safe

All cats adopted from the Maclean Animal Adoption Center have received their initial vaccinations. They have also been treated for worms and have been screened for general health.

We encourage you to establish a relationship with a local veterinarian as soon as possible and take your cat in for a checkup. When transporting your cat, the safest method is to use a crate. Your cat will be likely be less stressed if contained and you will not have to worry about being distracted.

It is true that cats have independent natures, but in reality your cat is entirely dependent on you for his health and well-being. A cat who receives adequate nutrition and periodic veterinary examinations will most likely live longer.

Keeping Your Cat Flea-Free. For the most part, fleas are not a problem in our area. However, if you should move to another part of the country the following information may be helpful.

Flea collars are expensive and largely ineffective. By contrast, frequent vacuuming of your house and laundering of your cat's bedding can go a long way toward reducing fleas. In addition, there are some good products, which can be applied as little as once a month, that can virtually eliminate fleas on your cat. Talk to your veterinarian.

Handling Your Cat. Most cats that are handled with gentleness and respect will reward their caretakers with affection. Some cats, however, can be a little under socialized or get over stimulated. Never correct a cat's behavior by hitting or slapping her because such "corrections" will only teach the cat to dislike and fear you. Read the following section for more information on correcting unwanted behaviors.

Unhappy Cats

"Why is my cat misbehaving? Is he angry with me?"

Cats are not naughty or mean-spirited by nature. When a cat "acts up" or develops perceived behavior "problems," caregivers should keep in mind that the cat is most likely trying to tell them that something is wrong. Punishing a cat is really nothing more than blaming the victim.

Telling ourselves that the cat "knows better" because he is acting "guilty" is untrue.

If there is one rule in the world of cat behavior, it is that physical punishment does not work and can quickly lead to

defensive and fear-based aggressive behavior.



Correcting behavior "problems" in cats should only be done with positive reinforcement. In the case of litter box problems, for example, even verbal correction tends to exacerbate the problem because the cat is already reacting to some type of stress (whether medical or environmental) and punishment just adds to the stress. The most important thing is to figure out what is troubling the cat and then to change the circumstances. In many cases, the answer is simply avoiding those things that cause the cat's unwanted behavior.

Whatever the "problem," you should not wait to get help. The longer the unwanted behavior goes on, the more likely it may become a habit and consequently be harder to change.

If you need help with understanding and resolving any behavior problem with your cat, give us a call at (406) 727-7387. One of our Animal Help Desk staff or volunteers will be happy to help.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: “I just adopted a cat and she won’t come out of hiding. What should I do?”

A: Hiding is the most commonly encountered “problem” among new adopters of adult cats. It is normal for a cat to hide when introduced to a new environment. Usually, the cat will come out on his own after a day or two, but some cats can hide for as long as a month. Make sure your cat has access to food, water and a litter box, and give him time to feel safe in his new home.

Never force the cat out from hiding, since this will only add to his fears. Spend some time every day in the room where the cat is hiding; sit down on the floor, and speak slowly and softly. Let him get used to your voice and smell.



Q: “Why is my cat missing the litter box?” or “Why is my cat spraying in the house?”

A: If a cat is having litter box problems, he or she must be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible. The cat may be having some pain or discomfort of which you are unaware. As a result, the cat may be avoiding the litter box in order to have a more comfortable place to eliminate, such as a bed, carpet or even the sink. Only a veterinarian can rule out medical problems.

Most litter box issues are due to medical problems such as urinary tract infections, bladder infections, constipation, diarrhea, or cystitis. All of these conditions are treatable and, once treated, most cats will go back to using their litter box.

If a veterinarian rules out a medical problem, make sure the cat is spayed or neutered, since spraying can be caused by a cat marking territory or seeking a mate.

Make sure the litter box is kept clean. Cats are very particular and may avoid the litter box if it’s not clean. Never yell at the cat, hit or slap the cat, or rub the cat’s face in his urine. This will only add to the confusion and may actually intensify the behavior. Read the section “Unhappy Cats” for more information.

Q: “Why does my cat sometimes vomit?”

A: Sometimes an otherwise healthy cat will make coughing sounds until she vomits a clumpy, fibrous mass of hair mixed with fluid. Usually, these are hairballs created in your cat’s stomach from the hair she ingests while grooming herself. Brush your cat frequently to reduce the amount of loose hair on her coat. You can also buy hairball gel for your cat at any pet supply store; the gel enables the cat to pass the hairball through elimination rather than vomiting.

A cat may vomit for reasons other than hairballs. If your cat is persistently retching or coughing, you should have your veterinarian examine her.

Q: “My cats just started fighting with each other. What should I do?”

A: Cats are naturally territorial animals and need time to adjust to a new cat in the home. Even cats that have lived together for years may suddenly experience problems. If cats are fighting, you should not let the fighting continue—but don’t ever punish the cats.

Confine the cats to separate locations (to give each cat a “safe” place) with all their necessary items and speak to a behaviorist. Or, slowly reintroduce them as discussed in “Introducing a Cat to Other Cats.” Most cats will work it out. Read the section “Unhappy Cats” for more information.

Q: “Should I declaw my cat to get her to stop scratching the furniture?”

A: Declawing is the surgical removal of the first joint of the cat’s paw. It is an unnatural and often painful way of dealing with unwanted behavior—and one that can itself lead to stress-related behavior problems. Cats scratch in order to maintain their nails, to stretch and exercise, and to mark their territory. This natural behavior just needs to be directed toward an appropriate scratching post. There are many good scratching materials for cats, as well as ways to make the furniture or rugs unattractive for scratching purposes. Try hanging aluminum foil, citrus sprays, a strategically placed cat tree, or even draping a cloth over the target area.

You can also learn to trim your cat’s nails to prevent damage to furniture. Or you could purchase nail caps for your cat from your veterinarian or online.

If you do adopt a cat that has claws and decide to have her declawed, we encourage you to call our HELP DESK first, discuss the issue with your vet, and read about declawing. For example, the Humane Society of the United States, who also does not recommend declawing, has some excellent information on its website. Go to www.humanesociety.org and type “declawing cats” in the search box and hit enter.

Your Pledge to Your New Cat

We believe that our cat is a full member of the family. This means that he or she has the right to be cared for and loved.

Each person in the family agrees to help take care of our new cat and treat him or her with kindness, patience, love, and respect.

We know that caring for our cat means responsibilities and jobs that must be done every day. We will give our cat proper food and fresh water every day.

We know that it costs money to take proper care of our cat. We will bring our cat to a veterinarian for regular checkups and when he or she gets sick or is injured.

We promise to spend time with our cat every day to show him or her how much we love him or her.

We promise to love and care for our cat throughout his or her lifetime. We know that cats can live up to 20 years and we will make every effort to keep our cat, no matter what changes life may bring. If we cannot keep our cat, we will make every effort to find him or her a loving new home.