

# **The Veterinary Guide**

**CATS**  
PROTECTION

Advancing the health of animals with those who care for them every day, so we can all live better together: this is our purpose.

Virbac was founded by veterinary surgeon Pierre-Richard Dick in 1968 and remains dedicated exclusively to animal health to this day. From the very beginning it has been our mission to improve the health and wellbeing of pets by providing advanced solutions that respect the nature of the animal, offer lifelong preventative care, are developed in close collaboration with veterinary surgeons and open up new pathways in veterinary medicine.

We're proud of our track record in bringing significant advances in feline medicine to clinicians, including the world's first genetically engineered vaccine against feline leukaemia and the first veterinary interferon for cats in Europe.

Our efforts in helping to make medications easier to give to cats have been recognised with a number of our products receiving International Cat Care's Easy to Give awards.

Today Virbac offers a unique portfolio of feline solutions, from prevention to diagnosis and treatment. Our portfolio includes a number of market-leading and award-winning products of which we are particularly proud, but all of our products combine quality, effectiveness and convenience for veterinary surgeons, nurses and cat owners alike.

We're proud to supply vaccines to Cats Protection, as well as other products such as Milpro® and Speed® Duo, and we are honoured to be able to support the important work that they do.

If you would like to find out more about how Virbac can support feline medicine in your practice please visit [vet-uk.virbac.com](http://vet-uk.virbac.com) or call 01359 243 243 to contact your local Virbac Territory Manager.



# Introduction to the Veterinary Guide

Welcome to the third edition of the Cats Protection *Veterinary Guide*. It has been five years since our previous update was launched and during that time we have helped hundreds of thousands of cats. Around 30,000 cats are rehomed through Cats Protection each year and we neuter around 130,000\* cats a year through our subsidised neutering schemes; the largest in the world for a single species. We have expanded our Lifeline service, where we provide temporary foster care for cats of those escaping domestic abuse. Through our campaigning work we have seen the implementation of compulsory microchipping in England. We have updated our brand to appeal to a wider audience, while continuing to be a leading voice in cat welfare and education.

None of this work is possible without the support we receive from our colleagues in veterinary practice, and we thank you for your help in all the forms it takes.

The following information provides guidance on the veterinary approach to cats in Cats Protection care, and feral cats presenting as part of our trap, neuter and return work. Our minimum veterinary standards ensure we have consistency in the approach to cat health and welfare across our network and helps set a benchmark for the care of cats in the shelter setting. We have also developed guidance on a shelter medicine approach to a range of health conditions which may be encountered in cats in care. Alongside this, there are additional resources to be found at [cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets](http://cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets)

Please keep this guide in the practice as a reference for all staff working with Cats Protection cats. For those who prefer an online format, it is available at [cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-protocols-and-resources](http://cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-protocols-and-resources)

By following shelter medicine principles, we can use our resources efficiently, optimise the welfare of cats in our care, and ultimately help more cats.

Content in the guide may change moving forward, we will update it as often as is possible.

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Head of Clinical Services, Cats Protection

\*These figures are correct at the time of printing.  
For up-to-date figures visit [cats.org.uk/annual-review](http://cats.org.uk/annual-review)

# Cats in the UK

According to the Cats Protection CATS (Cats and Their Stats) Report 2024<sup>1</sup> there are 10.6 million owned cats in the UK, with 25% of households owning at least one cat. The size of the feral cat population is not well studied, but suggestions of over one million cats have been made.

Cats are acquired for many reasons; with 54% of those owning a cat citing reasons such as companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress<sup>1</sup>. For many owners, cats are no longer thought of as the independent mousers they once were, and instead are considered a part of the family.

Cats are prolific breeders and can reach sexual maturity from four months of age. Figures obtained through the CATS Report 2024 estimate that around 85% of owned cats in the UK are neutered, yet around 18% of female cats will have at least one litter, and almost half of these litters are unplanned<sup>1</sup>. The promotion of prepubertal neutering aims to prevent unplanned litters, however, despite efforts from collaborative campaigns by animal welfare organisations, not all veterinary professionals routinely recommend neutering at four months or younger. In addition to a lack of familiarity with the procedure and understanding of the supportive evidence<sup>2</sup>, additional barriers that prevent uptake include practice policy and veterinary capacity

more generally. The neutering of owned cats is not only important for the individual themselves, but can also have important consequences on the number of free-living unowned cats and the demand on shelters due to the dynamic, interconnected nature of cat populations. Cats Protection is working towards the creation of a balanced cat population within the UK.

Data from the CATS Report 2024 showed that during the previous year only 18% of cats were adopted from a rescue or rehoming centre/shelter in the UK, compared to 26% more than five years ago<sup>1</sup>. Most cats are now bought, and the majority of those looking for cats turn to online sites such as Pets4Homes and Facebook. Alongside this, there has been a year-on-year increase in the number of new cats acquired being a breed rather than domestic short, medium or long-hair cats. In the CATS Report 2024, for the first time, more pedigrees had been acquired than moggies<sup>1</sup>.

While fewer owners are looking to adopt, Cats Protection has seen increasing numbers of cats on waiting lists to come into care. Cats are relinquished for a number of reported reasons. In 2023 the top reasons given to Cats Protection were:

- abandonment or straying
- unwanted litters of kittens
- the result of multi-cat households
- owner health concerns

Around one quarter of the number of cats reported to enter UK welfare organisations each year are rehomed or reunited by Cats Protection.

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# Cats Protection

The Cats Protection League was founded in 1927 and changed its name to Cats Protection in 1998.

Cats Protection works towards making a better life for cats.

At the forefront of research on cat welfare we use our decades of experience to help all cats and support owners to keep their pets happy and healthy. Our campaigns change laws to give cats more protection and we continue to call for a better deal for cats.

Our 10-year strategy is called All for Cats, where we are working towards:

1. Ensuring that all sheltered cats have a good welfare experience.
2. Improving the quality of life of all owned cats.
3. Ensuring all feral cats (those that are unsocialised and unowned) are treated appropriately.
4. Ensuring the UK cat population is balanced to improve cat welfare.

Alongside this we aim to:

- build greater awareness, engagement and long-term relationships with cat owners and cat lovers
- lead the sector in welfare research and impact measurement

## Rehoming

Cats Protection achieves its rehoming work through a network of volunteers and employees working across the UK. Cats Protection fosters cats in need until a suitable home can be found for them.

Cats Protection cares for cats in a range of facilities throughout the UK, with the environment of each cat meeting internal and external standards for space and resource provision.

Cats are kept either individually, as queen/litter combinations or in existing bonded pairs. Within our employee-led cat centres, cats are housed within buildings containing a number of pens.

Where care is provided through our network of volunteers, cat accommodation can include pens in a garden, an approved cattery facility or fostering within a room or whole house. The husbandry standards, of which we are proud, should be the same for all cats in the charity's care. Cats Protection provides volunteers and employees with comprehensive manuals of guidance on Cats Protection policies and procedures.

Cats Protection never puts a healthy cat to sleep and only euthanases on veterinary advice. However, long-term life in a pen is not acceptable on welfare grounds and vets are asked to consider the impact and prognosis of both physical and behavioural conditions when examining, diagnosing and treating cats in care. Our aim is to ensure a cat's quality of life in both the short and long term, and this is especially important as more cats with complex medical needs are being relinquished into our care. Cats that have been in care for more than three months are considered long-stay and at this time even more concentrated efforts are made to find them a home.

During these challenging financial times, Cats Protection has seen our cat housing facilities often full, with ever growing waiting lists. Rehoming of cats in need is a short-term solution to the overpopulation issue, supporting neutering is considered a medium-term solution and our long-term aim is to improve the lives of all cats through education about neutering and cat care.

Members of the public can find their local Cats Protection team by looking on our website [cats.org.uk/find-us](https://cats.org.uk/find-us) or contacting the National Information Line (see page 63).

## Research

Cats Protection leads in cat welfare research to benefit the lives of cats. Current research focusses on:

population and epidemiology research:

- the study of all cat subpopulations, including feral, stray, owned and shelter cats and their connections. This research helps to provide a better understanding of population demographics, movement between subgroups, and how interventions, including neutering, can effectively and appropriately support these populations. In turn, this will support in the development of a healthy, balanced cat population in the UK

- the development of a more advanced veterinary management system, to enable effective and accurate reporting of clinical, epidemiological, demographic and site factors of cats in our care. This data will help to inform evidence-based shelter husbandry and shelter medicine approaches to improve feline welfare, reduce disease, improve protocols and speed up throughput to enable us to help more cats, in addition to informing future research questions to support optimal shelter cat care

- the development of a Feline Welfare Assessment Tool

- the creation of methods to assess, monitor and improve the wellbeing of cats in shelters and domestic homes, as well as unowned free-roaming cats. By combining key stakeholder engagement with the development of novel solutions to measure cat behaviour and welfare, we will ensure that research is scientifically valid, and cat centred, but also considers the needs of those living or working with cats. Once the tools are developed, they will provide critical sources of information about the welfare of these different cat populations, supporting interventions which will optimise cat wellbeing

## Cats Protection is not a sanctuary organisation

Cats Protection is a rehoming organisation and believes there is a home out there for every cat.

Being in care causes stress to cats for a number of reasons, and therefore our aim is for each of our cats to spend the minimum time in care and get into a new forever home.



# Cats Protection and the veterinary profession

Veterinary care is a key priority of Cats Protection, and we are proud of our strong relationship with the veterinary profession.

Every cat in Cats Protection care is examined by a vet and is given a minimum level of veterinary care prior to rehoming, which we call our minimum veterinary standards. Veterinary practices may interact with Cats Protection in several ways including:

- treating cats in Cats Protection care and/or after their adoption
- performing subsidised neutering
- performing prepubertal neutering and signing up to the Cat-Kind kitten neutering database
- neutering cats as part of a trap, neuter and return scheme
- reading or directing owners to Cats Protection support materials
- recommending Cats Protection as a source of cats to the public
- fundraising to support our work

This guide has been produced for the information of all veterinary practices in whatever capacity they interact with the charity.

## Cats Protection Veterinary and Behaviour teams

Cats Protection has a team of veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses, and behaviourists registered with the Animal Behaviour & Training Council to provide support to our volunteers and employees working with cats, and give advice and support to those within the veterinary profession working with Cats Protection.

Within the clinical team there are vets working regionally and centrally. Responsibilities of the Veterinary team include:

- supporting with medical queries about cats in care from vets, employees and volunteers
- establishing vet agreements and relationships with practitioners
- ensuring compliance of our centres with registered practice premises requirements
- developing and reviewing protocols and guidance
- managing wholesaler queries
- working with our Procurement team to ensure supply of pharmaceutical products and the optimal use of our funds

Our Veterinary team can be reached by emailing [veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:veterinary@cats.org.uk) Email is generally the best way to contact us. In addition, we have a phone line: 01825 741 991. This number is not for public access. The public can be directed to the charity's National Information Line: [info@cats.org.uk](mailto:info@cats.org.uk) or telephone **03000 12 12 12**.

## Resources for veterinary professionals

Our website has a page for vets and nurses at [cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets](https://cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets) which contains information about kitten neutering, our wholesaler discount scheme and also a number of protocols and guidance documents, which are there to assist vets treating cats in our care. Our *Feral Guide* and *Behaviour Guide* are also available in PDF format, and can be ordered in hard copy.

This can be found at [cats.org.uk/cat-behaviour](https://cats.org.uk/cat-behaviour) or scan the code.



## Resources for the general public

Our website and social media platforms include a wide range of information for cat owners and those interested in cats. We also have a selection of leaflets available for client information, covering common behavioural and medical conditions, and general advice on cat ownership. These can be found as online versions in our pages for vets and nurses and are also available to order in hard copy.

## Veterinary students

Cats Protection is passionate about working with veterinary students and sharing our knowledge about feline welfare and shelter medicine with the next generation of vets. We offer pre-clinical extra mural study (EMS) at many of our cat centres, and host groups of students from vet schools to learn about best practice in their feline interactions. We also offer clinical EMS both at the United Kingdom Cat Centre Veterinary Clinic and at several of our cat centres, through our dual placement EMS scheme. More information and additional resources can be found at our student hub at [cats.org.uk/student-hub](https://cats.org.uk/student-hub) or you can scan the QR code.



Our veterinary student ambassadors are a group of students across all the vet schools with an interest in feline practice and shelter medicine. Their role is to raise the profile of Cats Protection in the veterinary schools through working with our Veterinary team to promote a series of online talks for vet students, setting up shelter medicine clubs, and highlighting our resources for cat owners and veterinary professionals.

## Veterinary capacity project

In order to understand some of the challenges currently facing the vet profession, Cats Protection performed a survey of 236 veterinary surgeons in 2023<sup>3</sup>. A report of the findings of this survey can be found on our website or by scanning this code or searching 'Veterinary capacity project' on our website.



Key findings included:

- 52% of vets surveyed were either not meeting demand for their services in the last 12 months, anticipated that in the future they would not be able to meet demand, or were uncertain around their capacity to meet demand. Top reasons cited for this were staff shortages, more pets registering and more pets needing treatment

- 13% of those surveyed had reduced the amount of charity work they were doing, with an additional 31% still seeing cases but having to delay them

- nearly half (46%) of those surveyed reported they were taking a more pragmatic approach to cases (with reasons cited largely due to the cost-of-living changes and owners less able to afford expensive treatments)

- barriers to practising pragmatic medicine included fear of litigation, concerns vets are not doing the right thing by their patients, and pressure from colleagues or the practice culture

This has formed the basis for a number of projects focusing on support of the profession moving forwards.

## Shelter medicine

In the Cats Protection vet capacity survey<sup>3</sup>, 80% of UK vets working in non-charity specific practice indicated they were involved in some form of animal charity work and there is increasing interest in shelter medicine. Several vet schools now include shelter medicine on their teaching curriculum for vet students, conferences regularly feature streams on both shelter medicine and contextualised care, and the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) published a *Manual of Shelter Medicine* in 2018.

Shelter medicine principles blend animal welfare science with realistic and practical recommendations. The aim is to provide for the needs of animals in the care of rescue and rehoming organisations to ensure individual welfare needs are met and there is a strong focus on quality of life. However, because charity resources are always limited, when treatment plans are considered, the treatment of one individual should not significantly compromise the charity's capacity to treat and help other animals.

