

10 myths that could harm your cat's health

There's a lot of misinformation floating around out there about what your favorite feline needs to survive and thrive. Let's make these myths go away!

1 'Cats just need food, water, litter and a place to sleep'

That's all true, but it's just as important how many sets of these resources there are and where they are. Food shouldn't be near water or the litter box. The litter box and water dish need to be fresh. Cats don't just need a place to sleep but also a way to observe their environment from perches, exercise, express predatory behaviors and hide when they feel threatened.

2 'I know when my cat's sick'

Actually, maybe not. Cats evolved to hunt and feed themselves independent from others, and because this requires traveling into locations where they could become prey for other species, cats are really good at hiding vulnerability that accompanies illness. In fact, by the time a cat shows signs of sickness, it's likely been ill for some time. Some subtle signs your cat might be sick:

- > changes in grooming
- > a change in activity level
- > a change in sleeping habits
- > a change in eating and drinking habits

- > unexplained weight loss or gain
- > eliminating in the home in places other than the litter box
- > bad breath

3 'If they're purring, they're happy'

Kittens purr as young as two days old, and they often purr while kneading—that massage that stimulates milk flow. A purring cat may be expressing contentment, but this behavior may also be for other reasons. Purring releases endorphins, so a cat in pain may purr to self-medicate.

4 'Indoor cats don't need to be vaccinated'

Indoor cats need to be vaccinated as

often as cats who go outside. The same is true for deworming, parasite control and regular visits to the veterinarian. Cats at higher risk include those who board, travel or live in shelters.

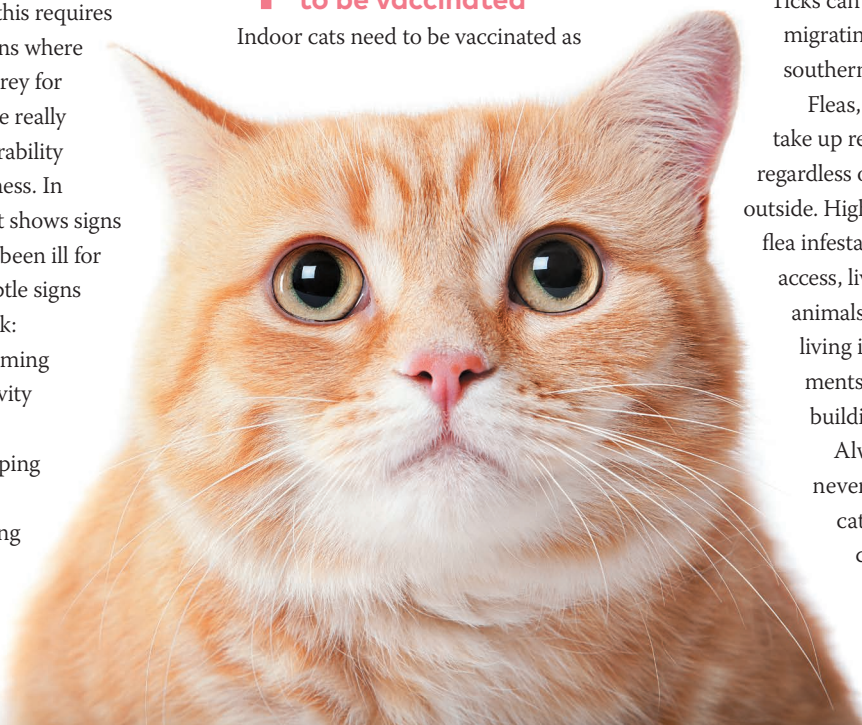
5 'Indoor cats aren't at risk for fleas or ticks'

Fleas and ticks hitch a ride into the house on dogs, and ticks hitch rides on people who've been hiking or out in the woods. With climate change, ticks are also being found in greater numbers and in different regions than previously seen. Models predict that with warming winters, suitable climates will be available throughout most of the United States and Canada.

Ticks can also catch a ride on migrating birds from more southern climes.

Fleas, of course, love to take up residence in homes, regardless of the weather outside. High-risk situations for flea infestation include outdoor access, living with other animals who go outside and living in pet-dense environments, including apartment buildings.

Always remember: never a dog product on cats. The dose or ingredients may be toxic to your cat.



6 'Indoor cats don't get heartworms'

All cats, even indoor cats, living in regions with mosquitoes are at risk for heartworm.

7 'Pregnant women should get rid of their cats'

Contact with cats does not increase the risk of infection by *Toxoplasma gondii*. Feel free to use pregnancy as an excuse to have someone else scoop the litter, but in reality, if feces is removed at least once a day and hands are washed after scooping, there is no risk. The same criteria apply for people with compromised immune systems, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. If you're still concerned, reach out your physician or veterinarian for more information.

8 'Cats only eat as much as they need'

Define "need." Stress eating is just as much a thing in cats as it is in people. So is

eating out of boredom. The diets we feed our cats are so calorically dense that it's difficult to stay within caloric budget.

Endless free refills are a real problem. Bowl feeding isn't a challenge to a bored cat. Feeding puzzles and devices are far better suited for cats as they engage cats' innate curiosity. A cat's drive to hunt is turned on permanently, so things that make them think and induce their play and predatory behavior are good. But just because a cat is foraging for food, it's still possible to become overweight. If your cat is underweight or overweight, work with your veterinarian to come up with the right diet, and measure or weigh the amount of food offered. There are lots of feeding toys and other devices available. Get creative!

9 'Cats need milk, grain is bad for cats and they don't need carbohydrates'

None of these is true. Weaned cats do not need milk, although they may enjoy

it. Kittens have plenty of lactase to digest mom's milk. As they're weaned, however, their ability to digest milk may decline, resulting in gastrointestinal upset. Some cats tolerate cow's milk lifelong; others are not so fortunate.

Cats' natural diet has only small amounts of carbohydrates (2% to 12% of their calories). The grains that their prey ate are ingested by the cat.

10 'You can't train cats'

Sure you can. Cats, like almost anyone, will perform a desired behavior or behavior pattern if they receive a positive result in exchange. Unlike dogs or people, however, because they have a lower "need" for companionship or acceptance, they will perform their "tricks" when they feel like it. Plus, they get distracted readily.

One practical application for cat training is teaching cats to love their carriers. A recent study showed that this reduced stress for cats visiting veterinary clinics. Your veterinarian can provide advice and resources to help.

