WHAT NEXT?
Bringing Your New Cat Home

Congratulations! You are the proud new owner of a cat. No doubt you're looking forward to years of happy companionship. But what do you do now?

The first thing you should know about your new pet is that most cats hate to travel. After the ride home from the animal shelter, he will, most likely, not be in the mood for fun. For the trip home, confine your pet in a sturdy cat carrier. Don't leave him loose in your car where he might panic and cause an accident.

To make his transition to your household as comfortable as possible, select a quiet, closed-in area such as your bedroom or a small room away from the main foot traffic, and provide him with a litter box. Let your new pet become acquainted with that limited area for the first few days. Let him sniff all your belongings and investigate all the hiding places. Over a few days, slowly introduce him to the rest of your house, including the other pets and household members. It will take a little while, but he will eventually begin to feel at home.

Cats vary in terms of how demanding they are as pets, so let yours guide you to the level of attention he wants, whether it's your hand for petting or your lap for sitting. Provide him with the necessary creature comforts and give him the companionship he seeks, and he will be content.

The following is a mini-primer of cats' requirements for a happy life:

Cleanliness. Your new cat will prize a clean environment and a clean body. Cats are naturally fastidious and most will instinctively use a litter box; for some, you may need to place the cat in the box and make little scratching motions with their front paws so they get the idea. Many place such a premium on cleanliness that you should clean the box daily or several times a week. Cats also value privacy, so place the litter box in a convenient but secluded spot.

Most cats will spend hours grooming themselves, but even the most avid groomer can use a little help from time to time. Tasks like nail clipping and ear and teeth cleaning are things you can do to help your cat feel well groomed. And even short-haired cats benefit from weekly brushing, a task that can be a pleasurable experience for both of you.

Security. Provide your cat with safety and security. Always use a cat carrier when transporting your pet. Protect him by making certain all windows are securely screened and washer and dryer are kept closed and checked before each use. Get into the habit of checking that drawers, closets, and cupboards are uninhabited before you close them. And for your own security, put a collar and tag on your feline friend—there's always the chance he may slip outside by mistake, and you want to make sure he can be identified as your pet.

Health Care. Animal shelters take in animals with widely varying backgrounds, some of whom have not been vaccinated. Inevitably, despite the best efforts of shelter workers, viruses can spread and may occasionally go home with adopted animals. If you already have dogs or cats at home, make sure they are up-to-date on their shots—including feline leukemia—and in good general health before introducing your new cat.

Take your new cat to the veterinarian within a week after adoption. There, he will receive a health check and any needed vaccinations. If your cat has not been spayed or neutered, make that appointment! There are already far too many unwanted kittens and cats; don't let your new pet add to the problem. Most likely, the shelter will require that you have your pet spayed or neutered anyway. If you need more information about why it is so important to spay or neuter your cat, please ask at the shelter.

House Rules. Provide your cat with some "basic training" to help him get along in your home. It's true that cats usually have their own ideas about how to do things. Even so, most cats can be taught to obey some simple rules like not scratching the couch, eating plants, or jumping up on the kitchen counter. With repeated, gentle, and consistent training, your cat will learn.

Yelling at your cat never works! Instead, positively reward him and provide him with alternative choices. A good scratching post—coupled with the handy squirt gun filled with water—can save your couch, your chair, and your nerves. If you help your cat understand the rules and give him a satisfying outlet for his scratching impulses, there will be no need to have him declawed, an unnecessary operation *no* cat should be put through.

Room for Fun. Finally, provide your cat with an interesting indoor environment. Cats love to play and will appreciate simple and inexpensive toys. Ping-pong balls and paper bags can provide hours of fun. A nice, comfortable perch by a window can become your cat's very own entertainment and relaxation center.

Enjoy Your Rewards

Now that you've made certain all the basic provisions are attended to, you can relax and enjoy your new pet. It may take a couple of weeks for him to adjust to life with you. But before you know it, you'll be curled up on the couch together, watching TV like old pals, and you won't remember what life was like without him.

Provided by The Humane Society of the United States.