



Foster Cat Take Home Instructions

Cat Name: _____

Cat ID Number: _____

Foster Date: _____

Please use your foster cat(s)'s official HPA! name and ID number in all official correspondence with HPA staff, volunteers, or the public/potential adopters.

About this packet:

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS

Sick Pets: sickmedical@houstonpetsalive.org

Vaccines/Spay/Neuter/Wellness: RoutineMedical@HoustonPetsAlive.org

Behavioral: behavior@houstonpetsalive.org

Cattery Placement: DunvaleCattery@HoustonPetsAlive.org

Interested Adopter/Adoption Process: Adopt@HoustonPetsAlive.org

Not sure where your question should go? Cat Foster@HoustonPetsAlive.org

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions at all! We'd be more than happy to answer any and all questions you may have!



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Veterinary Care for your Foster

Your foster cat most recently had:

FVRCP vaccine(s): _____ Flea Prevention: _____

Rabies vaccine: _____ Combo Test: _____

Your foster cat(s) will be *DUE* for the following:

FVRCP vaccine: _____ Flea Prevention: _____

Rabies vaccine: _____ Combo Test: _____

Other Treatment(s): _____

Spay/Neuter Surgery: _____

Meet & Greet/Cattery Clearance: _____

Your new pet is currently taking the following medication(s):

For the following condition(s):



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BASIC CAT CARE SUPPLIES

Food & Water

Food and water are best served in stainless steel or ceramic bowls that don't harbor bacteria like plastic does. One bowl should always be filled with clean water that is changed at least once per day. Each cat needs his or her own bowl for food. We recommend feeding a good quality cat food that is high in protein, preferably grain-free, and does not contain corn, soy, or wheat.

Breakaway Collar & ID Tag

Your cat has been microchipped and will hopefully lead the luxurious life of an indoor cat. As an extra precaution, purchase a collar and ID tag so you can be immediately notified if your cat accidentally gets out. Since cats are curious creatures, the only safe collar for a cat is a breakaway collar. Breakaway collars are designed to release at the buckle if your cat gets cat on something so that she doesn't choke herself. Most importantly, be sure to get an ID tag made with your current contact information.

Scratching Post & Nail Clippers

Scratching is one of your cat's most ingrained instincts, so it's important to provide her with an appropriate outlet, such as a scratching post. Have at least one on the very first day – you can always add more later. A vertical scratching post should be sturdy and covered with a rough material that your cat can dig her claws into, like sisal or rope. Cats need to stretch from toe to toe so make sure you get one tall enough for them to stretch their complete body length. Flat scratchers made of cardboard are popular amongst kitties who prefer horizontal scratching. Clipping your cat's nails is another great way to prevent scratching of inappropriate items like furniture. Buy a pair of nail clippers designed for cats, not humans, as human clippers can split a cat's nail.

Litter Box & Scooper

When it comes to litter boxes and litter, the choices are endless. Many cats are happy with a simple large pan; some prefer clumping litter, while others prefer clay. Most of the cats at Houston Pets Alive! are accustomed to using a fine, unscented clumping litter. Keep in mind that cats are finicky; your personal preference for a specific type of box or litter may be different from your cat's preference. As a general rule, make sure to have at least one litter box per cat in your household.

Carrier



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A sturdy plastic carrier should be used for transporting your cat to the vet, etc. The carrier should be big enough for the cat to lie down comfortably. Cardboard carriers are meant to be used only once as they are not sturdy enough to hold a cat's weight with repeated usage.

Toys

It's important to provide your cat with toys since playing mimics one of your cat's favorite predatory acts - hunting. Although your cat does not have to hunt for food, she still enjoys the actions and movements involved with the process like chasing, pouncing, carrying, biting, and rolling around. Toys can be made at home (sock filled with catnip, paper bags, crumpled paper, etc.) or purchased from a pet supply store.

INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO YOUR HOME

When you bring your new cat home, set up a safe room. A safe room can be a bathroom or any small room where your new cat can adjust to the new surroundings without feeling overwhelmed. Bathrooms are ideal because they provide few places for your new kitty to hide and allow them to explore at their own pace. Put their food, water, litter box, toys, and scratching post in the room, and keep them in this room for about a week. You can spend time with the cat in the safe room but make sure to also keep them in the safe room when you're away from home. Using Feliway (a synthetic pheromone that helps calm kitties) can be helpful during this time.

INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO YOUR RESIDENT CAT

- Keep them separated: When you bring your new cat home, set up a safe room by following the directions above. Prevent your resident cat from entering the safe room during the initial adjustment period.
- Introduce by smell: To get your resident cat used to the smell of the newcomer, rub a towel gently over the new cat. Let the resident cat smell the towel - don't be surprised if they hiss.
- Encourage Interaction Through the Door: Place your new cat's food by the door so that they stay near it. Your resident cat will smell and hear them through the door. Give your resident cat treats near the door so they associates the new cat with good things.



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- **Swap Places:** Put your resident cat in the safe room while your new cat roams the house. This allows each cat to explore each other's belongings. Do this for about 30 minutes before putting them back.
- **Open the door a crack:** After a week, crack open the door of the safe room so the cats can see each other but can't stick their heads through. Hissing and growling is normal, but if one tries to swat the other, close the door. Do this a few times daily.
- **Let Them Out:** Bringing a new cat into the house is similar to introducing a new baby to a sibling - there is always some jealousy involved. For cats, this usually comes in the form of hissing. Let your cats hiss at each other, but break it up quickly if they start to bite. Once split up, put the newcomer back in their safe room for a day or two before trying again. Don't yell at or punish your cats for their behavior. On the contrary - spend time reassuring each of them. Over time, some cats will become lifelong companions while others will merely tolerate each other. At the very least, eventually they will come to respect each other.

INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO YOUR RESIDENT DOG

- **Keep them separated:** When you bring your new cat home, set up a safe room by following the directions above. Prevent your resident dog from entering the safe room during the initial adjustment period.
- **Introduce by Smell:** While your cat is adjusting to her new surroundings in the comfort of her safe room, rub a towel on her and let the dog smell it. Do the same with your dog so the new cat can smell him too.
- **Let Them Out:** After your cat has been in her safe room for about a week, crack the door while keeping a tight grip on your leashed dog. Once your cat comes out, allow the two to sniff each other. Make sure your cat has a place to escape if she gets stressed during this time. Hissing and growling are normal until the two get comfortable with each other - the adjustment period can take months.
- **Increase their time together:** Continually increase the number and length of time of interactions. After numerous interactions, the next step is to allow the cat full reign of the house while you are at home. During this period, make sure your dog is leashed so you can control him. Until you can fully trust them together,



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you should always make sure the new cat and dog are separated when you are not at home or able to supervise them.

ENSURING YOUR CAT STAYS HEALTHY

Transitioning Foods

Abruptly changing your cat's food can cause digestive upset. For best results, start by mixing in a small amount of the new food into whatever you currently feed your cat. Over the course of 7-10 days, gradually mix in more and more of the new food while decreasing the amount of the old food. This can be particularly helpful if your cat is a picky eater!

Common Illnesses to Watch For:

Cats are prone to several ailments brought on, or exacerbated by, stress. Sometimes, even the happy event of foster or adoption and moving into a new home or meeting new family members can be stressful to a cat's body and cause a response. If you have any health concerns with your foster, please email sickmedical@houstonpetsalive.org.

Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) - The equivalent of the common cold, cats and kittens are prone to URI's especially when they encounter stress, like moving to a new home or adding a new pet to the household. Symptoms include sneezing, nasal and/or eye discharge, wheezing, struggling to breath well.

Diarrhea - Cats and kittens have sensitive stomachs and may experience diarrhea due to stress and/or if encountering abrupt food changes.

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) - Cats are unique in that they can develop urinary issues from stress alone! They can also experience urinary tract infections, just like humans! Symptoms include soiling outside of the box, straining to urinate without producing significant urine, licking the genitals and yowling, and frequent trips to the box. This can be life threatening, seek immediate veterinary attention if your cat is straining to urinate!

