



Outdoor Cats: Risk Prevention

The question of whether a cat should be kept indoors or be allowed to roam outside is frequently asked. Some behaviorists feel quite strongly that many cat behavior problems could be eliminated if cats were let outside. The outdoors is, after all, a feline's natural habitat. Most veterinarians, however, would agree that many cats themselves would be eliminated if all were given the opportunity to roam.

One advantage of allowing your cat outside is better physical fitness. Fewer outdoor cats have weight problems due to the increased activity. In addition, cats who spend time outside do have access to a desirable, natural substrate for their elimination habits and may be less likely to soil household carpet and furnishings.

Disadvantages of allowing a cat outside are much more numerous. Some of the risks include: being hit by cars; becoming lost; being claimed by others who assume the cat is a stray; acquiring serious if not fatal infectious diseases (Feline Infectious Peritonitis, Feline Leukemia, Feline Immunodeficiency Virus or Rabies); and injury due to animal fights. Parasite infestation can also be a risk (fleas, heartworm, tapeworm, roundworm and other intestinal organisms).

Despite the long list of reasons not to allow a cat to roam, many cats do not respond to logical arguments. They will get outside no matter what a concerned owner tries. The following recommendations may minimize some of the risks of this "hazardous" lifestyle.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR CAT

1. Spay or neuter your cat as early as possible. Also, do not declaw a cat who goes outside. Her claws provide not only defense but escape (climbing a tree or a fence).
2. Maintain a timely vaccination program for Distemper, upper respiratory viruses, Feline Leukemia and Rabies.
3. Have stool samples checked at least once or twice a year for intestinal parasites. In the avid hunter, consider routine monthly worming for tapeworms which can be very difficult to detect.
4. Protect your cat against fleas. Revolution is an easy-to-use once-a-month product that should be very helpful in this pursuit.
5. Have your cat well identified at all times. A bell attached to the collar may help protect the local small wildlife population. Consider having a microchip implanted in your cat as additional protection.
6. Have your cat heartworm tested and use heartworm preventative during the mosquito season.
7. Consider taking your cat for walks. For the less motivated cat, this may satisfy her outdoor needs.

By taking these few precautions with your cat, you will reduce his risk of encountering serious problems from being outdoors. However, the only way to truly protect your cat from these problems is to keep him indoors permanently.