



## The Risks of Outdoor Cats and Kitties



It may seem ideal to have your cat roam in the outdoors; you might even think that it's good for them. Unfortunately however, outside is a very dangerous place for cats and kitties. There are many hazards and risks that you should be aware of that outside poses to your furry friends.

Before you even consider letting your cat freely roam outdoors be sure to check your state and city laws regarding the matter. In some states and cities it is illegal to let your cat leave your property with out being leashed or under your constant supervision.

Also consider who your neighbors are. Neighbors may not want cats roaming onto their property; often cats will use gardens, sand boxes and other unwanted areas for their outdoor litter boxes. Cats are also predatory by nature, they very well may leave your neighbors unwanted hunted "gifts" like mice, birds, bunnies, and other small pray animals through out their yards.

You may have the best intentions but legally your neighbor has the right to safely detain any animal on their property they deem a pest and turn them in to animal control. Animal controls picks up over 1,200 cats each year in the twin cities.<sup>1</sup>

With this in mind be aware of all the other dangers and harm that outdoor cats and kitties are exposed to as well:

### ***Pests:***

First and foremost there are many pest that would love to hop on to your cat and feed off their blood. This not only is uncomfortable for your pet but also means they can transmit all kinds of blood born diseases to your pet.

- *Fleas*
- *Ticks*
- *Ear mites (Untreated ear mites can lead to ear deformities and loss of hearing and balance.)*
- *Intestinal worms*
- *Ring worms (which can also infect pet owners as well)*

These parasites can cause a variety of moderate to severe symptoms, such as scratching, skin infections, vomiting and diarrhea. In addition, these creepy crawlies can hitch a ride into your home and infect your family. Parasites can be difficult to eradicate from your pet, humans and your home.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Problems with Letting Your Cat Roam." *Saint Paul, Minnesota Government*. N.p., 07 July 2016. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.americanhumane.org/animals/adoption-pet-care/caring-for-your-pet/indoor-cats-vs-outdoor-cats.html>

### ***Illnesses:***

Letting your cat outside can expose them to contracting many dangerous illnesses, some are incurable and some can be deadly. Many can be contracted from being around or near other cats.

- *Feline Leukemia (FeLV)* (*can contract through, saliva, blood, urine and fecal matter*)
- *Feline AIDS (FIV)* (*contracted through bite wounds, no treatment or cure*)
- *FIP (feline infectious peritonitis)* (*Can contract through ingesting or inhaling the virus*)
- *Feline distemper*
- *Upper respiratory infections (or URI)*.

### ***Toxins and Hazards:***

Cats have very delicate diets. There are so many toxic plants and chemicals that your pet can be exposed to outside, along with poisonous food and choking hazards in spilled trash or litter. Here is just a short list of things your cat can be potentially exposed to outside:

- Plants (Lilies, Azaleas, Palms, Chrysanthemums, Ivies...)
- Antifreeze
- Weed killers/Pest killers
- Chocking hazards (plastic and rubber products, metal bits, Holiday lights  
And many more)
- They also have the potential risk of becoming trapped in or under cars, foundations, porches, garages etc....

### ***Other Animals:***

Believe it or not there are likely many other predatory animals around your home, and neighborhoods, that may only be seen at night. Other stray dogs or cats can also pose a threat. Other animals may not only think your cat a good snack, but may consider them a threat to their territory and engage them in a fight.

Depending on your area these are just a few of the animals that may threaten your cat:

- Coyotes
- Foxes
- Raccoons



- Dogs
- Other cats (large wild cats and smaller domestic cats)
- Predatory Birds (Eagles, Falcons, Vultures, Hawks)
- Snakes

### ***Streets:***

Cars and traffic are a serious danger to cats. Contrary to popular belief cats do not have an innate instinct to avoid busy streets and cars, and they get hit often. <sup>1</sup> An estimated 200 cats are killed in traffic each year in Saint Paul.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Weather:***

Weather can change in an instant especially living in Minnesota. Cats left outdoors can be exposed to frost bite in the winter and dehydration in summer. <sup>4</sup>

### ***People:***

Sometimes the most dangerous predators can be other people. Not everyone loves cats the way you do. There are some neighbors who don't want cats in their yards and gardens, some people resort to poisoning, shooting with BB guns, darts or arrows, even trapping and killing. As sad as it is there are also a lot corrupt people in the world who may be looking for animals to kill or torture. There are also cases of "thieves" that go out looking for stray animals to sell to dog fighting rings as bait or testing facilities for experiments.

### ***Getting Lost:***

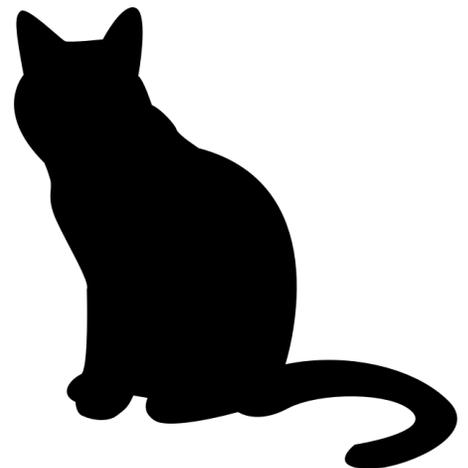
Cats may get trapped in someone's garage, house or car by accident, they may become scared and disoriented and not able to find their way back home. Cats that are use the indoor are likely to get spooked outside and hide, and they may not come out if called. Cats can hide in deceptively small spaces, especially when fearful, this can make them especially hard to find.