Shelter medicine encompasses herd health principles, preventative medicine and infectious disease management. It also considers the role stress and behaviour play in case and shelter management. Cats temporarily housed in rescue facilities present unique issues to the veterinary surgeon providing for their care. Challenges facing cats in care include:

- increased stress which contributes to both an increase in behavioural and stress-related disorders, and can alter the immune status of cats

- infectious disease, due to the increased population density, and the effects of stress. Cats are more likely to contract or have recrudescence of infectious disease, and may be more resistant to treatment or not recover as quickly

- a full medical history is not always available

- an individual cat's normal behaviour and preferences are not always known, especially upon entering care

Understanding the experiences of cats in care, and how this impacts their health and management, is an invaluable part of their veterinary care. We would encourage vets to visit and understand the facilities cats are housed in to help in their consideration of the health and behaviour of the cats in their care.

## Contextualised care

Contextualised care is a term for individualising care plans, looking at both the circumstances of the patient and the owner or caregiver. It has also been described as a pragmatic approach and encompasses some shelter medicine principles. When providing contextualised care, limitations such as cost and what the patient and the owner can feasibly manage are prioritised when creating a treatment plan, with a focus on ensuring the welfare of both cat and owner. By using contextualised care, diagnostics and treatment may not be the most advanced or expensive, but it can be equally rewarding and ultimately achieve the best possible outcome for the individual's circumstances.

Cats Protection asks vets working with cats in its care to take a contextualised approach, considering resources available (both financial and human) and the importance of being able to home the cat as quickly as possible. Examples of case management for cats in care and where it may differ from owned cats include:

- amputation is often considered more appropriate than a complicated orthopaedic procedure

- bilateral thyroidectomies are generally recommended for cats with hyperthyroidism, preventing medication being a hurdle to rehoming where there is a curative surgery available

- cats with osteoarthritis benefit from analgesia. However, joint supplements may have limited effect and may concern potential adopters in terms of cost and ease of administering

- chemotherapy, antiviral drugs, immune-modulatory drugs and radioactive iodine treatment are generally not considered appropriate

With regard to healthy cats, as more screening tests become available, it is financially impossible for a charity to use these tests in all the cats it rehomes. Alongside this, there are welfare and potential rehoming implications of performing tests on healthy animals.

Our protocols and guidance have been developed to help in decision making for cats in care.

They are available from [cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets](https://cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets)



Our Veterinary team is also available to provide support.

## Shelter and Charity Veterinary Association

The Shelter and Charity Veterinary Association (SCVA), previously the Association of Charity Vets, is a BSAVA-affiliated association for vets and nurses and was founded in 2010. Their vision is to empower veterinary professionals to optimise the welfare, including both physical and behavioural health, of animals in charity and accessible care clinics and shelter settings through evidence-based, ethical and contextualised decision making. This is achieved by promoting education and research to develop the field of shelter and charity medicine, and the SCVA has been involved in scientific publications and in shelter medicine streams at major conferences. Their annual conference provides an excellent opportunity to meet like-minded professionals and keep up to date with the latest developments in the field. For more information about their work and membership see their website: [scvassociation.org.uk](https://scvassociation.org.uk)



# Minimum veterinary standards

## The different needs of cats

Cats Protection encounters a range of cats through its work, from feral to pet cats, and those who fall outside of either of these classifications. Every cat is an individual, and how a cat will interact with humans throughout their life is dependent upon the socialisation with people that the cat receives, especially during the critical socialisation period between two and seven weeks of age. Genetics, the temperament of the parents and other early experiences will also influence a cat's nature. Not all cats can adapt to life as a pet cat. Not all cats can live independently. How social a cat is can be thought of as a spectrum, with feral cats and highly social pet cats at either end, with other cats falling between these extremes. Generally, we can describe cats within the following categories:

- pet cats
- feral cats
- cats in need of an alternative lifestyle

### Pet cats

Pet cats are those cats who have had sufficient socialisation with people during the critical period between two and seven weeks old, to be suited to rehoming in the domestic environment. Pet cats will generally be relinquished by their previous owners or are brought into Cats Protection care as strays.

### Feral cats

Cats Protection describes feral cats as those which have received little or no socialisation to people during the critical socialisation window, nor have they been habituated to the domestic environment, and therefore are not suited to life in the domestic setting. Ferals are generally presented as part of a trap, neuter and return scheme.

### Cats in need of an alternative lifestyle

Some cats may have received some early socialisation to people, but not to an extent where they can adapt fully to life as a pet cat in a domestic home. They may be referred to as 'in-betweeners' cats. These cats often are relinquished because they aren't coping within a home environment, or meeting an owner's expectations of how a pet cat should behave. They may have an unknown history, but are identified while in care, or after an adoption is unsuccessful. For cats unable to cope as a pet cat in a home, they can often thrive when living in a supported outdoor home, for example a stable yard. With feeding and shelter provided, the cats can then choose how much interaction they have with people.

'Community cats' may fall within any part of the spectrum between feral and pet cat, but are often 'in-between'. Community cats generally live freely in an urban environment but are supported by members of the local community.

### Veterinary care of cats at Cats Protection

All Cats Protection cats must receive a minimum veterinary standard of care. This will differ for cats in care and feral cats. Please see the highlighted boxes on pages 14 and 15 which summarise this care. Each point is then discussed in the chapters that follow.

Following the Cats Protection minimum veterinary standards is vital for the following reasons:

- to ensure the welfare of the cats we have in care
- to achieve consistency in the veterinary approach to cats rehomed across the charity. This provides certainty to new owners of the standard of care their cat will have been given, and if cats move within the charity, that veterinary checks and care will have been the same

# Minimum veterinary standards for cats in Cats Protection care

## Minimum veterinary standards for cats in Cats Protection care

- Veterinary examination with diagnostic tests and treatment as necessary
- Blood testing for FIV and FeLV for all high-risk cats
- Vaccination against FHV, FCV, FPV and FeLV with second/booster vaccinations if still in Cats Protection care when due
- Parasite control including flea and worming treatment
- Neutering
- Microchipping of all cats and kittens over 12 weeks
- Free temporary pet insurance for new owners

For cases where diagnostic workups, surgical procedures or treatments are likely to be costly, Cats Protection representatives or the veterinary surgeon are encouraged to discuss this with their regional manager and the Cats Protection Veterinary team.

## Recording veterinary care

### Clinical records

It is important that all cats have their clinical notes recorded on individual records. If cats receive anything other than routine veterinary care such as vaccinations, parasite prevention and neutering, while under Cats Protection care, their individual clinical notes should be given to the new owner at the time of adoption. More information on medical records can be found on page 20.

### Making cats 'fit to home'

As vets working with Cats Protection, we ask that you determine and record when cats are 'fit to home'. Cats are fit to home when:

- any medical condition that they had coming into care or during their time in care has either resolved or been stabilised
- all minimum veterinary standards have been adhered to

For more information on the guidelines on making a cat fit to home please see page 19. It is Cats Protection policy that when a cat is adopted, the new owners are made fully aware of any known medical conditions whether they have been resolved, may recur or are ongoing.

## Medical Summary Forms

Cats are matched to potential new owners who are given guidance on integrating their new pet to ensure a successful long-term relationship. At the point of rehoming, an Adoption Form is completed which transfers ownership and the duty of care to the new owner. We recommend that when a cat is homed, a Medical Summary Form is also completed, which provides a useful and concise way to ensure owners are fully informed of a cat's dental status, preventive care and known health issues.

These are available for completion from your Cats Protection representative or the Veterinary team.

Filling out a Medical Summary Form:

- the vet whose care the cat is under should complete the form, once a cat is deemed fit to home
- if there are any changes to the cat's medical condition after the cat is fit to home, while awaiting adoption, the form should be updated
- routine health care, including vaccinations, microchip details, the date of the last flea and worm treatment, FIV/FeLV testing and neuter status should be documented
- if additional health conditions have been identified, please detail this in the designated box and mark if the condition is resolved or ongoing and how likely it is to recur
- record the dental grade at the time of making the cat fit to home

To further allow full disclosure of any previous health problems, cats who have received more than the minimum veterinary standards should also be rehomed with individual clinical notes detailing the veterinary treatment they received while in our care. The Medical Summary Form can quickly resolve any later disputes by indicating known presence or absence of a pre-existing condition, and ensures cats are matched appropriately to new owners.

## Post-adoption veterinary care

### Pet insurance

A temporary cover note is issued by Cats Protection at the point of adoption of all cats, regardless of the cat's age, which provides cover for conditions which are not pre-existing. Should an owner make a future claim, a copy of the cat's medical record while in Cats Protection care may be requested by the insurer.

### Owner's veterinary fees

Adopters are sought who are able and prepared to take on the commitment of their new pet, including those with ongoing medical conditions. It is extremely rare for Cats Protection to provide follow-up veterinary financial support to new owners. To do so would prevent us from helping more cats in need. In rare instances, Cats Protection will enter into agreements at the point of adoption, to fund specified veterinary costs towards specific conditions in identified cats, where adoption has otherwise proven impossible without such financial support. In these situations, a specific agreement form is completed by both Cats Protection and the adopter and copied to the veterinary practice concerned.

### Behavioural support

The Cats Protection Behaviour team offer six months of behaviour support for cats post adoption and can be contacted through [behaviour@cats.org.uk](mailto:behaviour@cats.org.uk)

## Minimum veterinary standards for feral cats

Veterinary care for feral cats, presented by a Cats Protection representative, should include:

- health check under general anaesthetic to ensure fit to neuter and release
- neuter and ear tip
- an in-house blood test for FIV/FeLV in sick cats (where there is not an immediate euthanasia decision) or where there is a suspicion of retroviral infection. Testing can also be performed for feral cats receiving a one-off treatment while under general anaesthesia, to help guide decision making
- a single vaccination against FPV, FHV and FCV
- roundworm and flea treatment

## Further guidance on feral cats

### How can we best help feral cat populations?

Cats Protection believes that the most effective and humane way to assist the feral population is by undertaking trap, neuter and return (TNR) schemes, with vaccination and treatment of minor health concerns at the time of anaesthesia. This maintains healthy colonies of controlled numbers and avoids the vacuum effect and growth of population which results following feral removal strategies. Feral cats are very territorial and moving them to a new site can be very stressful. However, if return to their original site is not feasible, cats should be re-sited to another suitable outdoor situation such as farms or stables which can involve significant prior planning.

### Is it possible to 'tame' a feral cat?

Feral cats find confinement extremely stressful and should therefore only be confined to pens for the minimal time required for neutering. Attempts to 'tame' ferals will cause severe distress by forcing the cat to endure interactions they are fearful of (including people), while removing opportunities for the feral cat to display their natural behaviours and their ability to choose. This is called 'flooding' and causes learned helplessness, but the cat is still undergoing continual stress.



### What if a feral cat is injured or ill?

Minor health issues can be treated while cats are under anaesthesia for neutering, such as the removal of a loose tooth or flushing of an abscess. Euthanasia is recommended for cats with conditions that cannot be resolved with one-off treatment and where the condition will impact the cat's welfare and survival, following consultation with your Cats Protection representative (whenever possible).

Feral cats should not be confined following neutering for longer than 12 hours (males) or 24 hours (females), and ideally released sooner if the vet feels it is appropriate. If a longer hospitalisation period is being considered, contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team at [veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:veterinary@cats.org.uk)

FIV/FeLV testing should be performed in sick feral cats (where there is not an immediate euthanasia decision), please see pages 24 and 25 for further information.

### What about feral kittens?

When deciding if feral kittens will be left; trapped, neutered and returned; or brought into care, it is helpful to estimate the age of the litter. Further advice on aging kittens can be found in the *Feral Guide*.

- **Kittens under eight weeks old** can be neutered safely from weaning. Prior to weaning kittens are unlikely to be trapped as they are generally hidden away by the queen. Bringing kittens younger than five to six weeks into care will require hand-rearing which reduces their survival chances and significantly increases workload for volunteers and employees. After five to six weeks the fear response develops in kittens and so bringing them into care is likely to be stressful and may not result in a cat who can cope in the domestic setting

- **Kittens over eight weeks old** are beyond the critical two-to-seven-week socialisation period and are unlikely to adapt to life in a domestic setting. They should be trapped, neutered and returned

If considering bringing kittens under eight weeks old into care, for example if they are suspected to be abandoned, please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary and Behaviour teams. Ensure there is the resource available to effectively care for and socialise the kittens. Sometimes it may appear that young kittens are abandoned, but often the queen is hunting. Other female cats within the colony may care for the kittens during this time.

Further information in relation to each point can be found throughout this guide and a summary document on feral veterinary care on page 57.

Cats Protection has produced a *Feral Guide* which can be found at: [cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-protocols-and-resources](https://cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-protocols-and-resources)



### Discount schemes and ordering products when working with Cats Protection

As a charity, reducing costs where possible helps us to help more cats. From working closely with our wholesaler, pharmaceutical companies and suppliers, Cats Protection has secured discounts on a number of veterinary medicinal products and cat care supplies when ordered through a Cats Protection account. These products are listed on our Preferred Products List which can be found on page 61 or on our website.



### Wholesaler scheme

We ask that vet practices who work with Cats Protection set up a 'cats in care' wholesaler account with Covetrus. This can be arranged by emailing [veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:veterinary@cats.org.uk) The practice can then order veterinary medicines and other cat care supplies for our cats through this account. Payment will be direct from Cats Protection to the wholesaler.

The main products ordered are vaccines and flea and worm treatments. Practices may want to hold a small quantity of medications such as antibiotics and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. It is not recommended to order in injectable medications through this scheme as it is unlikely these will be used up within a 28-day period after broaching.

Local Cats Protection teams are supplied with pre-printed wholesaler order forms, which will need to be signed off by a vet. The order can be scanned and emailed to Covetrus where it is placed using an automated system. Alternatively, an online order form can be used to order products for cats in Cats Protection care (available from 2025). The order will usually be delivered to the practice the next working day if the order is placed before 4pm except when vaccines are ordered on a Friday (no deliveries take place over weekends). These will be delivered the following Tuesday due to storage temperature requirements.

All POM-Vs should be stored at the practice until dispensed for Cats Protection cats and any other non-prescription products can be collected by the local Cats Protection team.

Cats Protection also receives a substantial discount on Speed Duo FeLV/FIV blood testing kits; these are ordered through the wholesaler.

### Laboratory discount scheme

Finn Pathologists have kindly offered Cats Protection a charity-discounted, tailor-made laboratory service for cats in our care. Once a brief application form has been completed and sent by email to Cats Protection, Finn will send out a pack with the necessary submission forms, tubes and other consumables to use their services.

Laboratory submission forms should always be in the local Cats Protection team's name and not the name of the fosterer for example.





