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Pet Industry Association

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Fact Sheet



Balcony Safety

Cats and balconies are a risky mix. Cats are born adventurers and might see a second or even third floor balcony as a gate to the outside world. Although cats are good at balancing on railings, they could get a fright and lose balance, or see a passing bird or insect and instinctively pounce.

Vets tell too many sad stories of cats who have lived successfully with unrestricted balcony access for years, only to suffer a tragic accident later in their lives. It only takes one slip. The old adage that 'cats always land on their feet' is simply not true. Falls often result in broken limbs, jaws or pelvic bones, as well as causing internal injury, which is not always immediately apparent. Some falls can be fatal.

Fortunately, balconies can be adapted easily and inexpensively to become spaces where cats can safely enjoy outdoor time. Enclosed balcony access enables cats to experience the outside world safely. Exposure to fresh air and sunshine, breezes and scents, neighbourhood sights and noises are all psychologically beneficial for feline health.

Balcony cat-nets are a simple and highly effective choice when installed from floor to rooftop. A range of netting products is available through secureakat.com.au and catnets.com.au, with both commercial installation and DIY options. Specially designed cat safety nets are UV and chew resistant. Transparent versions are available to comply with building regulations and keep balconies looking tidy without obstructing views.

Commercial cat enclosures are also available through catmax.com.au and catnip.com.au. Options range from enclosed tunnels to multilevel cat complexes.

Once your balcony is safely enclosed, add some items of feline interest to make the balcony a special place for your cat. Maximise the use of vertical space by installing perches. Perches are a great addition, as they allow for elevated views over the neighbourhood and are fun places for climbing, playing and even napping. There are many varieties of cat perches available. Choose a strongly built product to suit the indoor/outdoor balcony environment or build your own. A special cat bed might be placed on a perch or in a sunny, sheltered corner of the balcony. Particular toys might be strategically placed to flutter in the breeze.

Add potted plants such as cat grass, catnip or cat mint. These can be grown inexpensively from seed, then transplanted into larger pots. Or start with young already established plants from your local nursery. These feline-friendly greenery make a lovely contribution to the beauty of your balcony and will give your cat something delicious to nibble. Just keep in mind that some plants can be toxic to cats, so ensure you check any plants placed on the balcony are cat safe.

Enjoy turning your balcony into a safe, enriched environment for your cat and a visually beautiful space where you can happily relax together.

Source: [NSW Cat Protection Society](#)

An outside run

Veranda or balcony cat-nets are a simple and highly effective choice when installed from floor to rooftop. A range of netting products is available, with both commercial installation and DIY options. Specially designed cat safety nets are UV and chew resistant. Or build or purchase a specially-designed cat enclosure for your yard. See our factsheet on catproof fencing and enclosures for more information and suppliers.

Walk your cat

Cat harnesses are available for cats of all sizes. These fit around your cat's body and attach to a lead that lets you walk your cat safely outside. Keep in mind you should never attach a lead to a collar as you would with a dog, as a cat's throat is very sensitive and will be harmed by tugging on the collar. Lead walking may be a great way for your cat to enjoy the outdoors, and a rewarding experience for both you and your cat. Please note that only particularly relaxed and outgoing cats may be trained to successfully walk with a harness and a lead, and only in an appropriate outdoor environment. Many cat personalities are simply NOT suited to this training. Remember that your cat depends on you for security and protection. See our factsheet on harness and lead training for more information.

Windows

Install a window seat or place a scratch post or piece of furniture under a window so your cat can look out. Cats love to sun themselves in the window and look at the world outside. Remember, light coloured cats are at risk of sunburn through the glass, so it may be necessary to take precautions for this. Also remember your cat will be happy looking out; this doesn't mean they want to get out. Most cats still try to pounce on bugs and birds through the glass.

Clean the litter tray

Cats are very clean animals with a very good sense of smell, so ensure that solid waste is removed from your cat's litter tray daily. Regularly clean the litter tray entirely as per instructions on the litter pack. Always keep the litter tray in a low traffic area. Cats, just like humans, would prefer to go to the toilet in private. If you place the litter tray in an area where people are walking past all the time your cat might not use it. Ensure the tray is the right size for your cat. Your cat should be able to turn around comfortably inside the tray and there should be enough space around the tray for your cat to have head room outside without bumping surrounding furniture. A large adult cat should not still be using the tray you bought for them as a kitten or toileting accidents are likely to happen. Litter trays should be equal to the number of cats in the home plus one extra tray. You might prefer litter trays with hoods to help minimise odours.

Spend time with your cat

Nothing beats spending quality time with your cat. Every cat has a different personality, so some might like just a few good pats or chin rubs while others will curl up with you for hours. Not all cats like to be picked up, and some become over-stimulated easily. Most cats love to bond through playtime, as well as through grooming and even conversation. Learn to 'read' what your cat is telling you. Cat owners are reported to have better communication skills than non-cat owners; this is thought to be because they have become more attuned to non-verbal communication cues.

Multi-cat household

For many cats the best way to keep them entertained indoors is by getting a second cat, or by adopting more than one cat in the first place. This will ensure your cat is never lonely and always has a playmate. Do keep in mind though that some cats prefer to be on their own, and it is very important to consider your cat's personality before adopting another cat. Adopt from a reputable source who can help identify for you which cats get on well with others or have lived with other cats before.

Stress

Signs of stress can include over-grooming and inappropriate toileting, aggression or withdrawal. However, these can also be indicators of serious illness so it is very important to contact your vet if you ever see signs of changed behaviour in your cat. Maintenance of routines is important for cats so try to keep a regular schedule. Also, be mindful that your cat sees your home as their territory and will scent-mark by scratching and rubbing their cheeks on surfaces. If your cat is not using their scratch post, it might simply be in the wrong place – watch where your cat scents. You will notice they tend to take the same pathways through your home. Move the objects you want them to mark, such as scratch posts, onto those pathways. Vacuum cats bedding regularly and hang it in sunlight but don't wash it too often: again, its familiar scent comforts your cat.

Source: [NSW Cat Protection Society](#)