

How Not to Lose Your Cat

There are few things more heartbreaking for cat owners than when their dearly loved pet goes missing. Numerous cats are lost every year and sadly, few are reunited with their original owners. Cats are lost for many reasons and it must be equally traumatic for a cat to find itself lost and suddenly a stray, foraging for food and shelter. Unless your cat is an indoor cat, it is not really possible to completely ensure that he will not wander or be stolen, but here are a few tips to minimise the risk of this happening to your cat.



1. Be sure that your cat wears a safe collar (the ones that open on pressure are the safest) with an identity disc firmly attached, clearly printed with your name & phone number. (Kittens under 7-8 months should not wear any type of collar). Make sure that the collar is neither too tight nor too loose. If too loose, the cat can get its front leg caught in it causing distress and possible injury. If too tight and it gets caught in a tree branch for example, the cat can be strangled. If you move house, don't forget to update the identity disc. **Micro-chipping** is really the only totally safe and sure way to identify your cat for the rest of his/her life. We would strongly recommend all pet owners to get their pets micro-chipped. It is not expensive and your vet can do this simple quick procedure. Please don't forget that if you move you will need to update the details with the micro-chipping company. Rescue centres in Ireland and England have found the owners of numerous cats who had been micro-chipped.
2. Always keep your cat in at night and if you have a cat flap make sure it is locked for the night. Cats frequently go missing when left out at night and are often the victims of road traffic accidents. If you experience difficulty in getting your cat in, do not allow him out after his evening meal – he will soon become accustomed to a fixed routine, settling down happily for the night.
3. Have your cat neutered. Neutered cats, both male & female, are far less likely to roam.
4. When transporting cats, always use a secure pet carrier. It is asking for trouble to carry your cat, no matter how docile, in your arms. A cardboard box is also inappropriate – a frightened cat will easily find a way out. A surprising number of cats are lost going to or from the vet surgery.
5. If you are going to be away for more than a day or two, and unless a responsible member of the family will be in the house, book your cat into a reputable cattery. Your vet will probably have boarding kennels or be able to advise you. Make the booking in good time and be sure that vaccinations are up to date. It is not advisable to ask a friend to come in and feed your cat during your absence. Your cat does not know that your absence is temporary and will often go looking for you or other human company, go too far and get lost, be stolen or be the victim of an accident. This is very traumatic for your friend, for you and particularly for your cat. We get numerous calls every holiday time saying "when we returned our cat was missing".

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6. If there is no one at home for long periods on a daily basis, be sure your cat is not left without access to the house where he has his bed, food and water. If you live on a very busy road or if it is not a very safe area, e.g. unsupervised dogs, leave your cat indoors until you are there to supervise his forays into the garden.
7. If there are workmen in the house, either book your cat into a boarding kennels or ensure that he is securely locked in a room with food, water and litter tray. Cats can be very upset by strangers and noisy activity and one cannot rely on workmen to keep doors and gates closed. Don't even think about getting a new cat or kitten if there is renovation work going on or envisaged in the near future.

What to do if your cat *does* go missing

If after all your care, your cat still goes missing, there are things that you can do. Remember, speed is very important – starting the search sooner rather than later gives a much better chance of success.

1. Compose a leaflet giving a good description of your cat, age, sex, whether neutered, colour, noting any distinguishing features, date and place last seen and, if possible, including a recent photograph. Make photocopies and leaflet the entire area, not just your road but all the surrounding area. People soon forget a notice in the shop window but tend to focus on a leaflet through the door. Ask local shops to display one in a prominent position, also the local vets, surgeries, supermarket notice boards, etc. Contact the DSPCA on a daily basis.
2. Advertise in the press and continue to put ads in after the initial three days. Cats have been found months after being lost, mainly due to their owners' perseverance.
3. Ask neighbours to check sheds and garages carefully. Cats are curious creatures and can wander through an open shed door to explore and then find themselves locked in when the homeowner locks up unaware that the cat is inside. If there is construction work in progress in the area, check carefully and alert the builders.
4. Go around the roads at quiet times calling him by name and also using whatever method you use to call him to meals, e.g. banging a tin or shaking a box of cat treats.
5. The corporation garbage disposal men are usually very helpful and sympathetic and will be able to give you a description of any cat victim of an accident that has been found in the area. Knowing that your cat has died is heartbreaking, but preferable to not knowing where or how he is.
6. Don't give up hope too soon, keep searching and follow up every lead.

