

A Safe Cat is an Indoor Cat

Written by: Leslie Wyant, DVM

If you want your cat to live a safe, healthy life, keep the back door shut. Letting it outside to explore its wild "roots" is a romantic idea in theory, but it is also a surefire way to introduce your pet to serious diseases, parasites, and physical trauma that indoor cats have a much lower risk of encountering.

"All cats should be indoor-only cats," said Nancy Peterson, spokesperson for the Humane Society of the United States . "Saying that a cat needs to be allowed to roam free outside is like saying that a child needs fresh air and then leaving the toddler unsupervised in the dangers of the outdoors while the parent goes to work."



Cats that are kept inside have a much longer estimated life span than animals allowed outdoors. An indoor cat typically lives to the age of 13 or more, whereas a cat that goes outside averages only three years. Dr. Deborah Day, a Diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine in Louisville , Kentucky , has seen many distraught owners who lost a dearly loved cat because it contracted a fatal viral infection from an outdoor source.

"I would recommend that if you consider your cat a member of your family, treat it like you would a child by providing it with all its needs and keeping it safely indoors," Dr. Day said.

According to the Humane Society, cats have been domesticated to depend on humans for their survival over the last 6,000 years. They are no longer wild animals that rely on their own abilities and instincts to live in the outdoors.

"Although they may not be as dependent as dogs, cats do rely on humans for their needs such as food and water, a stimulating environment, and quality attention time," Ms. Peterson said.

Outdoor cats can be victims of any imaginable form of trauma. Some commonly suffered injuries include wounds from attacks by other cats and animals, being hit by a motor vehicle, getting cut from sharp objects, and being tortured by inhumane people.

"A cat lounging inside his living room is just not very likely to be hit by a car," said Susan Longo, DVM, of the Annapolis Cat Hospital in Annapolis , Maryland . Injuries can result in extremely expensive veterinary bills, some of which may be more than what a family is willing to spend for the pet's health care. As a result, many cats are put to death because of severe injuries that could have been prevented if they had been kept inside and out of harm's way.

In addition, outdoor cats are more likely to be infected by diseases that can be life-threatening. The feline leukemia virus, feline immunodeficiency virus, and feline infectious peritonitis are all fatal diseases that are contagious between cats and are most commonly transmitted by cat bites. Felines are likely to inflict while fighting.

Outdoor cats also are more likely to spread certain diseases that can infect humans. Toxoplasmosis and intestinal parasites can affect people that become exposed to them through cat feces deposited in the environment or in children's sandboxes.

Rabies is also a concern in bites suffered from outdoor cats, especially if their vaccination status is unknown. And of course, those pesky fleas and ticks have a quicker route into your household if the cat spends much of its time outside.



Dr. Robert Bebko, a veterinarian boarded in feline medicine in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, warns new kitten owners at their first vaccination visit about the dangers of the outdoor life for cats. He said that if cats are kept indoors from the outset, they will be happy and healthy and the quality of their lives will not be needlessly compromised.

"Most owners do not ask me what my opinion is about letting cats go outside but I do share my thoughts with them during their initial kitten visits," Dr. Bebko added.

If you do insist on keeping your cat outside, you should at the very least vaccinate the animal against the feline leukemia virus, according to Dr. Bebko. Currently, there are no vaccinations that protect against feline immunodeficiency virus.

Some may argue that adult cats or strays that have grown accustomed to going outside cannot be converted into an indoors-only animal. But Dr. Day does not buy into that theory.

"I own 12 cats, most of which were taken in as strays, and none of them go out," she said. After one to two weeks of being well cared for, these cats lose their desire to wander outside the house. This is especially true if the owner provides a stimulating indoor environment, food, and companionship.

"I think my four stray cats remember what a rough time they had of it out there and never want to go back," Ms. Peterson added.

*Article courtesy of VetCentric.com

Originally published January 25, 2006

Written by: Leslie Wyant, DVM @ VetCentric

For more information on this article, please visit <http://www.vetcentric.com>