

The Indoor Vs Outdoor Debate

There is a big debate among cat owners when it comes to deciding whether cats should be allowed outdoors or should be kept inside the house at all times. There are pros and cons to both lifestyles and each need to be done right in order to make them as safe and healthy for your cat as possible. In this handout, the pros and cons of both will be addressed, and it will be up to you, the cat owner, to decide what works best for you and your feline companion.

OUTDOOR ACCESS

Risks

- Infectious feline immune diseases such as Feline Leukemia. These diseases are spread via bites by infected cats.
- Rabies. This is also spread via infected animal bites. Both domestic and wild animals can carry rabies (dogs, cats, raccoons, foxes, bats, coyotes, etc.)
- Parasites such as fleas, ticks, and intestinal worms
- Vehicular trauma
- Poison exposure (rat poison, antifreeze, etc.)
- Getting lost
- Getting stolen, especially visibly purebred cats (Ex. Bengal, Siamese, Rex, etc.)
- Injury from fights with other cats, domestic dogs, and wild animals
- Eating unapproved food
- Pregnancy

Precautions to lower certain outdoor risks

- Ensuring vaccines against rabies and feline diseases are kept up to date
- Regular use of parasite prevention and deworming
- Microchipping. Collars can break and fall off – microchipping is the most effective form of permanent identification
- Spaying and neutering to prevent reproduction



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INDOOR ONLY

Risks

- Inactivity leading to decreased fitness, obesity, diabetes, obsessive behaviors and problem behaviors (urine marking, scratching, misplaced aggression)
- Lower urinary tract disease
- Hyperthyroidism
- Dental resorptive lesions
- Household hazards (swallowing small objects like hair ties, burns from stove tops/candles/wood burning stoves, trauma from chewing electrical cords)
- Poison exposure (cleaning products, eating harmful house plants, medications)
- Second-hand smoke from cigarettes

Precautions to lower certain outdoor risks

- Regular stimulation such as playing and hiding food to stimulate exercise
- Controlling the cat's diet to prevent obesity and feeding urinary food to prevent urinary tract disease
- Taking care to not leave hazardous materials where the cat can have access to them
- Researching the type of houseplant before introducing it into your home to determine if it is toxic to cats
- Smoking outside the home
- Spaying and neutering to prevent certain unwanted behaviors
- Provide adequate environmental stimulation to lower stress – see "Keeping Cats Indoors" handout

If you would like to allow your cat the stimulation of the outdoors without the risks, there can be compromise.

- Leash and Harness: not all cats will tolerate this, but if your cat does, he or she can be taken outside much like a dog can for walks or outdoor playtime
- Window box: a screened-in window box can be built onto your windowsill and allow your cat the opportunity to observe the outdoors and the feeling of being outside, without actually leaving the home
- Outdoor enclosure: a screened-in outdoor area can be set up to allow your cat to be outside without being able to wander and come into contact with other animals. This can be a wooden structure ("catio"), screen tent-like structure, etc.
- Fleas and ticks are still a risk even if your cat stays in the backyard! Parasite prevention should be given to any cat that leaves the confines of the home.