BITING AND SCRATCHING

Cats, especially kittens, will sometimes become overly excited during playtime with humans – so over excited that they bite or scratch as if they were playing with another



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cat. If this happens, make sure to end the play session immediately and walk away. The cat will not understand the first time this happens but with repetition will soon learn that play time only continues if he or she is on their best behavior.

Make sure that you teach your cat to clearly distinguish between hands and toys from the very beginning. Do not engage in rough play in which you use your hands or fingers as "prey." Feather or wand toys that put distance between you and the toy itself will help your cat learn this important lesson.

Provide your cat with acceptable ways to expend her energy and act out her predatory nature. Give your cat active and regular play sessions and she will be less likely to bite and scratch you.

THE LITTER BOX

A cat doesn't need to be taught what to do with the litter box; the only thing you need to do is provide an acceptable, accessible litter box!

An Acceptable, Accessible Litter Box Location

The litter box should be kept in an area that is convenient and private for your cat, such as a closet or bathroom. Most people choose an out-of-sight area such as a basement or laundry room to prevent odor and scattered litter. However, these areas may be undesirable to your cat if the cat or kitten cannot navigate stairs to get to the box, if the cat does not remember where the box is because it is in such a remote place, if it takes too long for the cat to get to the box, or if the cat is startled when using the box because a dryer, furnace, or appliance next to the box kicks on while the cat is using it.

Type of Litter

Most cats prefer fine grained litter because it has a softer feel on the cat's feet. However, every cat is unique. Once you find a litter that your cat likes, stick to it as change may result in her not using the box. Many cats also don't like scented litters.

Multi-Cat Households

In order to prevent litter box problems in the multi-cat household, try the following: Have one litter box for each cat plus one. Place boxes in different areas of the house so no cat can guard the box and prevent others from using it. If you have a multi-level house, there should be boxes on each level of the home.



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Covered vs Uncovered Litter Boxes

Some cats prefer covered litter boxes while others refuse to use them. Be aware that covered litter boxes may hold smell inside, making them unattractive to your cat. Some larger cats may not have ample room inside a covered box to turn around, dig, or bury. Covered litter boxes make it easy for another cat to trap the user inside.

Cleaning the Litter Box

The litter box should be scooped daily in order to keep the litter clean and the box appealing to your cat. If you have more than one cat, you will need to clean and scoop even more frequently. Avoid using chemicals to wash the box, soap and water is sufficient.

SOLVING LITTER BOX PROBLEMS

If your cat is having litter box problems – don't worry, you're not alone! Don't forget that you can always email catfoster@houstonpetsalive.org for help. The internet is also rife with information and suggestions on what to do!

The first thing to do is to rule out a physical problem by emailing sickmedical@houstonpetsalive.org. Urinary tract infections or crystals in the urine are common medical reasons for inappropriate elimination, either of which can make urination very painful. Cats often associate this pain with the litter box and begin to avoid it. Left untreated, a urinary tract infection or blockage from crystals can cause permanent damage or be fatal so do not delay in seeking medical attention!

If you've ruled out medical issues, you'll need to turn your attention to the cat's environment. If you need advice or have questions about this, please contact us at catfoster@houstonpetsalive.org. Cats may stop using the litter box because of a change in their surroundings, such as the introduction of a new pet, moving homes, rearranging furnishings, remodeling, or a new baby.

Cats may also stop using the litter box because they are dissatisfied with the type of box or type of litter you use. A change in the box or litter can cause them to stop using it; try and stay consistent for the life of the cat. Some cats even like to have two boxes – one for each function. Some like covered boxes, others like uncovered ones. Sometimes it can be a matter of the box's location. Some don't like litter box liners or scented litters. In short, you will need to be prepared to experiment and slowly rule things out.



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Any time your cat eliminates outside the box, clean the soiled area promptly and thoroughly with a product like Anti Icky Poo. You can try making the area where she has been eliminating aversive to her by covering it with an upside-down carpet runner or aluminum foil, or by placing citrus-scented cotton balls over the area. Use positive reinforcement to reintroduce your cat to the litter box. You may also want to isolate the cat in a confined area such as a bathroom in order to re-acquaint him or her with using the litter box.

