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# Home, Sweet Home:

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## How to Have a Happy-to-be Indoors Cat

**F**irst. The depressing realities: Cats who spend time outdoors have a life expectancy one-fourth that of their indoor counterparts. They get lost, stolen, attacked by other animals, poisoned and hit by cars. Many of them end up at animal shelters. Until pound seizure is outlawed, some shelters (not PHS) will sell your cat to a research laboratory where it is likely she will be used in painful experiments and then destroyed.

It's difficult to connect these frightening facts with your cat, who is contentedly snoozing in the shade of your apricot tree or chasing butterflies on the patio. Some outdoor cats do live to a ripe old age, but the chances that your cat will be one of them are unacceptably small.

Whether you've just adopted a kitten or cat, or live with a cat who sometimes goes outdoors, the following guidelines can help you to prolong your feline friend's life without compromising its quality.

### **Bringing the Outdoors In**

This is the key concept in helping your cat adapt to life indoors. What is it that she enjoys doing when she's outside? How can you provide these activities (or a reasonable facsimile) in your home?

Let's be honest what do cats spend most of their time doing? That's right ---sleeping. Studies show that cats sleep 65-85% of their lives. Is there a sunny windowsill that you can make into a cat-nap station? A

carpeted shelf attached with brackets to a securely screened window is a wonderful snoozing area.

After logging all that nap-time, your cat is going to need some vigorous physical exercise to prepare her for her next rest. This is especially important for cats who are used to being allowed outdoors and who express their dissatisfaction by prowling and meowing around your house.

Active outdoor pastimes include climbing, stretching, chasing prey (real and imaginary) and generally observing the passing scene. Climbing and stretching can be accomplished indoors with the help of a scratching climbing post. Hunting and chasing require a little time from you plus a few toys. Watching and sniffing are best done on the window shelf.

Is there any safe way for a cat to spend time outdoors? Some cats can be trained to wear a harness and leash. If you're handy with chicken wire and 2 x 4s, you can build a cat run in your yard. You may want to let your cat spend time in your fenced yard while you are there with her.

Whether or not you plan to let your cat live indoors or outdoors, she should wear a breakaway collar with ID tag at all times. Indoor cats do sometimes escape. If she is not wearing identification, it is unlikely that you and she will find each other.

Another safety precaution is to teach your cat to come when called. Many lost cats are in fact quite close to home but are too frightened to come out of their hiding place.

Living with an indoor cat requires more effort on your part. You must find creative ways to provide stimulation and exercise rather than leaving that task to neighborhood flora and fauna. The reward for all this? Besides saving her from a painful, untimely death, you will be strengthening the bond between you through play and training.

For detailed information about training your cat to use her scratching post and not your sofa, or to come when called, and how to get maximum mileage from minimal toys, please call the Animal Behavior Hotline at 340-1053. We will be happy to send you or pamphlets on these subjects.

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Amy Shapiro, animal behaviorist for PHS, can be reached by calling 340-1053. She offers puppy training classes, private lessons for adult dogs.

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# Keeping Cats Indoors: Cruelty or Kindness?

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By Kathy Snow

Kitten season has begun in Santa Clara Valley.

It happens every year from April through September. The unspayed/unneutered outdoor cats breed and give birth to thousands of litters. Hundreds of these litters will be brought to the Humane Society this summer: hundreds will be given to friends and neighbors by well-meaning but uneducated cat owners; hundreds will be sold in pet stores; and hundreds of litters of stray cats will not survive their first two months of life, but will die of disease or starvation.

The statistics are indeed grim for many felines.

The Humane Society's solutions to the problem have been covered in previous issues of *The Humane Society News* and are straightforward: have your cat spayed or neutered, provide it with an ID tag, give it lots of love and keep it safely indoors. The answers to our suggestions are frequently, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, and NO."

It is difficult for many cat owners to believe their beloved feline friends can live happily indoors. "My cat would be neurotic"; "My cat loves the back

yard"; "It's cruel to keep cats inside": the reasons for allowing cats outdoors are numerous.

But before you open your back door and let your friend outside, ask yourself the following questions:

•*Is it kind to expose my cat to feline diseases in the community?*

•*Is it kind to risk losing my cat to a car, another animal, or to a cruel person?*

•*Is it kind to allow my cat to wander into other people's yards and gardens?*

•*Would I allow my dog the same unsupervised freedom?*

We may imagine our cats happily playing in the yard or dosing in the sun, and yet most cat owners live in highly urbanized areas. We have domesticated cats and brought them to live with us in Silicon Valley. We must also be prepared to protect them. And while it is possible for an outdoor cat to live a full, long life, the odds are against it.

Once you have made the decision to keep your cat safely indoors, you can keep them happy and satisfied with just a little extra effort.

•Provide your cat with a variety of toys, a large scratching post or branch, and set aside enough time each day for a regular play period. "Neurotic" indoor cats are usually just bored. Play periods are good energy releases and will bring you and your pet closer together.

•Provide a resting place (a carpeted shelf or ledge) near a screened window. Your cat will enjoy the fresh air and the view. Cats seem as content to sit in front of the window as humans are to sit before the television.

•Don't feel guilty! You are doing your cat a favor by giving it the protection it deserves. Cats can adjust to indoor life and remain happy, content and safe for years.

For more information, *The Indoor Cat* by Patricia Curtis (Putnam, 1981) is a good source. Ms. Curtis discusses many of the concerns of cat owners and gives practical advice on health and behavioral problems.

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Kathy Snow is the Society's public relations director. She shares her home with a happy, completely indoor cat.