



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Introduction to the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats

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Introduction

Owning and caring for a cat can be great fun and very rewarding, but it is also a big responsibility and a long-term caring and financial commitment. You control your cat's lifestyle; it is your responsibility to make sure that its needs are met, whatever the circumstances. The law requires that you must take reasonable steps to ensure that your cat's needs are met including:

- a suitable environment to live in
- a healthy diet
- the ability to behave normally
- being housed with, or apart from, other animals and
- protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Every animal is different and, as you get to know your cat, you will recognise familiar characteristics. It is important that you are able to notice any changes in behaviour as these might indicate that your cat is distressed, ill, or is not having its needs met in some other way.

This document summarises the key things you need to know and signposts you to the relevant sections of the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats.

It is your responsibility to read the complete Code of Practice to fully understand your cat's welfare needs and what the law requires of you.

Section 1: Environment

Make sure your cat has a suitable place to live

All cats need their own resources, so you should provide enough bowls, litter trays, resting places, etc. If you have more than one cat, this means one for every cat in the house plus one extra to give the cats choices and reduce the chance that access is blocked by another cat.

Sleeping and resting

You should provide your cat with a comfortable, dry, draught-free resting area to which it has constant access and where it will feel safe.

Cats need opportunities to climb, jump and hide, such as a simple 'platform' type bed or safe access to shelves and the tops of cupboards.

Cats that are not used to living with people, such as some farm cats, may prefer to live outdoors but still require access to a draught-free, waterproof shelter, and you still need to look after them.

Hazards

Ensure your cat is kept away from hazards such as potentially harmful substances.

Travel

Make sure your cat is transported safely. Do not travel with your cat loose in your vehicle.

Cats should not be left unattended in a vehicle. In warm weather, **this can be life threatening.**

Going to the toilet

Your cat should have somewhere suitable to go to the toilet. Some cats may prefer to toilet outdoors however all cats need constant access to a litter tray within the home in case there are times when they are unwilling or unable to toilet outside.

Section 2: Diet

Make sure your cat has a balanced diet that meets its nutritional needs

Your cat must have access to fresh clean drinking water at all times.

How often to feed your cat

Your cat should eat regularly and must be fed at least once a day.

Cats are true carnivores and eat meat. They cannot be vegetarians.

Healthy Weight

Your cat should not be too fat or too thin. You can assess your cat's weight by seeing if you can gently feel its ribs; if they are hard to find it may be overweight. If the ribs and backbone are prominent, then your cat may be underweight and ill. If in doubt, ask your vet whether your cat is within its correct weight range.

Other dietary needs

Some cats have special dietary needs; your vet is the best person to advise you about the care of your cat in these circumstances.

Section 3: Behaviour

Your cat should be able to behave normally

Socialisation

Socialisation with people, cats and other animals, and getting used to common noises, is an essential part of early learning. There is an important period of early learning from approximately 2 weeks to 7 weeks of age.

Typical behaviours

Behaviour such as hunting is important to cats. You can fulfil this need with play using appropriate toys. Behaviour such as scratching or claw conditioning is normal; you can buy a scratching post of the correct type from most pet shops.

Exercise

Make sure your cat has opportunities to exercise each day to stay fit and healthy. If it does not go outside, provide suitable indoor activities to keep your cat active.

Signs of Stress

Watch your cat closely for signs of stress or changes in behaviour.

Section 4: Company

Make sure your cat's social needs are met

Social behaviour & relations with other animals and people

Notice how your cat reacts to other cats, pets or people, and make sure that it is able to avoid them if it wants to.

Responsible persons should ensure that cats in their care are handled properly and are not stressed or harmed by other people, children or animals.

Dogs should be introduced to cats very carefully; the dog should be held safely on a lead at first so that it cannot chase the cat. The cat should be able to retreat to a safe hiding place.

When you are away from home

You must arrange for your cat's needs to be met if you are away from home.

Numbers of animals

Cats are by nature solitary animals and generally prefer to live alone, so living with other unrelated cats in particular could be very stressful for them. Keeping multiple cats together could increase the risk of stress related and infectious disease. It is best not to keep too many cats together, especially if they do not have access to the outside. Large numbers of animals need a great deal of care and you should not keep a large number of cats if you cannot meet their welfare needs.

Section 5: Health

You must ensure your cat is in good health

Health care

You should regularly examine your cat for signs of injury and illness. You must ensure your cat is treated promptly by a vet if it is injured or ill. Your cat's vet will be able to advise you about routine health care, such as vaccination, and parasite control (e.g. fleas and worms), as well as any health problems it may have.

Grooming

You should ensure that your cat's coat is properly groomed. A pet care specialist may be able to advise you about coat care.

Identification

Your cat should be identifiable. Cats are generally identified by two methods to help trace their keeper should they become lost: microchipping; or wearing a correctly fitted quick release collar that has the cat keeper's contact details. Microchips are the most reliable way of identifying your cat.

Neutering

You should strongly consider having your cat neutered for certain health benefits and to prevent the birth of unwanted kittens.

Code of Practice for Cats can be found at:
<https://gov.wales/cat-welfare-code-practice>