# Clinical examination

A full clinical examination should be undertaken in all cats entering the care of Cats Protection, where possible within the first 48 hours, but at least within the first seven days. This will depend on the cat having time to settle, balanced with the urgency of any concerns requiring a veterinary check. If a cat cannot be adequately examined despite giving them time in care to settle, they should be sedated/anaesthetised to examine at least once prior to homing. All cats in Cats Protection care should have individual records. Clinical notes should be as objective as possible. We ask that vets use the Bristol Dental Grading Chart to assess teeth and that faeces and body condition score are also objectively graded.

When performing the clinical examination of Cats Protection cats, the vet is asked to consider the following:

- **infectious disease.** Check thoroughly for signs of infectious diseases as these are more difficult to control in a rescue environment with the frequent introduction of new, stressed animals. In particular, vets are asked to consider ringworm, feline parvovirus and upper respiratory tract disease (see infectious diseases section on page 39)
- **age.** Estimate the cat's age and compare with the previous owner's judgement, if available. Although age estimation is not an exact science, it is helpful to be able to advise potential adopters of a vet's estimation when matching a cat to a potential owner. It may also affect pet insurance premiums. Adopters are advised of the limitations of age estimations
- **sex.** Assess the cat's sex and neuter status. Please palpate entire female cats and those of unknown neutered status for pregnancy. Ultrasonography to stage pregnancy is not needed. See neutering section on pages 30 to 33
- **microchip.** Scan for a pre-existing microchip
- **stray cats.** Follow the Cats Protection Stray Policy for all stray cats (see pages 53 to 55)

• **diagnostic tests.** Please only undertake further diagnostics if necessary in sick cats and when knowing the result of those tests is essential to influence case management (see page 37)

• **treatment.** Treatment of conditions that carry a reasonable prognosis and do not cause long-term suffering to the cat should be carried out. See 'Procedures and treatments for cats in Cats Protection care' on page 37

• **fitness to rehome.** Assess whether the cat is fit to home from a veterinary perspective, therefore meeting all the following criteria:

- healthy on a full health check or any ongoing conditions are stable
- has received the minimum veterinary standards. Cats are usually rehomed at least 48 hours after a vaccination and 48 hours after neutering at the vet's discretion
- the cat is not thought to pose a zoonotic risk, or for certain conditions, for example infectious diarrhoea, clinical signs have resolved and security measures are in place. There are owner guidance documents available on our website here.



- they are likely to cope with transition to an appropriate new home and are expected to enjoy a good quality of life. Cats Protection recognises assessing long-term prognosis based on a single clinical exam has limitations, and that cats may still become sick shortly after adoption following a clinical examination where nothing abnormal is detected. However, the aim is to ensure welfare and reduce the risk of owners facing unexpected consequences soon after adoption. If a cat is not fit to home, please discuss further recommendations which may include monitoring/further diagnostic tests/further treatment/euthanasia

• **records.** All findings and treatment should be recorded in the cat's individual clinical record and summarised in the Medical Summary Form once the cat becomes fit to home. Please ensure all accounts for Cats Protection cats are in the name of the local Cats Protection site and not, for example, the fosterer's name. As our fosterers are volunteers, there are data protection concerns around using personal details. Recording cats under the local Cats Protection name also allows records to be more easily traced and found

• **recheck.** While in care, the vet should recommend when the cat should be rechecked. Cats in Cats Protection care should generally be vet checked at least once every three months. If a cat is undergoing treatment or if the Cats Protection representative notices signs of ill health, the cat should be examined more frequently as advised by the vet

• **referral.** Referral to medical or surgical specialists is generally discouraged. The vet or Cats Protection representative should contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team for any Cats Protection cat where referral to a specialist is being considered

Separate accounts for invoicing purposes should be set up for:

- the treatment and neutering of cats in Cats Protection care
- the neutering of owned cats (supported through our subsidised neutering offer)
- ongoing treatment agreements for homed cats
- the treatment and neutering of feral cats

## Diet and body condition

Cats Protection cats are fed on a good-quality, complete commercial diet. Cats must not be fed raw or vegetarian diets, even if supplemented.

Cats Protection advocates the use of wet food, usually in combination with dry food, unless problems identified on the clinical examination lead to the recommendation of a more specific or prescribed diet.

Coming into Cats Protection care and being rehomed are stressful times for cats, and stress may cause a loss of appetite and weight. Conversely, the limited exercise opportunity for a cat confined to a pen or a room can cause weight gain. Each cat's weight should be monitored regularly, and any cats found to be overweight can be put onto a light or calorie-controlled prescribed diet if deemed appropriate.

Ideal bodyweight will vary depending on the breed and age of the cat. To help with assessing body condition, please see below the Virbac Weight Scoring Guide for cats. This tool grades the body condition of a cat from one to nine. See page 22.

Cats who are overweight or obese can be made fit to home. Many cats will have more successful weight loss once in a new home. This can be listed on the Medical Summary Form, and a copy of the veterinary history given to the owner, to provide full transparency about the condition. Veterinary-prescribed diets can be given to assist or support cats with certain medical conditions. If a cat is on a veterinary-prescribed diet when they come into care, the Cats Protection representative should inform the vet at the cat's first health check, so that a decision can be made on whether it is a suitable food for the cat to continue eating.

Cats Protection recommends that cats in care are provided with feeding puzzles to help maintain good physical and mental health.

## Long-stay cats

The aim for cats in Cats Protection care is to get them into a home as soon as is reasonably possible. Living in a shelter environment is very stressful for cats as they are unable to carry out certain normal behaviours and have limited control over their environment. A protracted stay in care is a significant welfare issue and should be avoided wherever possible. Subsequently, treatment plans put in place must reflect this. There may be cats with chronic health issues that, despite best efforts, cannot be controlled so that the cat is well enough to be made fit to home. Prolonged treatment plans must always be balanced with the needs of the cat and the chance of a successful outcome, and if issues are not resolving, euthanasia should not be considered as a failure but a treatment plan that will be in the best interests of the cat.

Cats will present every three months for rechecks, and we ask that vets look not only at the physical health but also the mental wellbeing of the cat involved. Providing veterinary care for cats that have been in care for a long time can involve difficult decision making, and the Veterinary team is always available to help with these cases, email [veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:veterinary@cats.org.uk)

## Decision making and case discussions

We ask vets to discuss treatment options, estimated costs and prognosis, along with any concerns with regards to the cat's quality of life (both in care and after adoption) with the Cats Protection representative. Please also advise the Cats Protection representative whether it is recommended potential new owners discuss a cat's condition with the vet prior to adoption and whether medication can be passed on to a new owner.

We encourage contact with the Cats Protection Veterinary team if required. For example, when considering prolonged therapy or where cats may have a more guarded prognosis. Any treatment, ongoing or one-off, which is likely to cost more than £500 should be discussed with the Veterinary team before treatment is undertaken. If an outbreak of infectious disease occurs, the Veterinary team needs to be informed. For more information on infectious disease management see page 39.

## Fitness to travel

On occasion, veterinary practices may be asked to advise on a Cats Protection cat's fitness to travel. If a healthy Cats Protection cat has to travel for less than four hours then a veterinary health check should have taken place within the last three months, but if the journey will be longer than four hours the health check should take place within 48 hours of the journey. When assessing whether it is reasonable or appropriate to transport a cat in Cats Protection care, please consider:

- the individual cat's:
  - health
  - behavioural status
  - prognosis in the short and long-term
  - adoption prospects
  - microchip status. Where possible cats should be microchipped prior to travel

- the journey:
  - time
  - type of transportation
  - nature of intended destination
  - reason for transportation
- alternative options
- any specific considerations needed, including:
  - if a journey is over four hours, kittens and cats should be vaccinated and over 48 hours should have passed since their vaccination. Cats should also have been blood tested for FIV/FeLV
  - we advise against transporting sick cats, other than to see a veterinary surgeon, or under the direction of a vet (for example, to move a cat to an isolation facility)
  - if a cat has significant respiratory or cardiovascular disease they should not be transported, other than to see a vet
  - avoid transporting pregnant and lactating queens and kittens under eight weeks old where possible

For further guidance or support with the transportation of cats please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team.

## Clinical examination of feral cats

When a feral cat is anaesthetised for neutering, the opportunity should be taken to do as much for the cat as possible. A thorough health check should be carried out by the vet once the cat is anaesthetised and before surgery commences. Feral cats should not be examined without sedation or general anaesthesia.

In particular, please pay attention to:

- **microchip.** Please scan for a pre-existing microchip. Do not place microchips in feral cats. The legislation for compulsory microchipping in England specifies that owned cats must be chipped; feral cats are not required to have a microchip. If a microchip is present, please follow our Stray Policy on pages 53 to 55
- **clinical examination.** A full examination should be undertaken to assess the cat's health and whether they are expected to have a good quality of life in the wild

- **preventative treatment.** A single vaccination of RCP should be administered, and treatment for fleas and roundworms applied. Where there is a strong suspicion of tapeworms, such as visualising a segment, a tapeworm treatment can be applied concurrently. Spot-on treatments need to be used as there is no guarantee feral cats will eat when confined. Ticks can be removed with a tick hook


- **diagnostic tests.** Sick cats, or cats where there is suspicion of retroviral infection, should be tested for FIV/FeLV unless there is an immediate euthanasia decision. Testing can also be considered in cats receiving a one-off treatment for a health condition to guide decision making. Please only undertake further examinations or diagnostic tests if necessary and when knowing the outcome of those tests is essential to influence case management. Tests for which immediate results are unavailable are not appropriate for use in feral cats

- **fitness to release.** Assess whether the cat is fit to release. Feral cats should be confined for the absolute minimum period of time

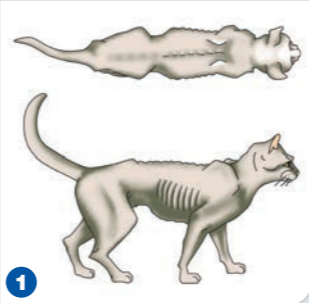
- **treatment.** Provide treatment for minor conditions where a single treatment is feasible, for example removing a loose tooth, cleaning a wound, treating a minor infection. Involved treatments requiring repeated intervention, hospitalisation or confinement are never suitable for feral cats. Euthanasia is recommended for cats with conditions that cannot be resolved with one-off treatment and where the condition will impact the cat's welfare and survival

- **records.** All findings and treatment should be recorded. It is recommended that a separate file be used for all feral work

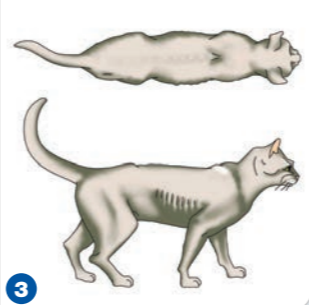




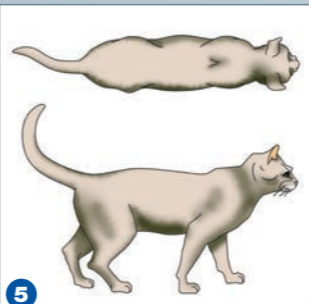
## Feline Body Condition Score



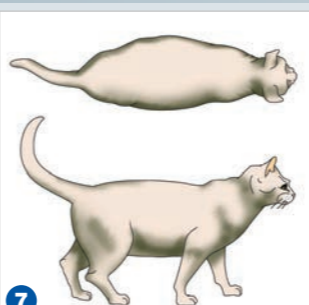
**1**



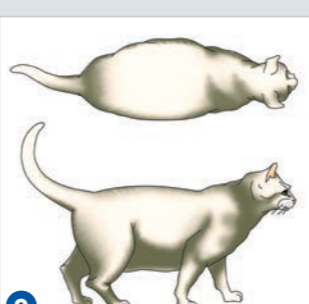
**3**



**5**



**7**



**9**

### Underweight

- 1** Ribs visible on shorthaired cats. No palpable fat. Severe abdominal tuck. Lumbar vertebrae and wings of ilia easily palpated.
- 2** Ribs easily visible on shorthaired cats. Lumbar vertebrae obvious. Pronounced abdominal tuck. No palpable fat.
- 3** Ribs easily palpable with minimal fat covering. Lumbar vertebrae obvious. Obvious waist behind ribs. Minimal abdominal fat.

### Ideal

- 4** Ribs palpable with minimal fat covering. Noticeable waist behind ribs. Slight abdominal tuck. Abdominal fat pad absent.
- 5** Well-proportioned. Observe waist behind ribs. Ribs palpable with slight fat covering. Abdominal fat pad minimal.

### Overweight

- 6** Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist and abdominal fat pad distinguishable but not obvious. Abdominal tuck absent.
- 7** Ribs not easily palpated with moderate fat covering. Waist poorly discernible. Obvious rounding of abdomen. Moderate abdominal fat pad.
- 8** Ribs not palpable with excess fat covering. Waist absent. Obvious rounding of abdomen with prominent abdominal fat pad. Fat deposits present over lumbar area.
- 9** Ribs not palpable under heavy fat cover. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar area, face and limbs. Distention of abdomen with no waist. Extensive abdominal fat deposits.

# FIV/FeLV testing

Cats should be individually assessed for their risk of infection with FIV or FeLV (see below) and then all cats classified as high risk should be tested. At the point of adoption, owners are made aware whether a cat has or has not been tested for FIV or FeLV and the results of any testing.

Appropriate cats should be tested as soon as possible after coming into Cats Protection care. For example, unless essential, do not wait to test pregnant and lactating queens. Positive results are inevitably traumatic for those caring for the cats, with delays being even more upsetting. Kittens that require testing should be tested as soon as they are big enough to sample, at around eight to nine weeks of age.

## Which cats in Cats Protection care should be tested for FIV/FeLV?

- Sick cats (either on admission or those that become unwell in care), and cats who are showing signs that could be consistent with retroviral infection, or where the vet feels testing is indicated
- All entire, sexually mature cats (including pregnant and nursing queens)
- All stray cats
- All cats known to be in contact with cats that are FIV or FeLV-positive (this includes all kittens of FIV-positive queens)
- Orphan kittens, or kittens whose mother's FIV and FeLV status are unknown
- Any cat before they undergo extensive treatment or surgery

Screening patient-side blood testing kits are used first-line and can be ordered centrally through a Cats Protection 'cats in care' wholesaler account. These are in general very accurate but false positive results can occur. Ideally serum is used for the screening test kits as this reduces the likelihood of false positive results. Any positive test results are then confirmed at reliable external reference laboratories using tests which can give us definitive results that are not influenced by, for example, maternally derived antibodies. The only exceptions to this are feral cats (for more information see below) and cats that are showing classical signs of the disease.

