

AWL Guide for Cat Owners

Learn how to understand your
cat and enrich their life





Welcome to the Animal Welfare League Guide for Cat Owners!

We strive to support new and existing pet owners to be the best fur-parents possible. That's why we've created this guide to help you get to know your cat better! Interpreting your cat's behaviour is the best way to understand how they're feeling and will enable you to take better care of them. We've also included lots of helpful tips on how to ensure your cat lives an enriched and happy life with you.

Indoor cats are happy cats

Cats don't have to roam outdoors to be happy. With the right set up, your cat will be super happy indoors! By keeping your cat indoors you're protecting them from all the dangers that come with roaming outdoors. You can never be sure if roaming cats will come home safely, so when your cat's at home you have the peace of mind that they're safe. Also, they'll be close by for cuddles and company all the time so you and your cat will enjoy much more quality time together!



Learn more



Setting up your home for your new cat

There's a few things to consider when creating your cat's perfect home environment. Here's some of our top tips for creating an enriching, cat friendly environment:

- 🐾 Feed them at regular times so they know when to expect their breakfast and dinner.
- 🐾 Offering your cat high places, like a tall cat tree, is a great way to allow them to feel secure in their environment.
- 🐾 Cats love hiding spaces! Empty cardboard boxes or igloo beds are examples of great spaces for your cat to have some time alone. Place these in a quiet area of your home.



- 🐾 Tall and weighted scratch posts allow your cat to fully stretch, keeps their claws in check and also gives them a place to leave their scent.
- 🐾 The rule of thumb for how many litter trays you should have is 1 tray per cat + 1 extra.
- 🐾 Cats like their litter trays in a private location where they won't be disturbed.
- 🐾 Litter trays should be 1.5x the length of your cat to give them enough space to turn around.
- 🐾 Litter in the tray should be at least 3-4cm deep.
- 🐾 When you first bring your new cat home, set them up with everything they need in a small, quiet space away from high traffic areas. This will help them decompress from the stress of a new environment. The space doesn't need to be closed off - we recommend allowing them the opportunity to explore their new home at their own pace.

Get to know your cat's body language

Cats communicate by using their ears, tail, eyes and body posture.

Neutral/relaxed pose - ears are forward but relaxed, or ears could be slightly to the side, tail is curved loosely and isn't twitching.



Excited/playful pose - ears and whiskers are forward, tail is wagging or moving gently or on the ground and ticking slightly, front paw could be extended.



Fretting/fearful pose - turning away from you, whiskers turned back slightly, crouched down, harder and faster breathing, ears very turned out to the sides.



Defensive aggression pose - hissing, showing teeth, striking out with paw, raising back end higher.





Health benefits of desexing

Desexing your cat is compulsory in South Australia and has health benefits that will help them live a longer, healthier life.

Desexed female cats will not develop diseases of the ovaries or uterus, and will have a reduced likelihood of developing breast cancer.

If you have a male cat, desexing reduces their risk of contracting Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) through fighting with other cats. FIV is a complicated disease which attacks the immune system and leaves the cat vulnerable to opportunistic infections such as slow-healing wounds, severe dental disease or skin disease.

Why it's important to microchip your cat

Have you ever thought about what you would do if you lost your cat? If your cat isn't microchipped, you significantly reduce your chance of being reunited with them. This is why registering and microchipping your cat is one of the most responsible things you can do as their owner.

What is a microchip? - A microchip is a method of identification for pets. It's a small chip with a number unique to your pet only. The number is recorded in a microchip registry with your contact details.

How do I microchip my pet? - Only vets and authorised microchip implanters can implant a microchip.

Is it compulsory to microchip my pet? - Yes, it is mandatory to microchip your pet in South Australia.



Get to know your cat's love language

Cats have their own way of showing you that they love you. Some of these include:

Head butting

When your cat rubs their head against you, it's their way of bonding with you as well as leaving their scent on you. For your cat, mixing their scent with yours indicates that you belong together.

Kneading

If your cat sits on or near you and pushes their paws up and down, it's a sign they're happy.

Following you

If your cat follows you from room to room, this is a sign of affection.





Putting their bottom in your face

This seems odd, but it's a habit from when their mum was looking after them. It's a sign they trust you to look after them.

Tummy up

When your cat lays on their back with their tummy up, it means they're very comfortable with you and they feel safe.








Slow blinking

If your cat stares at you and blinks slowly, it means they're content and trust you.







How to tell if your cat is stressed

Cats can become stressed, frightened or frustrated and it's important to know some of the main causes and signs so you can help them be fear-free.

Some main reasons include:

-  A new animal or person in the home
-  Another animal controlling resources in the home
-  Moving house
-  A change in routine, food or litter
-  Pain or illness
-  Loud or sudden noises
-  Boredom

Signs of stress include:

-  Inappropriate or painful toileting or urine spraying
-  Excessive vocalisation
-  Excessive grooming or self harm
-  Decreased appetite
-  Hiding, hissing and growling
-  Sudden aggressive behaviour

How you can help

- 🐾 Take your cat for a checkup at the vet. This will identify whether there's a medical reason for your cat's change in behaviour.
- 🐾 Make sure your home is set up to be an enriching environment (see pages 3-4).
- 🐾 If you have more than one cat, place their litter trays in different areas - cats like privacy!
- 🐾 If you change their food or litter type, do it slowly over time.
- 🐾 Use a calming spray or diffuser like Feliway to help relax your cat in stressful situations.



Where to pat your cat



That's nice!



Hmm, not sure...



Don't even think
about it!





Enrichment activities for your cat

Enrichment activities provide both mental stimulation and physical exercise, which reduces the likelihood of your cat being destructive.

Some enrichment activities you can provide your cat include:

- Toys for them to play with
- Puzzle feeders
- Harness training for outdoor walks
- Rotating different textured items in a dedicated sensory spot for your cat to experience
- Placing treats around the house for your cat to go on a treasure hunt
- Tunnels made from cardboard boxes for them to explore
- Light catchers for them to watch and try to catch reflections

What does Animal Welfare League do for cats?

Our vision is a South Australia where every pet has a loving home. We believe in giving every healthy cat and dog a second chance. That's why all animals who come to Animal Welfare League are given the best possible care, treatment and opportunity to find a loving home. We also strive to improve cats' and dogs' lives in the community. Supporting and encouraging people to live safely and well with cats and dogs, as well as offering support to pet owners to help them be the best fur-parents possible, are some of the ways we work to improve the lives of pets in the community. We also educate the community about the importance of desexing and microchipping to help reduce the number of stray cats in South Australia.



Connecting pets, people and community through a
lifetime of love and memories.

awl.org.au

