



6 Reasons You Might Let Your Cat Out, And Why Not To

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When I worked with the [MSPCA](#) in Boston, every day I'd hear from guilt-ridden pet parents about the awful things that happened to their cats when they went outside — they were hit by cars, attacked by predators, infected with diseases or they just disappeared.



But many people still let their cats outdoors — often with misplaced good intentions. Here are some of the most common reasons people let their cats outside, and safer, indoor alternatives.

Myth 1: Indoor cats get bored.

Fact: The truth is, indoor cats can and do get bored, but letting them outside is not a good solution.

Instead, make your home more interesting: Set up perches where he can watch birds from the safety of inside, build a [DIY cat playhouse](#), hide his food or [modify his feeder](#) so he has to “hunt” for it. (Find more suggestions in our [environmental-enrichment series](#).) Finally, if your cat is amenable to it, you might consider adopting a second cat as a playmate.

Myth 2: Indoor cats are overweight.

Fact: If your cat is overweight, the safest way to help her trim down is by combining portion control and a daily exercise and play routine.

Stop free-feeding your cat, or at least be mindful only to feed a healthy amount per day. (Yes, cats do overeat. You can consult your vet about how many calories your cat should be eating in a day.)

Have a cat who won't stand for an empty food dish? Keep him distracted with the activities mentioned above — [the feeder toy](#) would be perfect for him. If you feed wet food, try stuffing a smaller dog's toy (like a Kong) with the food so your cat will have to work to get the food out. You could also choose to use an [automatic feeder like this one](#) that works for wet or dry food, so you have options.

Cats love a schedule. Try feeding him at the same times each day and he'll get used to the routine quickly. (Just remember to consult your veterinarian before starting any new feeding or weight-loss routines.)

Myth 3: Indoor cats are destructive.

Fact: Destructive behavior is often a sign that something else is going on. Is your cat sick? Bored? A talk with your vet or a behaviorist may be in order.

Solving the problem might be simpler than you think. For years my cat Mojo loved her sisal scratching post on the floor, but then she started scratching my couches as well. I kept trying to redirect her back to her sisal, but nothing worked. What did? Getting a second sisal post that I mounted vertically instead of horizontally. Turns out she wanted both, and my couches have been safe ever since.

Myth 4: My cat's always been allowed outside, so he can't be indoor-only.

Fact: Many cats have successfully gone from outdoor-only or indoor/outdoor to indoor-only. The key, again, is making sure the indoor environment is just as interesting as outside — and being vigilant about preventing escape attempts. Read our article [Transitioning an Outdoor Cat to Indoors](#) for tips on how to do both.

Myth 5: My cat is safe when he goes outside because he stays close to my home.

Fact: A study of 10 house cats and seven farm cats published in the European ecology journal [Ecography](#) found that on average, the house cats covered more ground than the farm cats — at night, the house cats moved within an average area of nearly 20 acres, compared to just over 6 acres for the farm cats.

A lot can happen even within a small radius of your home, so if you really want to let your cat outside, consider harness training him or creating a screened-in enclosure for him. Read our article [Should You Let Your Cat Go Outdoors?](#) to find out how to harness-train your cat and build a cat-safe outdoor enclosure. ([Here's a video tour of one ingenious homemade enclosure.](#))

Myth 6: I need to let my cat out of the house because I'm allergic to her.

Fact: You may well be allergic to your cat, but it's possible you're really allergic to something she's bringing in: Indoor/outdoor cats pick up fleas, ticks, pollen and other allergens from the environment.

The Dangers of Letting a Cat Outside

Did you know that the lifespan of an outdoor cat is shortened by three to five years compared to an indoor cat? It's true that many cats that live outdoors can live a lot longer than that, but every time a cat is put outside, his or her life is put at risk. Allowing a cat to go outside doesn't just put the animal at risk either, an unsupervised cat may also destroy gardens and ecosystems. A lot of people assume that it's natural for cats to be put outside, but in many areas, environmentalists are trying to make laws that forbid people from letting their cats outside. See 11 reasons why you should keep your cat indoors below.

1) They Can Get Hit by a Car

You might think that this only applies to busy roads, but you don't need to live near a highway for your cat to run the risk of getting hit by a car. Anytime your cat crosses the street it runs the risk of being killed. Some people argue that their cat knows about street safety and is aware of the cars around them: but it only takes one mistake for a cat to get run over. Don't assume that the car will always see your cat or that your pet is smart enough to avoid traffic. We have seen this multiple times in the Burlington area and unfortunately this situation is normally fatal or the cat needs very expensive medical care and rehabilitation.

2) Other Animals Can Hurt Your Cat

Cats are in danger of being hurt or killed by other animals. Whenever you let your cat go outside, they are in danger because of other animals in the area. In Burlington, GTA and Tri Cities, there are a variety of wild animals that will hurt or kill a cat; coyotes, foxes, hawks, owls, raccoons, and even dogs and other cats, just to name a few. Your pet runs the risk of being attacked by dogs and even other cats. Even in a fenced in backyard while under supervision, a coyote can climb an 8 foot fence and snatch a cat very quickly.