Cats Protection FIV/FeLV flowcharts offer guidance on testing, confirmation and action in light of results. See our 'For vets and nurses page' at [cats.org.uk](https://cats.org.uk)

## Cats in Cats Protection care FIV/FeLV testing (follow the Stray Policy for stray cats, see pages 53 to 55)

Cats Protection rehomes confirmed FIV-positive cats to indoor homes provided they are clinically well and suited to an indoor lifestyle. Euthanasia is recommended if confirmed FIV-positive cats are likely to have a poor quality of life. Kittens of FIV-positive mothers are tested, as generally only a proportion of the litter will test positive.

Cats Protection euthanases all confirmed FeLV-positive cats and those that are symptomatic for FeLV and test positive with a screening test. We also advise the euthanasia of all kittens born to FeLV-positive queens before testing as it is expected that 100% of the litter will test positive for FeLV if the queen is positive.

Potential adopters are made aware on the Medical Summary Form whether a cat has been tested prior to rehoming.

## Feral cat FIV/FeLV testing

Feral cats that require FIV/FeLV testing should be blood tested under general anaesthesia using screening tests. The test should be carried out immediately while the cat remains under anaesthesia. Confirmation testing should not be performed in feral cats who test positive for FIV/FeLV, as they would need to be confined while awaiting results and this will be extremely stressful and detrimental to their welfare. The exception to this is a feral kitten less than eight weeks old that can be taken into care, socialised and rehomed as an indoor cat if the confirmatory test comes back positive for FIV. Please refer to our FIV/FeLV testing flowcharts here.



The following feral cats should be tested for FeLV/FIV:

- sick cats (where there is not an immediate euthanasia decision), or where the vet has a clinical suspicion of infection with FeLV or FIV
- individual cats where a one-off treatment is being considered, where cats can be tested at the vet's discretion to help with decision making
- if there is a significant number of sick cats in a colony, there is flexibility around testing the whole colony. Please discuss this with your Cats Protection representative





# Vaccination

Vaccination of cats in Cats Protection care is essential to protect individuals and facilitate herd immunity to limit the spread of infectious diseases.

Vaccinations should be administered by a veterinary surgeon following a clinical assessment and they should complete a Cats Protection Vaccination Record Card for each cat. Where a vet has examined a cat and given the first vaccination, they may delegate the second vaccination to be performed by a registered veterinary nurse, under their direction. Vaccines preferred for use in Cats Protection cats can be ordered centrally by setting up a 'cats in care' wholesaler account. See discount scheme section on page 16.

## Timing:

- all cats should be vaccinated as soon as possible after entry into Cats Protection care using the vaccine brand preferred by Cats Protection (which can be found on the Preferred Products List available on the 'For vets and nurses' page of the Cats Protection website)
- if there is veterinary evidence that the cat has received a full vaccine/course within the last 12 months (in line with Cats Protection minimum veterinary standards, see page 14) there is no need to repeat the vaccination
- cats should usually be vaccinated 48 hours before neutering
- in kittens we recommend vaccinating at eight to nine weeks of age and then neutering 48 hours later

## Stray cats:

- stray cats of unknown vaccination status should be vaccinated, even though an owner could come forward. This minimises both the risk of an unvaccinated cat contracting infectious disease and the risks to other cats in Cats Protection care
- see the Stray Policy on pages 53 to 55

## Datasheet:

- cats should be vaccinated as per the datasheet of the Cats Protection preferred product
- use of vaccines outside the datasheet, for example use of vaccine in young kittens in the face of an FPV outbreak, should first be discussed with the Cats Protection Veterinary team

- an FAQs document on vaccines is available on the 'For vets and nurses' page on the Cats Protection website

## Pregnancy and lactation:

- avoid vaccinating pregnant queens if they are not to be neutered during pregnancy
- lactating queens should be vaccinated at approximately one to two weeks post-partum on a risk/benefit analysis for the particular case (for example in a centre with high feline density, a cat may be at greater risk than when with a fosterer with a single cat where there has been no history of disease in the foster environment). In these cases, Cats Protection can consent to a vaccine being used off licence
- if veterinary surgeons are not sure about using vaccines off licence, they can discuss this with the Cats Protection Veterinary team

## Adoption:

- cats are kept in Cats Protection care at least 48 hours after any vaccination prior to adoption, in case of a vaccination reaction

## Vaccination for feral cats

Feral cats should be given a single vaccination while under anaesthesia against FHV, FCV and FPV as part of the trap, neuter and return scheme. A single vaccination at the point of neutering can result in a high percentage of cats developing protective titres of serum antibodies, especially against FPV and FCV<sup>6</sup>.



# Parasite control

Appropriate use of flea and worming treatment in rescue cats benefits each individual cat and helps to control environmental issues and the potential spread of disease. However, while parasite control for cats in care is important, our cats are also in a unique controlled environment where they won't go outdoors or be in contact with other animals (apart from another bonded cat, littermates or queen) and cleaning and disinfection protocols will be stringent. Flea and worming treatments for Cats Protection cats can be ordered centrally through a 'cats in care' wholesaler account.

See discount schemes section on page 16.

## Flea and worming treatment for cats in Cats Protection care

All domestic (non-feral) cats (including strays) should be treated against fleas and worms as soon as possible after entry into Cats Protection care. In most cases, repeat treatments of anti-parasiticides are not required. Cats Protection preferred products should be used as per the datasheet, and appropriate to the age, health and physiological status of the cats. A vet must assess the cat before any prescription flea or worming treatment is given. Non-prescription products such as Capstar may be given where a welfare need is identified.

Cats Protection has guidance on parasite treatment and intervals for adult, pregnant and lactating cats and kittens in the charity's care. This can be found at [cats.org.uk/cat-care](https://cats.org.uk/cat-care)

## Flea and worming treatment for feral cats

Feral cats should be given a single treatment against fleas and roundworms under general anaesthesia, under veterinary direction, as part of the trap, neuter and return scheme. Tapeworm treatment is not routinely advised but may be indicated where there is evidence of a heavy burden, such as the visualisation of segments. Ticks can be removed with a tick hook.

Within our guidance on parasite control, we discuss the options for treatment for use in feral cats available through Cats Protection, scan to find out more.





# Neutering

The promotion of neutering is one of the core objectives of Cats Protection. We aim to neuter all cats before rehoming. For further information, including a veterinary video guide to prepubertal neutering, see our resources on the Cat-Kind website at [kind.cats.org.uk](http://kind.cats.org.uk)

## Kitten neutering

**Cats Protection recommends members of the public have their cats neutered at four months of age or younger.**

Cats Protection believes that neutering at four months or younger, also known as kitten neutering or prepubertal neutering, is the best way to support the development of a balanced cat population and improve individual cat welfare. When cats are unneutered, populations can expand rapidly. Research shows that areas with more unneutered owned cats are more likely to have higher numbers of free-living unowned cats. Recent estimates suggest there are around a quarter of a million free-living, unowned cats across all urban areas of the UK<sup>5</sup>.

A modelling study has also highlighted the important interlink between owned and unowned cat populations<sup>6</sup>. It found that lower rates of neutering of female owned cats led to population booms within other subpopulations, especially for stray cats. The study also highlighted the important role of prepubertal neutering, showing that even when neutering rates remain the same, neutering female owned cats prepubertally could decrease population growth rates for all subpopulations. Therefore, earlier neutering is not only a positive welfare decision for the individual cat, but also benefits the wider cat population.

Cat-Kind is a group of charities and organisations who are working together to improve the effectiveness of neutering through the promotion of prepubertal neutering, by collaborating on research and joint projects.

The Cat-Kind website ([kind.cats.org.uk](http://kind.cats.org.uk)) hosts a resource hub for vets neutering, or considering neutering, cats prepubertally. Resources include guidance on kitten anaesthesia, video resources, a database of veterinary practices who practice and promote four-month or earlier neutering, and a summary of the scientific evidence around commonly cited concerns of prepubertal neutering, such as growth and development, behaviour, obesity and surgical risks.

In addition, The Cat Group, a collection of professional organisations dedicated to feline welfare, has produced a policy statement on the age of neutering, recommending that kittens are neutered as early as practical and no later than when they are sexually mature (at four months). Organisations aligned with The Cat Group include BSAVA, ISFM and the RSPCA. The BVA also supports the policy statement of The Cat Group. More information on this can be found on The Cat Group's website: [thecatgroup.org.uk/policy\\_statement](http://thecatgroup.org.uk/policy_statement)

## Kitten neutering database (KiND)

The kitten neutering database, available through Cat-Kind, is a search resource enabling the public to find a vet who will neuter cats at four months or younger. Any practice that neuters at four months or earlier is eligible to sign up to the register. Practices can also sign up to become a Kitten Neutering Champion, where vets looking for support with prepubertal neutering can contact you by email or phone or arrange to visit your practice. We believe peer-to-peer support could really benefit those practices wanting to neuter cats at a younger age, but who would value the advice of a colleague first. For further details, go to [kind.cats.org.uk](http://kind.cats.org.uk)

## Neutering cats in Cats Protection care

**Age.** Kittens in Cats Protection care can be neutered any time from two days after first vaccination. However, adoption should not be delayed by holding kittens back in care for neutering, if a suitable owner has been found. All Cats Protection cats four months and over should be neutered before homing. Follow the Cats Protection Stray Policy (see pages 53 to 55) for all stray cats.

**Pregnancy.** It is recommended to spay cats in Cats Protection care up to approximately six weeks of pregnancy. Giving birth and raising kittens in Cats Protection care is stressful for the mother,

can be detrimental to her welfare and influence the behaviour of her kittens. It also leads to difficulties in providing safe and adequate socialisation and social referencing, which is required to ensure the kittens become well-adapted pets and have good welfare in their new homes. If pregnancy is end stage or giving birth is imminent, for example there is milk in the mammary glands and/or the cat is showing typical behavioural changes, the pregnancy may be allowed to continue, although the vet is asked to assess each case.

**Lactation.** Female cats in Cats Protection care should usually be spayed from six weeks after kitting. In contrast with bitches, queens can be neutered when lactating and it does not prolong lactation. However, kittens should remain with their mothers until eight weeks old, to allow gradual weaning and to facilitate their behavioural development.

**Assessment of neutered status.** Guidance on the assessment of a cat's neutered status can be found here.



**Surgical approach.** Female cats in Cats Protection care are generally spayed by the left flank approach, with dissolvable sutures where possible, to facilitate post-operative monitoring by Cats Protection representatives. Cats Protection prefers an ovariohysterectomy to be performed and the ovarian pedicles and the uterine body (as far caudal towards the cervix as possible) should always be ligated. If female cats of unknown neuter status are undergoing exploratory laparotomy, following a shave for a scar and luteinising hormone test, they should have midline surgery performed. For more information please see our protocol on the management of cats of unknown neuter status on our 'For Vets and Nurses' page.



**Analgesia.** All cats should be given analgesia at neutering. Post-operative analgesia should be provided on a case-by-case basis as assessed by the attending veterinary surgeon, depending on the environment the cat is going back to.

**Antibiotics.** Prophylactic antibiotics are not recommended for use for clean surgical procedures including neutering.



## Feral cat neutering

**Age.** Feral cats are neutered from weaning.

**Pregnancy.** Feral cats should be neutered up to the latest stage of gestation as possible. Pregnant feral cats should not be confined to allow them to have the kittens. If the veterinary surgeon is not able to perform surgery, the queen should be released immediately. Confinement severely compromises the welfare of feral cats.

**Lactation.** Lactating feral queens should be neutered. In contrast with bitches, it does not prolong lactation. If the kittens were not found, she should be released as soon as possible post-operatively (ideally no more than 24 hours later) to allow her to return to her litter. In her absence there may be other queens in a colony situation that would suckle the kittens.

**Surgical approach.** Feral queens should be spayed by the left flank approach, with dissolvable sutures. Cats Protection prefers an ovariohysterectomy to be performed and the ovarian pedicles and the uterine body (as far caudal towards the cervix as possible) should always be ligated.

**Medication.** An analgesia injection should be given to every feral cat. Prophylactic antibiotics are not recommended for use for clean surgical procedures including neutering.

**Ear tip.** Feral cats must be identified as neutered by straight line removal of a 10mm tip (5mm in small kittens) of the left ear. This is an internationally recognised means of identification which can be seen at a distance and in low light. This prevents the stress of re-trapping, repeated anaesthesia and surgery. Ear tipping is required as a condition of payment by Cats Protection. Microchipping should not be performed. Legislation for compulsory microchipping of cats in England refers only to owned cats.

**Return.** Female feral cats should be returned to site within 24 hours of neutering (with dissolvable sutures), including cats who have had a pregnant spay performed. Male feral cats should be returned within 12 hours of neutering. Rarely health constraints may require exceptions, however the welfare implications of any time being confined for feral cats must be carefully considered. Most feral cats will not eat, drink or toilet in confinement. Acceptance and reintegration back into a colony is also likely to be impeded by delays. If considering a longer hospitalisation time please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team.

## Cats Protection neutering of owned cats

Cats Protection helps tens of thousands of cat owners with the costs of neutering. In 2023 alone we neutered 157,000 cats. Further information can be found at [cats.org.uk/what-we-do/neutering](https://cats.org.uk/what-we-do/neutering)

All owned cats neutered through the Cats Protection neutering schemes should be recorded on a separate Cats Protection neutering record for invoicing purposes.

## Guidance for neutering kittens

### Keep healthy

Younger animals have a juvenile immune system, so best to do earlier in the day, before other operations to reduce risk of infection.

### Keep fed

Withhold food for three hours only before surgery. Do not withhold water. Offer food early in recovery.

### Keep calm

Keep littermates together, including during recovery, and reduce stress such as from noise, handling.

### Keep accurate

Weigh accurately and calculate doses based on body surface area.

### Keep warm

Don't clip or wet excessively when prepping. Maintain a warm ambient temperature, keep insulated throughout and express the bladder.

## Anaesthetic considerations

Cats Protection recommends that:

- female cats are intubated for neutering and maintained on oxygen
- at least 20 minutes should elapse after the initial intramuscular injection of medetomidine/ketamine before administering atipamezole
- perioperative analgesia should be administered
- post-operative analgesia should be given at the vet's discretion on a case-by-case basis

## Quad protocol

A useful protocol is to use equal volumes of: medetomidine 1mg/ml, ketamine 100mg/ml, midazolam 5mg/ml and buprenorphine 0.3mg/ml, known as the kitten quad. These can be mixed in the same syringe and given together.

