



## Harness & lead training

It is important to understand before reading further 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. Anxious or shy cats, for example, would not be appropriate candidates. Many outdoor environments are not suited to this training, for example, areas with busy vehicle traffic or areas with lots of dogs off-lead. Do not push your cat to do this training if your cat shows signs of stress at any point. Remember that your cat depends on you for security and protection. Always use a harness. Never attach a leash directly to a collar. Cats have sensitive throats and neck muscles, and the tension from pulling may cause injury. A harness ensures any pressure from pulling on the lead will be absorbed by the shoulders and chest of the cat's body. It is best to start this training at the kitten stage. A kitten who grows up feeling comfortable in a harness will be much more suited to venturing outdoors on a lead. To minimise disease risk, avoid taking your kitten outdoors (even on a harness) until approximately 6 months of age when their full course of vaccinations is complete. Adult cats of the right personality may adjust to lead walking provided they are given adequate training at a slow and gentle pace.

Successful training can be achieved in three phases.

### **Phase 1**

Start by working indoors. Allow your cat to adjust to wearing a harness. Put the harness on your cat, immediately follow-up with a treat, then resume normal activities. Let your cat wear the harness for about 10 minutes, then remove the harness and give your cat a treat. Keep this routine for a period of days, gradually increasing the harness time until your cat moves comfortably around your home as usual. Always give your cat a treat immediately after putting on and immediately after removing the harness. Always supervise your cat's harness time.

### **Phase 2**

Allow your cat to adjust to the lead. Attach the lead to the harness, then give your cat a treat. Let your cat wear the harness and drag the lead behind for about 10 minutes, then remove the lead and give your cat a treat. It is normal for your cat to play with the lead, and it is best to just ignore this behaviour. Keep this routine for a period of days, gradually increasing the time your cat wears both the harness and the lead. When your cat seems comfortable in the lead, pick up the lead but allow your cat to initiate movement around the house. This will help your cat adjust to the feeling of tension in the lead. Let your cat be in control. Remember that not all cat personalities are suited to harness and lead training. Monitor your cat's response and stress level, and be prepared to slow the pace of training or even stop if necessary.

### **Phase 3**

Now it's time to move outdoors. Start with a quiet place where you know your cat is safe, such as your back garden or a courtyard. Allow your cat to explore the surroundings as you hold the lead. Keep this routine for a period of days, gradually increasing the length of outdoor time if your cat isn't feeling stressed. As your cat's confidence increases, you can begin to venture out for short walks in your local area. Choose quieter times of the day for walks, when your cat is less likely to be frightened by traffic noises and frequent passing pedestrians. Be alert to the presence of neighbourhood dogs, and be prepared to take evasive action or pick your cat up as necessary. For added safety, a soft collapsible cat carry basket may be carried over your shoulder, just like a handbag.

Over time, your cat will become familiar with your local walking area and gain confidence. You may eventually find yourself sitting at an outdoor café table with your cat at your side, soaking up the sunshine.

Keep in mind that this training will only suit some cats, and be prepared to stop this training immediately if your cat shows signs of stress. Allow lots of time, patience and have plenty of treats on offer. Lead walking may be a great way for your cat to enjoy the outdoors in safety, and a rewarding experience for both you and your cat.

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](#)