3) Diseases and Health Issues

A cat can get sick from going outside. There are a lot of diseases that cats can get by going outside and coming in contact with other felines. Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) is one example, a cat with FIV has a compromised immune system and is more susceptible to other illness.

Feline Leukemia virus (FeLV) is another serious illness that infected cats can transmit to healthy cats. It can be transmitted through saliva and close contact with sick cats. Cats that frequently come into contact with other cats run a high risk of becoming infected. FeLV is very serious due to the fact that it can be fatal.

By going outside, cats also run the risk of getting rabies (which has been more and more frequently reported in Ontario), as well as parasites (such as fleas, ticks, lungworm, and tapeworm) and fungus (such as ringworm). Not all vaccinations protect felines from disease and health issues and they still run the risk of infection.

4) Cats Make a Mess

There are lots of risk factors for a cat when it goes outside, but that's not the only reason why cats shouldn't be allowed to roam the neighborhood. If you have a cat, you know how awful it can be to clean a stinky litter box. Now imagine that you are a neighbor that found cat poop in your tomato garden or in your flower bed. Every time you let your cat outside, there's a good chance that they are using the outdoors as their bathroom. It could be in someone's garden, a child's sandbox or even in carport or a shed. If your cat is going to the bathroom on your neighbors property they have probably noticed and aren't too happy with it.

5) Some People Hate Cats

Protect your feline from awful people. There are many people out in the world that don't like cats, and some of these people will try to hurt animals whenever given the chance. It's heartbreaking to lose a pet, but it's a thousand times worse if you lost them because someone intentionally hurt your pet. We have seen some cats that have been poisoned, tortured or killed by vengeful neighbors. When you put your cat outside you leave it at the mercy of these sick individuals.

6) Cats Can Get Trapped or Lost

Sometimes a feline doesn't come back home because they have lost their way or they got trapped somewhere. Have you heard the song "the cat came back?" Well not every cat has amazing directional skills, and therefore they aren't guaranteed to return if they wander too far from home. It's also very common for cats to get trapped somewhere: up a tree, in someone's garage, even in the engine of a car! Once they get into a tight space, it's hard for them to get out. If no one discovers them, they can starve to death or die from exposure to the elements. Cats can also get accidentally transported to different cities when they climb into cars.

7) Cat Overpopulation: Cats Reproduce Very Quickly

Don't let them out if they haven't been fixed.

This only applies to cats that aren't fixed, so if your pet isn't spayed or neutered, don't let them go outside. Female cats can become pregnant when they are just kitten, as early as when they are four months old! A few months later, they can give birth to a litter of kittens. Even while they are nursing their babies, a female can become pregnant again. Cats reproduce at a phenomenal rate. There are so many kittens born each year, and so many cats in Canada are still being euthanized because contract city animal shelters do not have the programs in place to find them all homes.

8) Cats are Decimating Bird Populations

They kill birds and other small animals.

It's no secret that cats are small predators and that they enjoy hunting and killing. Even a well fed house cat will prey on birds and other animals for sport. The issue of cats killing small animals indiscriminately is a cause for great concern. They may even kill endangered and threatened species. Some animals that a cat might prey on can also cause injury to the cat or poison them.

9) They Could Be Poisoned

An outdoor cat is exposed to a variety of substances, and some of them are deadly. Antifreeze is a real danger: cats are attracted to the taste and smell of it. Ingesting antifreeze can cause kidney failure and death, even in a healthy cat. There are other harmful substances that a cat can come into contact with, such as pesticides and chemicals. There are even plants that are poisonous to cats and there is no way to control their interactions with poisons and toxins.

10) It Can Reduce Their Lifespan

Every time a cat goes outside, they run the risk of being harmed or killed. While not every cat that goes outside will be killed, the chance of being harmed is very high. Keeping them safe in your home adds years to their lives, and gives them more time to spend with you.

11) It's difficult to assess health

It is difficult to assess your cat's health if they are going outdoors. Many cats who go outside will also go to the bathroom out there. The litter box is one of the best ways to assess your cats health, changes in urination and defecation can be a sign of illness. Cats who go outside are also able to get into things and may even be fed by neighbours. The food may not be of a good quality, it could be expired, have bacteria and also can increase the number of calories your cat is getting which could lead to obesity.

12) It's against bylaw

In Burlington it's against bylaw for cats to roam. In many other communities this is also the case. It's a good idea to check your local bylaws. When cats are roaming in a city where it's against bylaw, they're a lot more likely to be picked up by caring strangers and brought to the local animal control or shelter. People may mistake them for strays needing assistance. If not claimed within 3 days, your cat could be placed for adoption!