## Quad protocol feline dose rates

Bodyweight (kg)	Body surface area (m2)	Volume anaesthetic drugs* (ml)	Volume reversal agent 5mG/ml (ml)	Volume Meloxicam* 2mg/ml (ml)
0.50	0.07	0.04	0.020	0.05
0.60	0.07	0.04	0.020	0.06
0.70	0.08	0.05	0.025	0.07
0.80	0.09	0.05	0.025	0.08
0.90	0.10	0.05	0.025	0.09
1.00	0.10	0.06	0.030	0.10
1.10	0.11	0.06	0.030	0.11
1.20	0.12	0.06	0.030	0.12
1.30	0.12	0.07	0.035	0.13
1.40	0.13	0.07	0.035	0.14
1.50	0.14	0.08	0.040	0.15
1.60	0.14	0.08	0.040	0.16
1.70	0.15	0.08	0.040	0.17
1.80	0.15	0.09	0.045	0.18
1.90	0.16	0.09	0.045	0.19
2.00	0.17	0.10	0.050	0.20

\*Off-licence – obtain informed owner consent.

## Kitten Quad app

An app is available to help vets calculate drug dosages using the 'quad' combination. The app can be found by searching for 'Kitten Quad' in the Apple App Store. Please check other app providers for availability.





# Microchipping

New legislation to introduce compulsory microchipping for owned cats came into force in England on 10 June 2024. Under the new microchipping regulations, owned cats must be microchipped before they reach the age of 20 weeks. The owner's contact details must be stored and kept up to date in a pet microchipping database. Owners found not to have their cat microchipped will be given 21 days to comply or may face a fine of up to £500.

Feral and unowned cats are exempt from the new microchipping rules, but all other cats in England must be microchipped, whether they are indoor or outdoor cats.



## Microchipping cats in Cats Protection care

All cats in Cats Protection care who have not already been microchipped should be microchipped prior to adoption (see below for information about feral cats). Cats Protection preferred microchips should be used (see page 61). Cats Protection microchips can be used for cats in the charity's care, and as part of Cats Protection neutering schemes.

Microchipping should be performed as part of the veterinary clinical examination. Microchips should be implanted by the vet or registered veterinary nurse, and registered to the local Cats Protection as soon as possible, ideally immediately after implantation. Cats Protection employees and volunteers cannot microchip cats.

Kittens can be microchipped from around eight to nine weeks of age, often at the same time as the first vaccination.

Follow the Stray Policy (see below) for all stray cats.

Adverse reactions in Cats Protection cats, which may include microchip failure, loss, migration or hair loss as well as injury or disease, should be reported to Defra. Either call 0845 933 5577 or email [defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

Cats relinquished to Cats Protection care with pre-existing microchips have their registered details checked:

- in the case of strays, to attempt to reunify them (see the Stray Policy on page 24)
- in the case of cats relinquished by their owners, to double-check registered ownership

The microchip details are transferred to Cats Protection, and then to the new owners at the point of adoption.

## Microchipping feral cats

Feral cats should not be microchipped, and this is reflected in the legislation for compulsory microchipping, which specifies the requirement for owned cats to be chipped. When neutered as part of a trap, neuter and return scheme, they are identified as neutered by removal of the 10mm tip of the left ear, a mark which can be seen at a distance and in low light. See page 58.

## Foreign microchips

Cats Protection encourages owners to ensure they always keep their registered contact details up to date. This is especially important for those owners whose cats are still registered outside the UK following their travel into the UK. If these cats stray and their foreign-registered microchip is identified, there is no way of finding out if these cats have entered the country legally or whether they pose a risk of rabies and so quarantine or euthanasia may be enforced in the absence of authorities tracing an owner. If a foreign microchip is found, our Cats Protection representative is recommended to get in touch with our Branch Support Unit who can advise of how best to proceed. They can be contacted on 0808 0019 1919.



# Procedures and treatments

Please ensure informed consent is given by an authorised Cats Protection representative before undertaking any diagnostic, surgical or medical procedure or hospitalisation of Cats Protection cats.

Please follow the Stray Policy for stray cats presented through Cats Protection.

## Diagnosics and screening tests

Judicious use of funds for diagnostic tests allows resources to be available to help other cats in need. There are welfare implications for each test and procedure performed on a cat in care, and there can also be rehoming implications. It is important that adopters are informed of the level of testing that has been done and that there is no way to guarantee the ongoing health of a pet.

### Disease screening

Screening tests are generally only performed where there is significant likelihood of disease and knowledge of that disease will change the management of the patient, or where the disease could impact on the population of cats. An example of where screening is indicated is testing of high-risk cats for FIV/FelV.

### Diagnostic tests

Diagnostic tests should only be performed in sick cats, and when knowing the outcome is essential to influence case management.

The following are examples of tests rarely considered necessary in the shelter environment:

- laboratory identification of FHV or FCV
- screening for FCoV
- ultrasonography for pregnancy

Diagnostic testing including routine pre-anaesthetic and geriatric blood tests and blood pressure monitoring should only be performed in cats where there is clinical suspicion of disease, and not routinely in healthy cats, regardless of their age.

Post-mortem examinations should be performed in cases of sudden death, or euthanasia of cats in Cats Protection care where infectious diseases such as feline parvovirus need to be ruled out, in the interests of protecting other cats. However, extensive post-mortem tests for non-infections causes are not generally considered an appropriate use of charity funds.

If in doubt about whether to run a diagnostic test, please refer to our protocols which can be found by scanning the code or contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team.



## Medical treatments

As funds are limited, please consider the strength and quality of evidence for the efficacy and safety of products when recommending them for cats in Cats Protection care. This includes neutraceutical products, and it should be considered that each additional medication has cost implication and can deter potential adopters. Lengthy protracted treatment plans are likely to compromise feline welfare. See pages 60 to 61 for details on centrally ordering discounted products for use in cats in the charity's care.

## The cascade

Cats Protection understands that there may be occasions when it will be necessary to use medicines which are not specifically authorised for the treatment of cats, but may be used legally when justified by the veterinary surgeon clinically, under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 'Cascade,' and that there may be unknown side-effects associated with the use of such medicines. Please discuss this with the authorised Cats Protection representative when prescribing products to cats in Cats Protection care under the 'Cascade'. An off-licence consent form should be signed.

## Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies, either in place of conventional therapies or as an additional treatment, should not be used for cats in Cats Protection care.

The charity's outlook on the use of these treatments is aligned with the RCVS statement on the use of complementary therapies, particularly in that we 'expect that treatments offered by veterinary surgeons are underpinned by a recognised evidence base or sound scientific principles. Veterinary surgeons should not make unproven claims about any treatments, including prophylactic treatments'.

In addition, we aim to use a shelter medicine approach and direct our funds accordingly.

All treatments for Cats Protection cats should be under veterinary direction. Lay persons should also not be performing complementary therapies on Cats Protection cats.

## Referrals

To align with shelter medicine principles, referral of Cats Protection cats to medical or surgical specialists should be avoided. If referral is being considered, we advise the Cats Protection representative to discuss the case with their regional manager and the Cats Protection Veterinary team before internal or external veterinary referral is undertaken.

## Hospitalisation and boarding

Occasionally cats in Cats Protection care will need to be hospitalised, for example severe cat flu cases, however we do not recommend undertaking treatment courses that will involve long periods of hospitalisation. Costs would be significant, and generally conditions requiring long hospital stays will have a more guarded prognosis and may require ongoing treatment which is a barrier to rehoming. Equally, Cats Protection cats should not be boarded at a veterinary clinic for more than 24 hours, as this will compromise the welfare of cats already having to cope with a shelter setting and may also compromise infectious disease control.

## Common conditions and case examples

When considering treatment options for cats in Cats Protection care, please also consider their impact on rehoming (where their welfare needs can often be better met) and timing. Our aim is always for a cat to be homed as soon as is reasonably possible. This means that different options will be more appropriate for cats in our care compared to owned cats in a home environment. Some examples of this are below.

- The treatment of a hyperthyroid cat. Options once the thyroid disease is stabilised are:

1. Oral medication £
2. Performing a surgical thyroidectomy ££
3. Radioactive iodine treatment £££
4. Diet £

- For a cat in our care the best option is going to be to perform a bilateral thyroidectomy. This may not be the cheapest option, but by performing the surgery we can resolve the issue, meaning that we are able to home a cat without the need for ongoing medication or dietary therapy which can be a significant barrier to finding a home. While radioactive iodine treatment can also achieve a

cure, it is more expensive. Therefore, a bilateral thyroidectomy constitutes on balance the most appropriate treatment plan

- The treatment of a case of cat flu where the cat is anorexic and lethargic with purulent nasal discharge:

1. Hospitalisation with fluids and antibiotics, with a feeding tube placed if needed ££
2. Trial a course of antibiotics in the centre along with supportive treatment £
3. Hospitalisation as per option one but also take diagnostic swabs to find out the causative agent £££

In this case, options one or two may be appropriate. We would encourage vets to hospitalise severe cat flu cases and feeding tubes can often help to get the cat back onto the road to recovery quickly. However diagnostic swabs are not likely to change the treatment or the outcome so would not be recommended

- The management of a complicated limb fracture:

1. Orthopaedic surgery to repair the fracture £££
2. Amputation of the limb ££

- In this case amputation is generally the preferred option. This will dramatically reduce the time it will take to get the cat fit to home. Generally the cat will only have to stay in care a further seven to 10 days following surgery. Orthopaedic surgery is likely to have a lengthy recovery period of several weeks. There is a risk of complications which is likely to be higher in a shelter cat, where the stress of being in care can impact on the cat's immune system, which may lead to further surgery and time in care

The Cats Protection Veterinary team appreciates that decision making for cats in care can sometimes be challenging. A shelter medicine approach and consistency across the charity is important and the Veterinary team has put together guidance documents to help with the management of common conditions in cats in our care. These can be found on our 'For vets and nurses' page at [cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-protocols-and-resources](https://cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-protocols-and-resources) and include guidance on the approach to management of heart murmurs, FPV, ringworm, FIP and FIV/FeLV testing scenarios. The list is updated regularly.

## Dental treatments

All cats' mouths should be graded using the Bristol Dental Grading Chart (see page 40). Dental work is recommended where:

- there is dental disease present that is grade three or four
- there is tooth resorption (also known as feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions, FORLs or neck lesions)
- fractured or loose teeth are present. Fractured teeth should be extracted unless certain there is no pulp cavity exposure when teeth are probed under anaesthesia

Dental procedures on teeth of grade one or two should not be performed due to cost, additional stress and their potential to prolong the time before a cat is available for homing.

It is important that potential owners are informed of the cat's dental status prior to adoption. The dental grade at the time of homing should be recorded on the Medical Summary Form for all cats, and if dental work is carried out this should be noted with details of the individual teeth extracted. The use of antibiotics at the time of dentistry is at the vet's discretion. We recommend considering the fact our cats are likely to be under stress and may subsequently mount a weaker immune response against potential dental infections.

## Infectious disease in cats in Cats Protection care

The management of infectious disease for cats in Cats Protection care comes with many unique challenges including:

- cats in care will vary in age, physiology and nutritional and health status
- stress will impact on the immune system and leads to increased susceptibility to a variety of feline infectious diseases. This may manifest as either clinical or subclinical disease, where the cat is not showing symptoms but is shedding the infectious agent. Often multiple cats will be living on the same site, so the introduction and spread of disease can have serious consequences
- when considering the health of cats in Cats Protection care, it is important to not only consider the individual but also the 'herd' of cats in that setting, and how the infectious disease may affect them

# Dental grading chart

## Grade 0



No to minimal gingivitis, **or** no to minimal calculus

## Grade 1



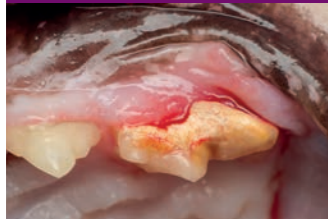
Moderate gingivitis only, no calculus

## Grade 2



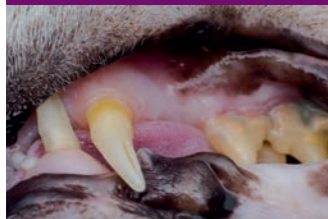
Moderate to marked gingivitis and calculus

## Grade 3



Mild to moderate periodontitis (apparent mild attachment loss)

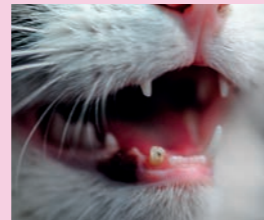
## Grade 4



Severe periodontitis (apparent severe attachment loss, exposure of furcation and tooth root)

**A cat is graded 0-4\* and may also have one or more of the following to note:**

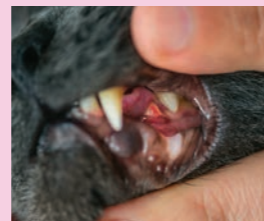
Fractured teeth



Stomatitis



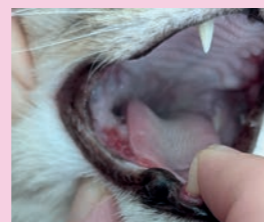
Resorptive lesion



Retained deciduous teeth



Missing teeth



\*Kittens are graded as 0

For more information, scan the code or visit [cats.org.uk/dental-care](https://cats.org.uk/dental-care)



Cats Protection has strict husbandry standards to minimise the spread of infectious disease. Please demonstrate excellent hygiene to Cats Protection representatives who will inevitably follow your example. Please wash hands/use disinfectant wipes or gels between examining cats, wipe the stethoscope and other equipment between uses on Cats Protection cats.

Cats Protection has produced guidance for the management of infectious disease outbreaks. Please note that some infectious disease agents require specific disinfectants and husbandry regimes, particularly ringworm, feline parvovirus and coccidia. For more information please scan the code.



The vet or Cats Protection representative should always contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team in the event of:

- a case of feline parvovirus
- a case of MRSA
- a case of TB
- a case of FIP
- a case of ringworm
- a case of any notifiable or reportable disease

• any situation where there are difficulties controlling outbreaks of infectious disease and where further guidance is needed

• an outbreak of cat flu\*

• an outbreak of vomiting or diarrhoea\*

\*In these cases, an 'outbreak' is where a disease has spread to other cats in the facility.

Please explain the nature and risk of any zoonotic infections diagnosed in Cats Protection cats to the Cats Protection representative responsible for their care. The charity cannot rehome cats with known zoonotic infections until they are confirmed free of the disease or are of minimal zoonotic risk, and we have a duty to protect our volunteers and employees from zoonotic diseases. When dealing with uncommon zoonotic diseases (such as MRSA, TB) or for further support, please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team.

## Death of a cat in Cats Protection care

Post-mortem examinations should be performed in cases of sudden death or euthanasia of cats in Cats Protection care where infectious diseases such as feline parvovirus should be ruled out, in the interests of protecting other cats (see page 37).

