

Cat Checkups & Preventive Care

Why Your Cat Should Stay Indoors: Part I

[Dr. Ruth MacPete](#) discusses the controversial topic of whether or not cats should be let to roam around freely outdoors. For more from Dr. MacPete, *find her on [Facebook](#) or at www.drruthpetvet.com!*

Did you know the average lifespan for an outdoor cat is just 3 to 5 years while indoor cats average 13-17? This huge difference in life expectancy should be a compelling enough reason for all cat parents to keep their feline friends indoors. Yet despite the perils of the great outdoors, many people allow their cats to go outside. In my opinion, cats should always be kept indoors in the safety of a warm and loving home. Like many veterinarians, I believe that the decision to keep your cat indoors is one of the most important actions you can take to promote the health and longevity of your feline friend. Here are the outdoor dangers you can avoid by keeping your cat indoors.

Cat Fight Wounds

Cats are solitary animals by nature and they do not typically like to share their territories with other cats. With increased crowding, territories overlap and normally solitary cats are forced to face each other. Unfortunately, these encounters usually result in territorial disputes. Besides bites and scratches, cat fights can result in an abscess when a bite wound becomes infected. Abscesses are painful and cats with abscesses usually have a fever and do not eat well. Treatment requires a veterinarian and involves surgical drainage and oral antibiotics to fight the infection.

Viral Infections

Even worse, cat bites can transmit infections like [feline leukemia virus \(FeLV\)](#), [feline immunodeficiency virus \(FIV\)](#) and, on rare occasions, [rabies](#). Interactions with stray cats do not need to be unfriendly to transmit disease: [feline infectious peritonitis \(FIP\)](#) and [feline leukemia virus \(FeLV\)](#) can be spread by close contact alone. Some of these diseases do not have effective vaccines and unfortunately there is no cure for any of them.

Parasites

In addition, outdoor cats are more likely than exclusively indoor cats to become infected with internal parasites, like roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, [heartworms](#) and [toxoplasma](#).

Cars

Automobiles are one of the deadliest hazard to outdoor cats. Most car injuries are fatal. The lucky ones who survive usually have severe injuries that often require

surgery. Many people believe that their cat is smart enough to avoid being hit by a car, but even the most street-savvy cat can be a victim. Like people, cats can become distracted: they could be chasing after prey, they might be running away from a dog, or they could be pursuing another cat in play. The fact is, all free-roaming cats are at risk of being hit by a car.

Poisons

Besides automobiles, [poisons are another very common danger facing outdoor cats](#). Cats can encounter poisonous chemicals like insecticides, rodenticides, and fertilizers. Pesticides are the most dangerous because they are sweetened or scented to attract pests and cats are often the unintended victims. In a single day, an outdoor cat may come across a neighbor's lawn fertilizer, snail bait, rat poison, ant bait, [antifreeze](#) and even fresh paint.

Wild Animals

Predators have always been a threat to cats, but as suburbs encroach on natural habitats, encounters with native wildlife have increased. In many states, coyotes, foxes and similar predators claim many cats, and in the South, alligators pose a major danger.

The Price of Being Wild

Once your cat is outdoors, there is no way to protect them from all of these dangers. In addition to endangering your cat's health, being outdoors can have an impact on your wallet. One of the largest veterinary pet insurers in the US reported that treatment of cat bites and wounds are among the top ten reasons for veterinary visits annually. Fights and injuries require veterinary attention, and since they can occur in the evening and on weekends, it can also mean a trip to the emergency clinic. Depending on the severity of the injury or illness, the visit could require surgery, hospitalization, medication and other treatment. Instead of spending your money on emergencies, wouldn't it be better to save your money for routine veterinary visits?

Living Healthier, Longer Lives

As pet parents, besides loving our pets, it is our responsibility to care for them and protect them from harm. So what can you do to insure that your cat lives out his nine lives? Take advantage of the excellent veterinary care available in this country and make sure your cat has regular veterinary check-ups. Keep your cat out of unnecessary danger by keeping him safely indoors. We all want the best for our pets, so next time you think about letting your cat outside, think about all

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the dangers an outdoor cat faces in a single day.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian - they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.

Resources:

1. Millburn, Naomi, and Demand Media. "What's a Normal Indoor Cat Lifespan?" *Pets*. Demand Media, n.d. Web. 25 Aug. 2014.