Do not yell at or strike your cat if he or she does not use the litter box. Litter box problems are almost always temporary and reversible, but a cat can develop litter box aversion if it associates elimination with punishment. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only second later.

MANAGING SCRATCHING

Provide an irresistible surface!

Cats love materials that they can dig their claws into, so sisal or rope usually work best. The post should be placed near the cat's food bowl or bed, since cats like to scratch after eating or napping. In order to entice the cat to the post, try dangling a toy from the top of the post or rubbing the post with catnip.

We recommend you pick up a horizontal cardboard scratcher AND a tall vertical scratcher for your cat. Every cat has their own preference for scratchers and you might have to try a few to find the one that works well, but most cats tend to love the cardboard variety. You can lure her to it by sprinkling catnip on the new scratcher, too.

Trim Regularly

The longer the nail, the sharper it is - so keep your cat's nails trimmed to prevent damage to furniture. Trimming is also important since a cat's nails can grow long enough to curl under and grow into the paw pad. Trimming should be done every 2-3 weeks. Most cats are not thrilled with nail trimming, so be patient and calm throughout. If you find this is too difficult to handle, vets and groomers are able to trim your cat's nails as well as our shelter staff.

Trimming a cat's claws is easiest as a two person job, one person to hold and one to trim. First, wrap the cat in a towel and firmly hold the cat. Once the cat is secure, the trimmer should carefully expose one paw at a time from underneath the blanket. Apply pressure to the middle of the paw to expose the nails. When trimming,



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cut only the clear, hooked part of the claw. Stay away from the pink part, called the quick. The quick is a live vein that will be painful to your cat if cut. Make sure you trim all claws, four on each front plus a dew claw, and four on the rear.

Alternative Options:

Sticky Paws is a product that is applied to prevent your cat from inappropriate scratching. The product, which consists of a sticky material, is unattractive to cats because their paws get stuck on it.

Soft Paws are plastic covers that are applied to a cat's claw so she can still use her claws naturally without causing damage. They are even available in holiday and fashion colors. Both products can be found at major pet supply stores.

DECLAWING IS NOT AN OPTION!

What is declawing? It is important to realize that your cat's claw is not a toenail. The claw is closely adhered to the bone - so closely adhered that to remove the claw, the last bone of your cat's toe must be amputated, plus the nerves, tendons, and ligaments. If performed on a human, it would be comparable to cutting off the last knuckle of each finger, bone and all. The procedure and recovery are excruciatingly painful despite pain medication. Despite this pain, remember that your cat must still walk, jump, and use her paws during recovery. When envisioned, it is clear why declawing is inhumane, cruel, and why it is banned in several cities in the US and most civilized countries in the world!

Further, a declawed cat is more likely to bite because you have taken away her primary defense mechanism. A declawed cat is 30 times more likely to have litter box problems because litter gets trapped inside a declawed paw, causing pain every time she needs to eliminate. Removing a cat's claws makes them feel defenseless and can result in a hateful, withdrawn, scared cat. Declawed cats often turn to biting as their defense mechanism. The constant state of stress can make them more prone to disease. Declawing alters the confirmation of a cat's foot, causing the foot to meet the ground at an unnatural angle. This can lead to back pain similar to what we experience when wearing improper shoes and life-long arthritis.

INFORMATION ABOUT RETURNS

If you are considering returning your cat because of a behavior problem, please contact Behavior@houstonpetsalive.org and CatFoster@HoustonPetsAlive.org. We have resources to



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help you solve problems before you feel that returning the cat is the only solution. We hope you will work with us to try to keep your pet rather than give up on him/her. New additions require time to adjust. It is traumatic for animals to be returned after being in a home. Please let us help you work it out so the pet can stay.

You are contracted to contact us first if you need to rehome this pet at any time in the future. Even if you have found someone that would like to take in your foster pet, please contact us so we can arrange it with them.

- If you choose to surrender your pet, please email us at CatFoster@houstonpetsalive.org and we will reply within in 24 hours. We need to schedule a time for you to come in.
- Wait time for an open kennel or foster home may take up to 2 weeks.
- If you show up without scheduling a time to return we will have to send you back home until a kennel space is available.