## Faecal scoring chart

### Grade one

Liquid, watery faeces

### Grade two

Mostly unformed stools, water faeces with lumps

### Grade three

Approximately 50% formed stools in softer stools

### Grade four

Mostly formed stools with a very small amount of softer stool

### Grade five

All firm, well-formed stools

### Grade six

Small, very hard faecal pellets



Adapted from Bristol Grading Chart

Cats Protection is a registered charity 203644 (England and Wales), SC037711 (Scotland) and is listed as a Section 167 institution by the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland | VET\_2125 | W83221

## Pain

The diagnosis and management of pain in cats can be challenging, and assessing pain in cats in the shelter environment can be even more so. Cats will have limited space to express natural behaviours and noticing issues, for example with mobility, may be difficult. Equally there will be limitations on the amount of time Cats Protection representatives may be able to spend with the cat in their care. Cats can be masters at hiding sources of pain. Tools such as the Glasgow Composite Pain Score can be useful to ascertain signs of pain based on feline facial expression. Cats Protection representatives caring for cats have guidance on signs of feline pain to watch for, as indicated below:

- becoming more withdrawn or hiding more than usual
- sleeping more than usual, especially in one place, or slowing down
- becoming less tolerant around people or of being handled
- aggressive behaviour
- hesitating or becoming more reluctant to jump up or down, or go through the cat flap
- stiffness after resting or showing a preference for using a particular leg when going up and down
- crouching in a hunched-up position with narrowed eyes
- reduction in play behaviour and interaction with carer
- reduction in eating or drinking behaviour
- increased anxiety or fear
- sleep disturbance
- pacing, circling or restlessness
- coat becoming scruffy or matted, particularly in hard-to-reach areas
- vocalisation, especially when moving or using the litter tray
- not using the litter tray
- overgrooming
- some cats will purr when in pain

Effective management of pain not only improves welfare but may also enable those cats to find an appropriate new home more quickly by improving any associated behavioural issues. The treatment of acute pain, for example following surgical procedures, is generally more straightforward. Further advice on the approach to pain relating to neutering can be found on page 31.

However, the management of chronic pain states, for example osteoarthritis, can prove more difficult both to identify and treat. Cats suffering from chronic pain which does not respond to standard analgesia are a significant welfare issue. In these cases euthanasia is often the best decision for the welfare of the cat. For more advice contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team.

Please be especially vigilant for signs of pain in Cats Protection cats so that it can be managed appropriately. These signs can be confounded by the stress of being in the rescue environment, so it may be hard for carers to distinguish between cats that are in pain and those who are suffering from stress. Our recommendation is that any cat with abnormal or concerning behaviour be checked by a veterinary surgeon before any further behavioural modification is considered. The Cats Protection Behaviour team is available for support at [behaviour@cats.org.uk](mailto:behaviour@cats.org.uk)

### Analgesia trials

Due to the challenges of proving or disproving pain in cats in care, and the important role of pain in behaviour, we have developed guidance for those caring for Cat Protection cats when a pain relief trial is advised. This involves the use of behavioural and musculoskeletal pain index scoring alongside Veterinary and Behaviour team support. For further advice, please contact the Veterinary team at [veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:veterinary@cats.org.uk)





# Lifeline

Lifeline is a service provided by Cats Protection where the cats of those fleeing domestic abuse are fostered by Cats Protection for an average of six to nine months until they can be reunited with their owner.

## Confidentiality

Details of both the owner and the cat remaining confidential is vital to maintain the safety of all those involved. Photos of the cat, or details of any cases, should not be shared externally, especially on social media. Microchip details should not be searched in order to check the registered keeper or make any changes to microchip records.

## Veterinary care

Once in foster care, cats will be presented to vets by their fosterer. The Lifeline team act as intermediaries in communications between the owner, the fosterer and the veterinary practice. Payment is arranged through the Lifeline team. The Cats Protection Veterinary team can also provide support with case management.

The ownership of cats remains with the owner, with permission for Cats Protection to act as guardian for the cat. Cats will receive the Cats Protection minimum veterinary standards (see page 14) to protect their health, and the health of other cats within Cats Protection care. Owner consent for additional procedures will need to be sought, whenever possible. In an emergency, or where consent cannot be given within a reasonable time, the fosterer or Lifeline team can consent to treatment on behalf of the owner.

Beyond the minimum veterinary standards, treatment to cats within the Lifeline service may differ to that given to cats relinquished into Cats Protection care, as Lifeline cats are cared for by Cats Protection on behalf of their owner.

Our focus is to ensure the health and welfare of these cats while we foster them, before returning them to their owner. Whereas for cats relinquished into care, working towards adoption is also a priority and may guide treatment decisions. Cats Protection funds the veterinary care, and so judicious use of funds is still required. Examples of where the approach to Lifeline cats may differ from those needing to be rehomed include:

- hyperthyroid cats may be treated with medication in the longer term, rather than just for stabilisation prior to a thyroidectomy
- although we would still offer an excisional biopsy for a mass, where the owner had concerns, a fine needle aspirate or monitoring may be the agreed approach
- cats with kidney disease above IRIS Stage 2 may be cared for, providing their welfare needs can be met and they have a good quality of life

Note: each of these scenarios would involve discussion with the owner through the Lifeline team, and consideration of the clinical assessment, welfare of the cat and owner wishes.

For further information, guidance is available here:





# Behavioural issues

Cats enter Cats Protection care from a variety of sources and backgrounds. There will likely be some cases where very little in the way of veterinary history is available. The process of coming into care and then being adopted involves the cat going through changes which are likely to cause the cat stress and increase the chance of behavioural issues developing.

Therefore, it is likely behavioural issues will be encountered when working with Cats Protection cats. This can include:

- pre-existing behavioural issues, which may be the reason for their relinquishment
- the development of behavioural issues while in Cats Protection care
- the development of behaviour issues after adoption, sometimes where no behavioural issues were evident while in care

It is recommended that if behavioural issues are encountered in cats in Cats Protection care our Behaviour team are contacted ([behaviour@cats.org.uk](mailto:behaviour@cats.org.uk)) for advice and support. This offer of support also extends to new owners in the first six months of ownership if behavioural issues are encountered.

Given that behaviour problems can have a variety of causes and often the information available only shows how that cat behaves under a specific set of circumstances, it can be very difficult to predict how that cat might behave in a different situation, for example in a different pen, with a different carer or once adopted.

Cats Protection cat carers are advised that all cats showing a change in behaviour or behavioural issue should have a full veterinary health check with discussion about the specific issue, to rule out any medical causes for that behaviour. Due to the effect of pain on behaviour, and the challenges in determining pain in cats, a trial period on analgesia

may be considered (please refer to page 42). Once medical causes are ruled out, consider whether there is something about the environment or the management of the animal that can be improved or changed. If, after these steps, a medical/ pharmacological treatment is needed, please also consider the strength and quality of evidence for its efficacy as resources are limited, as well as considering the evidence of its safety.

Given the difficulties faced with a cat exhibiting behavioural problems in rescue care, it is important that measures are taken to try to prevent the development of behavioural problems, through attention to relinquishment information, husbandry and the environment.

## Kitten socialisation

The management and treatment of behavioural issues is an important part of the work that Cats Protection does with cats, but preventing these problems developing later in life is also vital to reduce the chance of future relinquishment. Cats do not have an innate 'need' to be with people. Tolerance of and desire to be around people is a learnt behaviour. Cats Protection believes that all kittens, whether in care or with a breeder, benefit from a structured socialisation programme. Early handling by a variety of people is essential in order to socialise kittens with humans. The experiences kittens have within their first two months of life are extremely important in influencing their behaviour for the rest of their lives.



Early life in a pen environment, as many kittens will experience in Cats Protection care, is not representative of the experiences that cat will have in the future, therefore it is important that kittens are not only well socialised to people but also to the normal domestic environment they will be rehomed into. Cats Protection has a structured kitten socialisation programme to help prepare kittens for the variety of experiences they may encounter later in life. The programme, covering the first two to eight weeks of life, introduces and repeats various positive experiences throughout the socialisation period of the kitten. It is very important these experiences are positive as negative experiences during the first two to eight weeks can be as damaging as no experiences.

## The role of stress in care

Despite best efforts, coming into care will always be stressful for the majority of cats. They will generally enter a confined environment which they have limited control over, where they will potentially be able to smell, hear and see other cats. This can lead to psychological suffering with cats feeling emotions such as fear, frustration, boredom and anxiety. Long-term confinement may lead to depression and chronic stress as cats are no longer able to rely on adaptive measures to feel safe and alleviate these negative emotions, at this point the emotional distress will become damaging to the cat. It is important to recognise this psychological suffering and not put it down to the cat being shy or not interested.

Individual cats will vary in the time taken to adapt to their new environment. Cats Protection representatives are given guidance on signs of stress to watch for, as indicated below:

- being withdrawn or hiding more than usual
- sleeping more than usual. Some cats will feign sleep while trying to monitor their environment
- becoming less tolerant around people/other animals, or being less tolerant of being handled
- showing aggressive behaviour
- hesitating or becoming more reluctant to use important resources, for example only eating or using the litter tray at night
- crouching in a hunched-up position with squinty eyes. Some cats may cringe away as people approach
- reduction in play behaviour and interaction with people
- reduction in eating or drinking behaviour
- overeating

- increased anxiety or fear
- sleep disturbance
- pacing, circling or restlessness
- coat becoming scruffy or matted (undergrooming)
- house soiling
- overgrooming

Cat carers are recommended to seek veterinary advice for cats that show prolonged signs of anxiety or stress, such as always hiding, only eating or using a litter tray at night or showing aggressive behaviour.

Examples of husbandry and environmental measures used to help alleviate **acute** stress in Cats Protection cats include, but are not limited to:

- providing a place to hide, such as an igloo bed, a cardboard box or a Cats Protection Hide & Sleep®, part of the Cats Protection Feline Fort® system
- providing elevated perches
- providing a solid barrier between pens that cats cannot see through to block the view of other cats
- providing continuity of the cat's scent, such as a double bed system where only one bed is washed at a time
- minimum number of carers for familiarity
- providing a consistent, predictable routine
- not mixing cats taken into Cats Protection care from different sources or previous homes
- separating cats which appear not in the same social group even when from the same previous home

As cats adapt to their environment, their stress levels tend to decrease and then will plateau. However, stress levels can rise again due to the development of boredom and frustration.

Rescue and rehoming facilities must maintain effective infectious disease control and together with limited space this inevitably restricts the opportunities for cats to exhibit a full repertoire of normal behaviour patterns.

Cats in care have limited control over their environment, can be surrounded by a changing population of unknown cats and their environment is less complex and therefore stimulating than that of the home and outdoor environment. **Chronic** stress can be evident in cats that had previously adapted to the change of environment, but then develop behavioural issues. Stress may also contribute to a variety of medical conditions.

Examples of husbandry and environmental measures available to help alleviate chronic stress in Cats Protection cats include, but are not limited to:

- providing a space to hide and a raised surface to view their environment from a height
- providing a variety of toys on rotation to maintain novelty
- providing interactive play sessions, for example using fishing rod-style toys
- providing one-on-one interaction, such as petting and attention
- providing feeding puzzles, such as puzzle balls and puzzle boards

## Managing stress in the veterinary clinic

Visiting the vets and receiving veterinary treatment can be stressful for all cats, and cats' responses to this stress can at times make examining and treating feline patients challenging. There are ways that clinic staff can help improve our cats' experiences when at the vets:

- **handle with care.** Cats will always respond much better to gentle, quiet handling. If the cat is able to initiate the contact, by hand sniffing or rubbing for example, they will likely respond much better to future handling. Having a quiet environment out of sight of other animals will help to calm the cat down. Use towels when handling to allow the cat to hide as they need to and ensure the cat is examined on a stable surface they can easily grip onto. Cats Protection is against the use of scruffing to restrain cats
- **know when to stop.** Ensure staff are able to recognise signs that the cat is stressed. If this is the case it is often better to stop the examination and give the cat a break versus continuing until the cat feels they have no option but to resort to aggression to get out of the situation
- **let them hide.** Having the opportunity to hide is very important. While towels can help with this during handling, cats often struggle in veterinary pens to hide sufficiently, often resorting to hiding under vet beds. The Hide & Sleep® will fit in most veterinary clinic cages and allows cats to hide and also to get up high
- **consider sedation.** Often cats will struggle, despite gentle handling, to tolerate certain procedures such as blood samples. In these cases, sedation to allow for the procedure to take place is usually preferable to repeatedly attempting it with the cat conscious

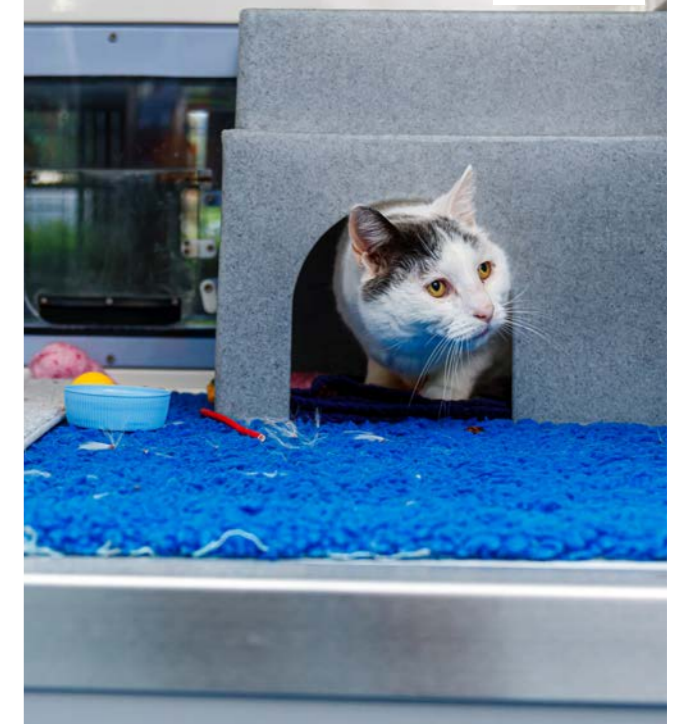
• **use pheromones.** The use of synthetic pheromones (such as FELIWAY® Classic) can help to keep cats calm. They can either be sprayed onto a towel ahead of using it for restraint, or a plug-in diffuser can be placed in the room

• **avoid anthropomorphism.** Cats that are stressed at the vets may show signs of aggression towards staff interacting with them. While this may be challenging, it is a justified part of the cat's fight/flight response. The cat is not 'evil', 'malicious' or acting with any intent, they are scared and reacting with their instinct. It can be easy to attribute cats with these emotions, but ultimately it will inherently change the attitude we have towards feline patients. Cats Protection believes in positive reinforcement, and cats should never be 'punished' for behaviour that is not considered appropriate

More information on stress in cats can be found in the *Behaviour Guide* produced by Cats Protection which is available online.