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<sup>3</sup> "Problems with Letting Your Cat Roam." *Saint Paul, Minnesota Government*. N.p., 07 July 2016. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=1+2131&aid=3415>

While some of these dangers may seem extreme there are still plenty of reported cases of it happening. As unfortunate as it is, it does, and it can, happen. Cats who live indoors and outdoors also have a much shorter life expectancy, the average expectancy is 2-3 years less than an indoor cat, on average outdoor cats don't make it past 5 years of age.<sup>5</sup> Indoor cats however, depending on health factors, can live anywhere from 15-20 years of age. The only way to keep your cat or kitties living long healthy lives and away from these dangers is by keeping them inside!



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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.vetinfo.com/indoor-outdoor-cat-life-expectancy.html>

## **Questions you might still have:**

\*Adapted from Mobile SPCA *Your Cat- Indoors or Out*<sup>6</sup>

### ***"But I have a six-foot fence?"***

-Unless you have special fencing that's designed to prevent a cat from climbing out, your cat will be able to scale your fence or crawl under and escape the confines of your yard.

### ***"But my last cat went outdoors and he loved it?"***

-Your cat may enjoy being outdoors, but by allowing him to go outside unsupervised, you're putting him at risk for a shortened life span. The expected lifespan of an indoor-outdoor cat will depend on several factors, including the type of neighborhood you live in and sheer luck. But, on average, cats who are allowed to roam outdoors often don't live to see age five. Cats who are always kept safely confined can live to be 18 to 20 years old.

### ***"But my cat's litter box smells?"***

-Scoop your cat's litter box on a daily basis. How often you actually replace (change) the litter depends on the number of cats in your home, the number of litter boxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may need to change it every other day or once a week. Wash the litter box with soap and water every time you change the litter; the use of strong smelling chemicals and cleansers may cause your cat to avoid the box.

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<sup>6</sup><http://www.mobilespca.org/Portals/0/downloads/documents/Your%20Cat—Indoors%20or%20Out.pdf>

### ***"But my cat likes to sun herself?"***

-Your cat can safely sun herself indoors by lying near a window. If you're really intent on letting your cat outdoors, put her on a harness and leash and stay with her while she's taking in the rays.

### ***"But I can't keep him in?"***

-Keep your windows closed or install screens. Remember to always keep your doors closed and teach your children the importance of keeping the doors closed too. It may take a few days or a few weeks, but if there are enough interesting things for your cat to play with indoors, he'll come to enjoy being indoors. If your kitty becomes a "door-dasher" (tries to run out while you are coming in doors) there are certain techniques you try to train them out of that behavior. One trick is keeping a bag of their favorite treats by the door and toss a few to your kitty before you enter or exit, this keeps them happy and away from the door.

### ***"But we've always let her out?"***

-You can change your cat's behavior. It will take time and patience, but it might save their life. When you implement your "closed door" policy, give her a lot of extra attention and entertainment. At first she may cry, but don't give in... More often than not, she'll soon be happy to stay indoors with you.

### ***"But my cat knows to avoid cars?"***

-Even if this were true, all it would take is another cat, a dog, or a shiny object to lure your cat into the street and into the path of traffic. Also keep in mind that not everyone will swerve to miss a cat in the road.

***"But my cat needs exercise and likes to play with other cats?"***

-Stray cats could spread viruses such as feline leukemia and other fatal diseases. If your cat needs a friend, adopt another cat that's healthy and disease-free. Cats kept safely confined do need extra attention and exercise inside, so be sure to play with your cats regularly using a variety of toys and chase games.

***"But my cat yowls and acts like he really needs to go outside?"***

-Your cat may be feeling the physiological need to mate. If this is the case, make sure your cat is spayed or neutered. Sterilized cats don't have the natural need to breed, and therefore, won't be anxious to go out to find a mate.

***"But I watch them?"***

-Even though you are watching your cat outdoors they can still be exposed to parasites and diseases. Cats will not understand the difference between "safely" going outside with you watching and trying to go out on their own. Once they know that going outside is an allowed and okay thing, they may try to sneak out on their own whenever they want. They may sneak out when you are coming and leaving through doors or through doors accidentally left open.

Transforming a cat that is allowed to roam freely outside into a safe indoor cat will take time, effort, and patience; some cats will adapt more quickly than others. And many cat owners report that keeping cats inside actually fosters the bond between feline and human. If, despite your best efforts, your cat simply cannot make the transition, then vow to keep your next cat safely confined from the start.

There are some safer options for cats that want to be outside such as ***cat enclosures***, or ***harness and leash*** and ***Constant supervision***. However, this still means that they may be exposed to parasites and diseases. Also cats will not understand the difference between "safely" going outside with you watching or only in an enclosure vs. trying to go out on their own when they want. They may start to try and sneak out when you are coming and leaving through doors or through doors accidentally left open.

## **Keeping Cats and Kitties Happy Indoors:**

- Be sure there are lots of perching spots near windows for sunning and visual entertainment.
- Providing you cat with a ready made or home made cat tree offers great opportunities for your cat to climb, stretch, scratch, and perch.
- Playing with your cat everyday to use up excess energy. Wand toys or other toys that recreate “fishing” “chasing” and “flying” pray are great options.
- Leaving cardboard boxes or paper bags (with handles cut off) out for your cat make great toys as well for your cat to play and hide in.
- If your pet likes to graze or chew on plants, planting cat grass or catnip indoors can be a great and healthy option.
- Cleaning litter boxes regularly is also important to keeping your cat happy indoors.

