



Is indoors, outdoors or a bit of both best for your cat?

To have a cat indoors versus outdoors is often a hot topic for debate. There are benefits and risks to having an indoor or outdoor lifestyle and they all need to be considered when working out which is best for each cat.

The outdoor cat

Some owners allow their cat(s) the freedom to come and go as they please. This enables a cat to obtain natural exercise, polish up on their hunting/predatory skills (this is not something a vet would encourage), socialise, patrol, and mark their territory. There are, however, some significant pitfalls that come with an outdoor cat, including:

- Injuries and/or fatalities related to motor vehicle accidents
- Cat fight injuries - abscesses
- Dog attacks
- Unwanted litters
- Exposure to cat diseases (FIV - feline immunodeficiency virus, cat flu) and parasites (fleas, ticks, worms)
- Poisoning - accidental ingestion or deliberate baiting
- Angry neighbours - toileting in their yard, noisy cats
- Animal cruelty - some people really really do not like cats!
- Accidental rehoming - an outdoor cat may be mistaken for a lost cat and can sometimes be adopted by the person who found the cat, especially if no microchip is located



If a cat is to have access to the great outdoors, it is advised that all vaccinations remain up to date, including the F3 vaccination (feline panleukopaenia, feline rhinotracheitis virus and feline calicivirus) and FIV vaccination (not incorporated in the F3 vaccine). Ensure the cat is desexed to discourage roaming, has a collar with a bell to help prevent injuries to wildlife, has a microchip to allow a safe return if the cat were to become lost, and make sure there is appropriate parasite prevention on board - spot on treatments tend to be a more convenient option.

The indoor cat

Aren't all indoor cats bored, fat, or associated with significant behavioural problems? No! I mean...there is some truth to this if a cat's indoor environment lacks enrichment...but the aim of this blog is to hopefully prevent any of these problems from occurring and to offer some solutions to help correct any unwanted behaviours.



- Help! My cat is destroying my house! This is probably one of the most common indoor complaints that vets usually hear about. Any sort of damage caused by scratching or marking often signals alarm bells. Is your cat bored? Is your cat stressed? Or is there an underlying medical condition as to why your cat is going to the toilet outside of their litter tray?

- My cat loves playing with and/or eating my indoor plants. Some plants are poisonous and the curious, bored or hungry cat may come face to face with a potential toxin. Always keep lillies away from cats as the entire plant is toxic and can actually kill them. There are a number of other plants that are toxic to cats (and dogs), but these will be discussed in another blog.

- My cat is just fat and lazy. Unfortunately, this usually comes down to the owner...How much do you feed your cat? Ok...but how many treats and snacks do you also give your cat? How much exercise does your cat get?

Providing appropriate enrichment to a cat can ensure they remain stimulated when kept indoors. Below are some ways you can help enrich your cats environment:

1. A large cat enclosure can allow a cat the best of both worlds. If you are a DIY kind of person, you can build the perfect enclosure for a cat. Alternatively, there are some fantastic cat enclosures available on the internet that are fully cat proof and have lots of room to enable your cat the freedom to move around, climb up steps or even run up and down cat ladders. An outdoor enclosure not only keeps the cat safe, it also gives them a sense of outdoors through sight, smell and curiosity. Always make sure there is appropriate shelter from heat, rain and cold gusts of wind. I do recommend that all cats are kept indoors at night time as this is when cat fights typically occur and roaming cats may come and bother a cat confined in an enclosure.
2. Allow a cat to use their hunting instincts without causing harm to wildlife. Hide treats around the house, have a toy (eg. wand toy) that can be slowly moved and then pulled by you to enable a cat to display some of the same behavioural responses to hunting. Always make sure that a toy is cat safe. Don't leave ribbons or strings around the house as these can cause an intestinal obstruction.

3. Incorporate sturdy blocks or cat ladders as part of a cats enrichment to allow them to climb and jump. Always ensure that any piece of furniture they can climb up onto is fixed and will not topple over on them.
4. Cats love to bask in the sun. A cat hammock by the window is another way they can chill, whilst snooping on the neighbours.
5. Provide more than one scratching post around the house as cats love to scratch. Sisal-rope scratch posts as opposed to carpeted posts offer a better surface for scratching. Not only does the scratch post help prevent unwanted scratching to your furniture, it also helps with keeping their nails in check. The RSPCA has instructions on how to make your own scratch post: <https://www.rspcaqld.org.au/blog/kids-and-youth/diy-cat-scratching-cone>
6. Cubby houses - if you have boxes laying around, cut breathing holes in them and turn them upside down and allow the cat to hide and seek. You can also connect boxes together and make tunnels for them.
7. You may be able to introduce a cat to a leash or harness for a bit of outdoor exercise. Some cats may enjoy a walk around the backyard or a short walk around the neighbourhood (stay clear from streets with lots of traffic or dogs).
8. Rotate toys to prevent boredom.
9. Cats require meat in their diet as they are obligate carnivores. Some home-cooked foods or the feeding of dog food to a cat can cause a protein deficiency in cats. Ensure the cat is on a high quality commercial diet that is nutritionally balanced. Hide kibble in kong toys or around the house (try and remember where you leave the food) to enable the cat to work a little bit for their food.
10. Make sure litter trays are cleaned regularly. There should be at least two litter trays available and a spare litter tray for every additional cat. These litter trays should be kept away from feeding and sleep areas.
11. Cats are usually social animals. If you are looking at getting a companion for a cat, a sibling pair or a second cat that is younger than the first may be a suitable option.
12. Pheromone sprays or diffusers may help calm a stressed or anxious cat, but it is always best to discuss any concerns with your vet.

In summary, if someone asks me if it is cruel to keep a cat purely indoors, my personal opinion is “no”. I actually get a sigh of relief when I hear that a cat is indoors only. When you have been in the veterinary industry for some time and you have witnessed horrific injuries towards cats that are very preventable, it is easy to have a biased opinion to ensure that the safety of a cat comes first. With the right amount of environmental enrichment a cat can live a very happy and healthy life indoors.