Scan the code to purchase  
The Hide & Sleep®



# Quality of life and euthanasia

Cats Protection does not euthanase healthy cats and euthanasia must only be carried out by a vet following their recommendation based on assessment of the cat's overall quality of life and prognosis. Euthanasia decisions will be made on welfare grounds as a result of poor feline physical and/or emotional health.



Cats Protection defines a good quality of life as a cat having their welfare needs met and expressing positive signs of physical and mental fitness, mental happiness and demonstration of positive natural behaviours. This can be assessed and interpreted following physical and clinical assessment, and observation of behaviour. This assessment is facilitated by good communication with your Cats Protection representative. When making treatment decisions, emphasis should be placed on quality rather than quantity or length of life.

Cats Protection has a legal duty of care as owners or keepers of cats. The Animal Welfare Act (England and Wales) 2006, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) set out the following needs, also known as the five freedoms, that owners and keepers must ensure they make reasonable steps to meet for animals in their care:

- the need for a suitable environment
- the need for a suitable diet
- the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- the need to be housed with or apart from other animals
- the need to be protected from pain, suffering and disease

Cats Protection as a charity has a legal responsibility to ensure that these needs are met, as do our cat carers.

Long-term life in a pen is not considered to be acceptable on welfare grounds. It can be difficult to know exactly what mental state a cat is in. Health-related quality of life is often easier to assess objectively. When considering the quality of life for cats that may be difficult to home and subsequently become long-stay cats, their degree of mental suffering should be ascertained. The vet is asked to consider the welfare of cats in the charity's care with physical and behavioural conditions when examining, diagnosing and treating them, to ensure their treatment plans allow for quality of life in both the short and long term. Examples where euthanasia might be contemplated are:

- cats with acute or chronic conditions where the short-term prognosis is poor
- cats with chronic conditions which preclude them finding a suitable home
- cats with chronic diseases where stabilisation of the condition has not been possible

- cats with conditions where the cat is not amenable to appropriate treatment
- cats with severe behavioural problems causing welfare issues
- conditions where treatment would cause undue suffering to the cat
- all cats confirmed to be FeLV positive (see FeLV flowcharts at [cats.org.uk/cat-care](https://cats.org.uk/cat-care))
- zoonotic conditions that are not easily managed and pose significant risk to people, for example mycobacterial infections

Euthanasia recommendations should be discussed with the authorised Cats Protection representative. If there isn't agreement or more support is required, this should be discussed with the Cats Protection Veterinary and Behaviour teams. It is not acceptable on welfare grounds for a Cats Protection cat to have a poor overall quality of life and prognosis, without due consideration being given to euthanasia. Cats Protection is not a sanctuary organisation.

Cats who die or are euthanased in Cats Protection care should have general/communal cremation organised by the veterinary practice.

## Stray cats

See pages 54 to 55 for guidance on euthanasia decisions in stray cats. Please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team for further advice and please follow the Stray Policy.



# Stray cats

## Injured and sick strays

Cats Protection advises the public to take sick and injured stray cats to their nearest veterinary practice for emergency treatment to alleviate suffering.

## Support for practices

Cats Protection will always try to support practices with stray cats, but we have a limited capacity, and we have a huge demand for our rehoming services. We recommend developing a practice stray policy to facilitate the management of stray cats while maintaining their welfare. It may be helpful to collaborate with other local practices and rescue organisations to develop this and ensure everyone in the practice knows what the procedure is.

## Stray cats within the care of Cats Protection

Acceptance Forms are completed by owners when they relinquish their cats into Cats Protection care. Acceptance Forms transfer legal ownership to the charity. With stray cats, ownership issues are more complex.

Cats are regarded in law as property. It is theft if a cat is dishonestly taken from their owner or from anyone else who has possession or control of them, where there is an intention to permanently deprive that person of the cat. It is also a potential offence under the Criminal Damage Act for a person, without lawful excuse, to neuter or euthanase a cat that belongs to another person or is in the care, control or charge of others.

Therefore, except where there are urgent welfare concerns, Cats Protection makes reasonable efforts to find and reunite a stray cat with their owner prior to undertaking non-urgent work. A Cats Protection Acceptance Form must still be completed by the finder of the cat who passes the cat to Cats Protection.

Stray cats accepted into Cats Protection care will receive the same minimum veterinary standards as cats relinquished by their owners, but because of their stray status, the timings may differ.

## Please note

This guide is not intended to constitute legal advice; it is simply an explanation of the procedures which the charity adopts in respect of stray cats which come into our care. We cannot provide legal advice in individual situations and would always recommend you consider seeking independent legal advice for non-Cats Protection stray cats.

# Cats Protection Stray Policy

Our policy states that stray cats:

- **with no microchip** must be held in Cats Protection care for 10 days before rehoming or non-urgent euthanasia. Other non-urgent procedures such as neutering, microchipping and non-urgent dental work can be undertaken after seven days, providing non-urgent euthanasia is not forecast as a possible outcome at the end of the 10-day stray period

- **with a microchip**, whether registered or unregistered, must be held in Cats Protection care for 16 days before carrying out rehoming or non-urgent euthanasia. Any other non-urgent treatment such as neutering, microchipping or dental work may be carried out after seven days, providing non-urgent euthanasia is not forecast as a possible outcome at the end of the 16-day stray period

Reasonable efforts must be made to locate an owner during the 10-day period (cats without a microchip) or during the 16-day period

(microchipped cats). The timeframe starts from when the cat enters Cats Protection care, and not before, regardless of whether paper collars have been used or any history is available from the finder.

All details of treatment of stray cats, including euthanasia, should be recorded carefully in case the owner comes forward at a later date. Where euthanasia has been undertaken, the veterinary practice is asked to retain the cat's body for the remainder of the stray period (10 days for cats with no microchip, or 16 days for cats with a microchip).

Please note: If a veterinary clinic takes a cat into care and makes efforts to find an owner, this cannot constitute part of the Cats Protection stray period, so it is recommended cats are signed into charity care as soon as possible.

## As soon as possible after admission of a stray cat into Cats Protection care

- Cats Protection will make reasonable efforts to find an owner, such as scan for a microchip, advertise and check websites and lost and found registers
- A veterinary examination will be arranged which should include:
  - scanning for a microchip
  - a clinical examination
  - vaccination (this is required as soon as possible to reduce the risk of the cat contracting or transmitting disease from or to other cats in Cats Protection care)
  - treatment for fleas, roundworm and tapeworm
  - blood testing for FIV/FeLV
    - positive results should be confirmed at an external laboratory
    - FIV/FeLV-positive cats should not be euthanased during the first seven days unless on veterinary advice, which should be clearly documented in the notes
- Carry out any urgent veterinary treatment for welfare reasons

• Euthanasia should only be carried out when the vet feels there is no other alternative and the cat's welfare would be compromised by continuing treatment. It is recommended to note on the Euthanasia Consent Form how long the cat has been in Cats Protection care. The body should be held by the veterinary practice for the remainder of the stray period (10 days for cats with no microchip, or 16 days for cats with a microchip)

• If a cat needs a general anaesthetic immediately after they enter Cats Protection care for urgent treatment, it is acceptable that the cat is neutered at the same time if the vet feels it is appropriate rather than anaesthetising the cat a second time. Otherwise, cats should not be neutered during this time

## For all stray cats, seven days after coming into Cats Protection care

- Neuter and undertake other non-urgent treatment such as dentistry and microchipping (except non-urgent euthanasia)
- If it is suspected a specific stray cat may require non-urgent euthanasia after the stray period (10 days for strays with no microchip, 16 days for microchipped strays), it may be appropriate to delay anaesthesia for neutering and other assessment until the cat has been in

Cats Protection care for the full stray period, in case euthanasia is indicated

• If a stray cat is anaesthetised for non-urgent treatment such as neutering seven days after coming into care, but an untreatable problem such as a tumour is discovered while the cat is anaesthetised, it may be appropriate that euthanasia is carried out immediately for welfare reasons. Please hold the body for the remainder of the stray period. Contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team for advice if needed

## For stray cats with no microchip, 10 days or more after coming into Cats Protection care

Any cat, including those cats suspected of being pedigree cats, found without a microchip may be rehomed once they have met the Cats Protection minimum veterinary standards of care and have been deemed fit to rehome by the attending veterinary surgeon.

Non-urgent euthanasia may be undertaken; an example of the circumstances of non-urgent euthanasia may be a cat with FeLV or other terminal medical condition that is not undergoing pain or suffering during the time it takes to look for an owner.

## For stray cats with a microchip, 16 days or more after coming into Cats Protection care

Stray cats with a microchip, where the owner has not been traced after 16 days, may be rehomed once they have met the Cats Protection minimum veterinary standards of care and have been deemed fit to rehome by the attending veterinary surgeon.

Where Cats Protection is on notice that the cat is owned (because someone might contact Cats Protection to say they believe we have their cat), the cat should not be rehomed after 16 days in care.

Should an owner come forward after rehoming has taken place, the Cats Protection representative should contact their Branch Development Manager or Operations Manager for assistance.

## Odour issues

If the smell or behaviour of a mature stray tom cat is causing issue, such as stress to other cats in Cats Protection care, during the first seven days, the issue can usually be dealt with using one or more of the following methods:

- moving the cat elsewhere
- cleaning thoroughly with recommended disinfectants

If the issue cannot be resolved, please contact Cats Protection Veterinary team for further support.

Please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team for advice if unsure what procedures may be undertaken in individual cases.

All details of treatment for stray cats should be recorded carefully in case an owner comes forward later. If an owner comes forward for a stray cat, they will be advised of any treatment or procedures carried out while in Cats Protection care and their outcome.





# Feral cats

Feral cats are free-living unsocialised cats. They will have had little or no positive human interaction during their socialisation period.

The welfare of feral cats can be compromised by:

- overpopulation
- injury and disease
- lack of and competition for resources
- lack of understanding
- persecution and inappropriate culling

Cats Protection helps over 10,000 feral cats a year through supporting and funding trap, neuter and return schemes throughout the UK. Trap, neuter and return is not only beneficial to the individual cat in terms of better health, but also to their colonies and the cat population as a whole. Trapping cats for neutering also enables us to give treatment for minor ailments and appropriate preventative care. Cats Protection believes that the most effective and humane way to assist the feral population is by undertaking trap, neuter and return schemes.

## Feral cats presented by Cats Protection representatives

The general principle for the approach to feral cats is to trap, neuter and return cats to the original site if at all possible. Feral cats are very territorial and moving them to a new site can be very stressful. Removal of a colony can also create a vacuum, where other cats will move into this space. If returning the cats is not possible, those organising the trap, neuter and return scheme should prepare for this scenario prior to trapping and re-site cats immediately after neutering to another suitable outdoor site.

Under general anaesthesia:

- scan for a pre-existing microchip. Do not place microchips in feral cats. The legislation for compulsory microchipping in England specifies that owned cats must be chipped. Feral cats are not required to have a microchip. If a microchip is present please follow our Stray Policy on pages 53 to 55
- perform a clinical examination to ensure the cat is fit to neuter and return
- blood test for FeLV and FIV in:
  - sick cats (where there is not an immediate euthanasia decision), or where the vet has a clinical suspicion of infection with FeLV or FIV
  - individual cats where a one-off treatment is being considered. Cats can be tested at the vet's discretion to help with decision making
  - colonies where there are a significant number of sick cats, when there is flexibility around testing the whole colony. Please discuss this with your Cats Protection representative

Cats Protection has developed the *Feral Guide* which is available both online and in hard-copy formats. This can be found at [here](#).



- if a feral cat tests positive for either FeLV or FIV, they should be euthanased **without** confirmatory blood tests as they would have to be confined for a period of time that would be stressful and contrary to their welfare. The exception to this is a feral kitten less than eight weeks old that can be taken into care, socialised and rehomed as an indoor cat if the confirmatory test comes back positive for FIV. Please refer to our FIV/FeLV testing flowcharts.

- neuter (see page 32 for details)

- Pregnant cats should be neutered as late in gestation as the vet feels is safe for the queen. If she cannot be neutered it's recommended to return her immediately. Pregnant feral cats should not be confined to await the birth of the kittens
- Soluble sutures should always be used when neutering feral cats
- An analgesia injection should be given
- Prophylactic antibiotics are not recommended for use for clean surgical procedures including neutering

- perform ear tipping with a 10mm straight-line amputation of the tip of the left ear in adults (slightly less in kittens). This is imperative as it prevents cats being re-trapped and anaesthetised again

- apply a topical roundworm and flea treatment. Where concurrent treatment is unavailable or inadvisable, the vet should elect which is most appropriate. For more information see our parasite control procedures on the 'For vets and nurses' page on [cats.org.uk](https://cats.org.uk).



- treat illness or injury where appropriate

- For minor conditions, where a single treatment is feasible, and the cat's ability to recover and thrive in their natural environment upon release is not compromised
- Do not prescribe treatment plans requiring repeated intervention or hospitalisation
- Euthanasia is recommended for cats with conditions that cannot be resolved with one-off treatment and where the condition will impact the cat's long-term welfare and survival, following consultation with your Cats Protection representative whenever possible

- vaccinate. Give one dose of a vaccine against feline parvovirus, feline calicivirus and feline herpesvirus

After neutering, males should be released within 12 hours and females within 24 hours, if considering longer confinement please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary team. Feral cats should not be confined to pens for prolonged periods, as this will be extremely stressful for the cat and may reduce the chance of successful integration.

## Kittens

Initially, the age of the litter will need to be estimated. Further advice on aging kittens can be found in the *Feral Guide*, see page 55 for details.

- **Kittens under eight weeks old** can be neutered safely from weaning. Prior to weaning kittens are unlikely to be trapped as they are generally hidden away by the queen. Bringing kittens younger than five to six weeks into care will require hand-rearing which reduces their survival chances and significantly increases workload for volunteers and employees. After five to six weeks the fear response develops in kittens and so bringing them into care is likely to be stressful and may not result in a cat who can cope in the domestic setting

- **kittens over eight weeks old** are beyond the critical two-to-seven-week socialisation period and are unlikely to adapt to life in a domestic setting. They should be trapped, neutered and returned

Sometimes it may appear young kittens are abandoned, but often the queen is hunting. Other female cats within the colony may care for the kittens during this time.

