
Your Cat - Indoors or Out?

Ever wonder what goes on behind closed doors? Healthy, safe cats live out their entire lives, for one thing. If you want your cat to live to a ripe old age, the best thing you can do for her is keep her inside. Allowing your cat to wander around on her own, without your supervision, makes her susceptible to any of the following life-shortening—and often painful—tragedies:

- Being hit by a car
- Ingesting a deadly poison like antifreeze or a pesticide
- Being trapped by an unhappy neighbor
- Being attacked by a roaming dog, cat, or wild animal
- Contracting a disease from another animal
- Becoming lost and unable to find her way home
- Being stolen
- Encountering an adult or child with cruel intentions

Some people believe there are good reasons to allow their cat to be outdoors without their supervision, so we've included a number of these objections along with our comments and suggestions.

"But I have a six-foot fence."

Unless you have special fencing that's designed to prevent a cat from climbing out, your cat will be able to scale your fence and escape the confines of your yard. If you do have special fencing, make sure that it can keep other cats or animals from getting into your yard to injure your cat. Some companies manufacture ready-made cat fences and backyard enclosures.

"But my last cat went outdoors and he loved it."

Your cat may enjoy being outdoors, but by allowing him to go outside unsupervised; you're putting him at risk for a shortened life span. The expected life span of an indoor-outdoor cat will depend on several factors, including the type of neighborhood you live in and sheer luck. But, on average, cats who are allowed to roam outdoors often don't live to see age five. Cats that are always kept safely confined can live to be 18 to 20 years old.

"But my cat's litter box smells."

Scoop your cat's litter box on a daily basis. How often you actually replace (change) the litter depends on the number of cats in your home, the number of litter boxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may need to change it every other day or once a week. Wash the litter box with soap and water every time you change the litter; the use of strong-smelling chemicals and cleansers may cause your cat to avoid the box.

"But my cat likes to sun herself."

Your cat can safely sun herself indoors by lying near a window. If you're really intent on letting your cat outdoors, put her on a harness and leash and stay with her while she's taking in the rays.

"But I can't keep him in."

Keep your windows closed or install screens. Remember to always keep your doors closed and teach your children the importance of keeping the doors closed, too. It may take a few days or a few weeks, but if there are enough interesting things for your cat to play with indoors, he'll come to enjoy being indoors. Be sure to provide him with a scratching post and safe toys to bat or carry around.

"But we've always let her out."

You can change your cat's behavior. It will take time and patience, but it might save her life. When you implement your "closed door" policy, give her a lot of extra attention and entertainment. At first she may cry, but don't give in—more often than not, she'll soon be happy to stay indoors with you.

"But my cat knows to avoid cars."

Even if this were true, all it would take is another cat, a dog, or a shiny object to lure your cat into the street and into the path of traffic. Also keep in mind that not everyone will swerve to miss a cat in the road.

"But my cat needs exercise and likes to play with other cats."

Stray cats could spread viruses such as feline leukemia and other fatal diseases. If your cat needs a friend, adopt another cat who's healthy and disease-free. Cats kept safely confined *do* need extra attention and exercise inside, so be sure to play with your cats regularly using a variety of toys and chase games.

"But my cat yowls and acts like he really needs to go outside."

Your cat may be feeling the physiological need to mate. If this is the case, make sure your cat is spayed or neutered. Sterilized cats don't have the natural need to breed, and therefore, won't be anxious to go out to find a mate.

Transforming a cat who is allowed roam freely outside into a safe cat will take time, effort, and patience; some cats will adapt more quickly than others. And many cat owners report that keeping cats inside actually fosters the bond between feline and human. If, despite your best efforts, your cat simply cannot make the transition, then vow to keep your next cat safely confined from the start.