

## 40 Cat Safety Tips

**Keep your cat safe by adopting and following these guidelines.**

*Beth Krippner*

1. You know your cat. If she's acting strange, err on the side of caution: Take her to the vet.
2. Antifreeze is sweet but deadly. If your car leaks, get it fixed, and keep antifreeze far out of reach from your pets. Even one teaspoonful is fatal.
3. Do not underestimate your cat; it can fall out of a window, says Pat Coughlin, a cat owner in Norway. Install protective screens or storm windows to let your cat safely enjoy the view.
4. If your cat tends to chew electrical cords, keep her in a cord-free room when unsupervised, says Larry Lachman, an animal behaviorist in Carmel, Calif. Also, spray cords with safe spicy or bitter-tasting products.
5. If you use clumping litter, groom your cat frequently to remove particles that may accumulate and interfere with elimination.
6. Keep your cats indoors. They'll be healthier and happier, says Ceridwen Attwood, a cat owner in Washington. Outside they're exposed to other animals, risk getting run over by cars and are exposed to the elements.
7. Do not let in strays just for the heck of it, Lachman says. Having strange cats around can overstress your own cat, which may lead to fighting, biting and soiling or spraying around the home.
8. Never hit your cat. Use spray bottles with water if discipline is necessary. Physical punishment doesn't teach your cat appropriate behavior.
9. Consider using clay litter for kittens. If your cat accidentally ingests some litter particles, clay is nontoxic in small quantities.
10. Safely confine your cat when workmen or visitors are in your home [to prevent escape], Lachman says. A bathroom, laundry room, bedroom or cat carrier is ideal for this purpose.
11. Only use cat-specific flea preventives in vet-approved dosages to avoid triggering a dangerous reaction in your cat or kitten.
12. If at all possible, get your cat first, then add a dog to the household, not the other way around, Lachman says. This may reduce fighting over territories.
13. When introducing a kitten to your household, provide food, water, a litterbox, scratching post, bed and toys, and confine your kitten to a safe room (a bathroom or spare bedroom) for the first few days, and any time you cannot directly supervise him. A pheromone diffuser in this safe room can help keep a cat calm.
14. Keep all yarn, string, thread and needles in a secure cabinet. Yarn or string can become caught on a cat's barbed tongue and may be swallowed.
15. Don't give cows milk to kittens or adult cats because it may cause gas and diarrhea.
16. Certain human foods and medicines are extremely harmful to cats. Do not leave chocolate, onions or medicines out on counters, Lachman says.
17. Keep your cat's identification tag or microchip information current in case your cat wanders away.
18. Train your cat to stay away from the stove at all times, even if not in use, by squirting him with a spray bottle when he gets too close.
19. Do not feed your cat dog food. Cats require different nutrients and more protein in their diets than dogs do.
20. Do not attempt to pick up your cat when he shows signs of defensiveness or aggression. Although your cat adores you, he may still bite or scratch you out of fear.
21. Kittens love to explore, so block their access to the area behind the refrigerator, bookcase or couch so they won't get stuck or injured.

22. Before starting your engine, honk your car horn to scare away any cats sleeping in the engine compartment.
23. Gently handle your kitten on a regular basis to socialize her and prevent behavior problems associated with lack of contact.
24. Do not leave a cat or kitten [unsupervised] with a child under age 7, Lachman says. Kids under age 7 have poor impulse control and can accidentally or intentionally hurt the cat.
25. Cats will make a plaything out of any item, so keep blind cords out of your cats reach to avoid strangulation.
26. With your veterinarians guidance, assemble a kitty first-aid kit and keep this on hand for emergencies.
27. Never leave an iron, hot or cold, sitting on an ironing board. The cord may look like a toy to your kitten and she could pull the iron down on herself.
28. Although cats enjoy playing with the plastic ring from milk jugs, these can be chewed apart and swallowed very easily, says Scott Ransom, a cat owner in Oregon. [My] cat [was] in intensive care for a week once because of this mistake.
29. Cats love moving water, so keep the toilet lid closed to prevent drowning.
30. Don't give cats medicines that aren't intended for cats, says Rosalie Marley, a veteran animal shelter worker in Nebraska. Aspirin, ibuprofen and acetaminophen can be deadly.
31. Keep the clothes dryer and dishwasher shut when not in use. Check inside these appliances before using. Cats love to hide in warm, dark places, but these appliances are fatal when in use.
32. When you pick up your cat, support his chest and legs so he feels safe and does not struggle. This protects you from scratches and bites, too.
33. Some plants are poisonous to cats, Coughlin says. The [ASPCA website](#) has a list of toxic and nontoxic plants.
34. Always check your cats whereabouts before closing drawers, closets or doors to avoid accidentally locking your cat in.
35. Your cat can be a danger to smaller pets such as reptiles, fish, birds and rodents. Keep your cat away from other pets when unsupervised.
36. When adding a second cat or kitten to your household, clear his health by your vet prior to bringing him home, so you do not expose your first cat to possible illness.
37. Check your garage door before closing it, to avoid injuring any cats perched there.
38. Install baby locks on cabinets where you keep bug spray, household cleaners or medicines. Your smart cat may learn how to open cupboard doors!
39. Invest in covered wastebaskets and garbage cans for your home to prevent cats from finding dangerous items such as chicken bones or dental floss.
40. Always use a carrier when transporting your cat. Even if your cat loves car rides, she may get underfoot or escape if startled.