Our advice when considering bringing kittens under eight weeks old into care, for example if they are suspected to be abandoned, is to contact the Cats Protection Veterinary and Behaviour teams. It needs to be ensured that there is the resource available to effectively care for and socialise them.

Attempts to 'tame' older feral kittens and cats will cause severe distress by forcing the cat to endure interactions they are fearful of (including people), while removing opportunities for the feral cat to display their natural behaviours and their ability to choose. This is called 'flooding' and causes learned helplessness, but the cat is still undergoing continual stress.

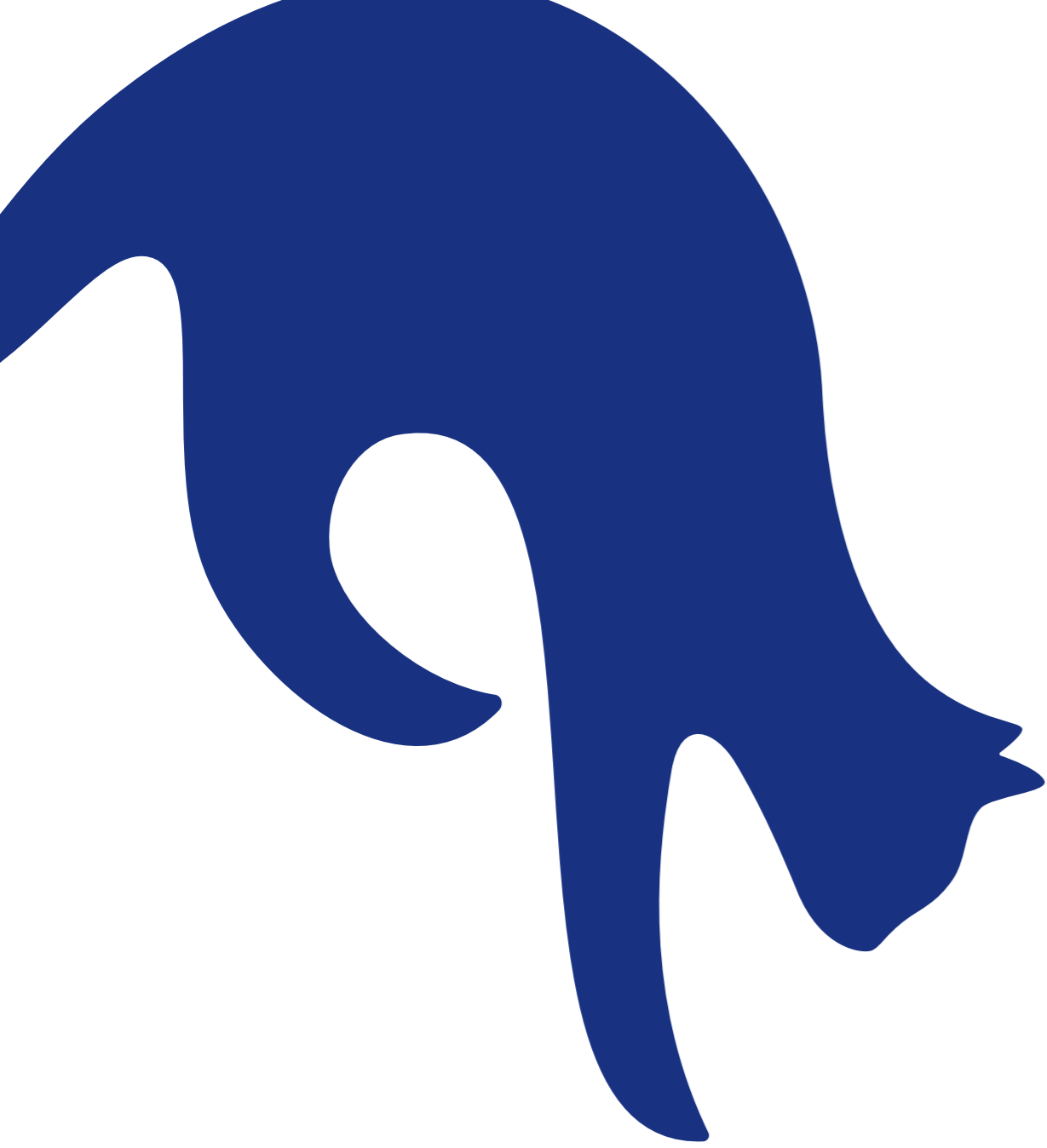
## Community-supported cats

When working with Cats Protection, you may come across free-living cats who are supported by a local community, usually receiving some form of care (generally being fed) but are not attached to a particular household. Some members of the community where the cat lives may feel the cat belongs to the community and be very attached to them, although no person is individually responsible and generally these cats will not be receiving regular veterinary care. The level of socialisation present within community cats varies, some will be true ferals while some will have a degree of socialisation and are comfortable with interactions with the people they have become accustomed to. These cats are unlikely to cope well with the rehoming process so Cats Protection aims to trap, neuter and return these cats to their site. There will be some community cats that are well socialised abandoned pets that seek out human company outside of wanting food. These cats may be suitable for rehoming.

## Cats Protection and the community

Working directly with people to improve cat welfare is a key aspect of Cats Protection operational work. We have a number of employee and volunteer teams across the UK who work within their communities to advocate for good cat welfare, understand and reduce any barriers and design welfare-focussed interventions. Work also takes place in specific targeted areas, often where there is no other support available, to improve cat welfare through activities such as education, owned cat neutering and trap, neuter and return schemes. The data gathered throughout this work is essential in informing our studies in population management, shaping the sector's understanding of stray and community cats.





## Costs

Cats Protection funds are limited and an approach to veterinary treatment based on shelter medicine and contextualised care is needed. If two treatment options are available that will achieve the same outcome, then generally the cheaper option is recommended. However, the cost of treatment is not the only thing that should be considered, with the time spent in care, resources available, long-term prognosis, chance of complications and likelihood of homing following this treatment plan also being important considerations.

For example:

- amputation instead of complicated orthopaedic procedures may be in the cat's best interests (less chance of complication and a dramatically shorter time in care) and will also be much cheaper
- a bilateral thyroidectomy may be more costly at that time, but it allows the cat to be rehomed without ongoing medical needs

For cases where diagnostic work-ups, surgical procedures or treatments are likely to be costly, Cats Protection representatives are asked to discuss this with their regional manager and Cats Protection Veterinary team, in particular if costs are likely to exceed £500 (either for one procedure or over the course of treatment).

In contrast with some other charities, any funds raised by local Cats Protection teams are managed centrally by Cats Protection. Cases, costs and records can therefore be discussed and shared with Cats Protection regional managers and the Cats Protection Veterinary team, when necessary. See pages 37 to 39 for further information on procedures and treatments.

### Preferred products and discount schemes

Following selection of clinically appropriate products, Cats Protection has negotiated discounts with a number of suppliers to enable the charity to make considerable savings when buying veterinary products for cats in its care. Products are regularly reviewed by the Veterinary team and are subject to change. To take advantage of the discount schemes, items must be ordered through a Cats Protection account. The discount schemes include:

- a veterinary wholesaler scheme, through which the following can be ordered:
  - veterinary medicinal products, including vaccines, flea and worming products and medicinal products for use in Cats Protection cats
  - FIV/FelV testing kits
  - microchips
  - other products for use in cats in care such as FELIWAY® and prescription food
- a comprehensive veterinary diagnostic laboratory scheme providing discounted tests on samples submitted from Cats Protection cats

- the Preferred Products List:

- products for which Cats Protection has negotiated a discounted rate and should be ordered over alternatives, where appropriate
- an up-to-date list is available from your Cats Protection representative or the Cats Protection Veterinary team and at [cats.org.uk/cat-care](https://cats.org.uk/cat-care)

Please note: Most commonly-used veterinary medicinal products can be ordered through the Cats Protection wholesaler scheme. It is however more cost effective for most injectable medications (excluding vaccines and insulin) to be supplied through the vet's own stock and charged per use or as part of the anaesthetic fee, for example, due to the relatively short in-use shelf life of these products.

Please see our website for further information:



### Invoices

Accounts should be in the name of Cats Protection and the local volunteer team or centre, not a fosterer's name, and the specific cat(s) should be detailed. We would be grateful if veterinary practices can provide Cats Protection volunteer teams and centres with invoices/statements that meet HMRC invoicing requirements of a VAT invoice, detailing all services charged, to enable Cats Protection to reclaim the attributed VAT where appropriate. Where any VAT exemptions apply, these are the responsibility of the veterinary practice. Authorised Cats Protection representatives can provide invoicing address details.

Each cat should have separate clinical records. Separate accounts should be created for:

- the treatment and neutering of cats in Cats Protection care
- neutering of owned cats (supported through our subsidised neutering scheme)
- ongoing treatment agreements for homed cats
- the treatment and neutering of feral cats

### Ongoing treatment agreements

Invoices for owned-cat neutering go centrally to Cats Protection. All other invoices can be sent to the local Cats Protection team.



# Contact details

Contact details for veterinary professionals and Cats Protection representatives (not to be shared with members of the public)

## Veterinary team

[veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:veterinary@cats.org.uk) (email preferable) or 01825 741 991 (messages are monitored daily from Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays)

## Behaviour team

[behaviour@cats.org.uk](mailto:behaviour@cats.org.uk)

## Vet Neutering Support

[vetneuteringsupport@cats.org.uk](mailto:vetneuteringsupport@cats.org.uk)  
(for vets using Cats Protection neutering vouchers) or 01825 741 926

## Neutering Finance

[neutering.finance@cats.org.uk](mailto:neutering.finance@cats.org.uk) or 01825 741 989

## Branch Support Unit

[BSU@cats.org.uk](mailto:BSU@cats.org.uk) or 01825 741 995

## Finance team

[accounts@cats.org.uk](mailto:accounts@cats.org.uk) or 01825 741 949

Contact details for members of the public and general enquiries

## Neutering Support

[neuteringsupport@cats.org.uk](mailto:neuteringsupport@cats.org.uk)

## National Information Line

[info@cats.org.uk](mailto:info@cats.org.uk) or 03000 12 12 12

## Postal address:

Cats Protection  
National Cat Centre  
Lewes Road  
Chelwood Gate  
Haywards Heath  
RH17 7TT

Local Cats Protection team details can be found at [cats.org.uk/find-us](https://cats.org.uk/find-us)



## Media and PR

If you are treating a Cats Protection cat that has an interesting background story, please contact [veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:veterinary@cats.org.uk) who can involve our Media team. Promotion of the excellent joint work carried out by vets and local Cats Protection teams to the public benefits everyone and helps spread important animal welfare messages.

## Research

If you are considering undertaking research with Cats Protection, or would like to use our cats or data for research, including the writing of a scientific case report that will involve a Cats Protection cat, please contact the Feline Welfare Research team at [research@cats.org.uk](mailto:research@cats.org.uk) for guidance. Cats Protection may undertake or facilitate ethically sound feline welfare research, of high scientific rigour, but must ensure energy and resources are focussed on projects that will bring greatest benefit to Cats Protection feline welfare priorities. Cats Protection will protect the physical and emotional welfare of cats and people. The charity will not be involved in research regulated by the Animals in Scientific Procedures Act 1986 nor in veterinary clinical trials, which require a Veterinary Medicines Directorate Animal Test Certificate.

## Support materials

### For vets, nurses:

Guidelines and disease protocols and procedures for vets and nurses can be found on our website at [cats.org.uk](http://cats.org.uk)

### For vet students:

Our student hub contains information for students on pre-clinical EMS and EMS placements; resources useful for studying, including podcasts; and links to other useful pages.

For those interested in applying to be a student ambassador please contact [veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:veterinary@cats.org.uk) for more information.

### For members of the public:

- national website [cats.org.uk](http://cats.org.uk)
- Essential Guides and Veterinary Guides. Client support materials which can be downloaded from our website or hard copies can be ordered free of charge for the practice
- Cats Protection online shop. Gifts for yourself, friends and family as well as cat items can be purchased here [catsprotectionshop.co.uk](http://catsprotectionshop.co.uk)

Our Hide & Sleep® cat bed can be ordered through this website



## Support services

**Cat Guardians.** Our free Cat Guardians service can give peace of mind that should someone pass away, Cats Protection will take their cat into our care until we can find them a new loving home. More information can be found at [cats.org.uk/what-we-do/catguardians](http://cats.org.uk/what-we-do/catguardians)

**Paws to Listen.** Providing emotional support and practical information whether a cat has gone missing, needs to be reluctantly rehomed, is nearing the end of their life, or has sadly passed away. It's a free and confidential service comprising of telephone and email support facilitated by trained volunteers, available Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm on 0800 024 94 94 or via [pawstolisten@cats.org.uk](mailto:pawstolisten@cats.org.uk)

A range of information is available to view at [cats.org.uk/grief](http://cats.org.uk/grief) To obtain resources for your practice such as posters and wallet cards, please scan the code.



**Cats Protection Lifeline.** Offers a free and confidential cat fostering service for anyone experiencing domestic abuse. As the majority of refuges and emergency accommodation providers are unable to accept pets, Lifeline offers a vital fostering service where cats can stay within temporary foster homes for 6-9 months until they can be safely reunited with their owner. More information can be found at [cats.org.uk/cp-lifeline](http://cats.org.uk/cp-lifeline) or you can email [lifeline@cats.org.uk](mailto:lifeline@cats.org.uk)

## Campaigning

Advocacy, Campaigns & Government Relations team [advocacy@cats.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@cats.org.uk) The team work with and influence politicians and decision makers to create a better life for cats.

### Cat behaviour

- The Animal Behaviour & Training Council [abtcouncil.org.uk](http://abtcouncil.org.uk) represents behaviourists and trainers from practitioner organisations recognised as meeting the agreed standards, and therefore provides a reliable source for referral. It is supported by the British Small Animal Veterinary Association and the British Veterinary Nursing Association. Veterinary practices can play a vital role in raising awareness of this organisation, via waiting-room displays and owner education evenings as well as websites and social media
- Behaviour advice is available to vets working with cats in our care, and also new owners who adopted their cat less than six months ago, from the Cats Protection Behaviour team at [behaviour@cats.org.uk](mailto:behaviour@cats.org.uk)
- Further information about feline behaviour can be found in the Cats Protection *Behaviour Guide* and also on our website which has a dedicated behaviour section. We have resources and information available on kitten socialisation on our website [cats.org.uk/kitten-socialisation](http://cats.org.uk/kitten-socialisation)



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**For further information visit [cats.org.uk](https://cats.org.uk)**

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