## Reasons to Brush Your Cat's Teeth

**Brushing your cat's teeth regularly could add years to its life.**

According to research by the American Veterinary Dental Society, more than 70 percent of cats develop periodontal disease by the age of 3, a condition which can be prevented by regular at-home tooth brushing.

So in observance of National Pet Week, which is May 6 to 12, here are some reasons for brushing your cat's teeth:

- Brushing cats' teeth regularly can extend their lifespan.

"Periodontal disease is a serious condition that causes gingivitis, loss of teeth, pain in the mouth and possibly even serious infections in the internal organs," said David Steele, a veterinarian with Advanced Animal Care in Mt. Pleasant, S.C. Preventing periodontal disease by brushing a pet's teeth regularly can reduce the occurrence of these conditions and increase a pet's lifespan.

- Brushing cats' teeth helps eliminate bad breath, which is often caused by pet dental or periodontal disease, and brushing your cat's teeth regularly can help prevent and correct this.
- Brushing your cat's teeth at home reduces the chance your cat will have to be anesthetized to have its teeth cleaned. Not only is there a slight health risk in having a cat anesthetized for a complete cleaning by your vet, but the procedures can be costly as well.

"By brushing your pet's teeth on a daily basis, we may be able to help reduce and perhaps even eliminate the need for having your pet anesthetized by your veterinarian for a more thorough cleaning," Steele said.

- Brushing your cat's teeth equals bonding. Though at first a cat may seem uncomfortable and you may feel awkward with brushing, it is possible that they will grow to enjoy the additional time spent with the owner.
- It's relatively easy.

"While to some folks brushing your cat's teeth may be a daunting task, it doesn't really need to be," Steele said.

Anyone with questions about how to properly brush their cat's teeth should consult with their veterinarian. Brushing your cat's teeth benefits your cat's overall health.

## Common Signs of Dental Disease

**Keeping your cat's teeth clean may prevent serious dental disease. Learn to recognize these symptoms of potential problems.**

Red gums and bad breath are indicators of dental and periodontal disease in cats. Drooling, bloody discharge and tooth loss are other important indications. Some bad breath is normal during the teething period in kittens. Pain on eating or opening the mouth may be caused by certain oral inflammatory conditions.

Most veterinarians perform dental cleaning and extractions. A thorough cleaning of your cat's teeth may be needed yearly to every few years. The frequency depends on your cat's diet and predisposition to plaque buildup and gingivitis. Prophylactic cleaning of your cat's teeth can prevent tooth loss and preserve the teeth into old age.

Bad breath or difficulty eating may also indicate serious oral problems such as oral abscesses or tumors. Owners may not recognize the severity of dental disease and the amount of discomfort to their cats. While most cats with severe dental disease will continue to eat, owners often remark that their cat "is like a new animal" after dentistry is performed.

Many owners worry about having dentistry performed on their cat's teeth because procedures require general anesthesia. Proper dental cleaning cannot be performed without general anesthesia. Anesthetic options available in veterinary practice today are advanced. Short-acting anesthetic gases such as isoflurane and high-tech anesthesia monitoring allow veterinarians to perform dentistry even on cats 20 years of age or older. Preanesthetic blood tests can determine if any other risks need to be addressed during dental or other surgical procedures. If you have concerns about the safety of dentistry and your cat, talk to your veterinarian about what precautions will be taken.

Another major concern is how the cat will eat if many or all its teeth need to be extracted. Some feline patients eat exclusively dry diets even after all their teeth have been removed.

