

Basic Feline Information

General

Felidae (cats) are divided into two main groups: Felis and Pantherinae. Pantherinae includes the jaguar, leopard, lion and tiger. Felis includes the cougar, lynx, ocelot and domestic cat. Yes, the cougar is genetically close to the domestic cat as it also cannot 'roar'. ALL felidae exhibit the same behaviour, so what a domestic cat may do, so too might a tiger!

Members of the feline family can be socialised by humans if they are held each day as kittens. Kittens that are left to themselves or have little human interaction may not be comfortable near people as they mature. Cats that hide or show aggressive behaviour towards humans typically were not carried or held as kittens.

Humans do not 'own' cats and must therefore not refer to themselves as the cat's 'owner'. Indeed, the cat owns the human as all the rubbing is to let other cats know that particular human is now their property. We are all human 'guardians' who agree to adore, cherish, respect and above all else, love our feline companion(s).

As inconvenient as it may be for the human guardians, all cats need to have front claws to aid with climbing, hunting and self-defence. Removing a cat's or kitten's front claws leaves them effectively defenceless and may cause other types of unacceptable behaviour such as biting. Claw removal may also be illegal in some jurisdictions as it can be considered mutilation and thus animal abuse/cruelty.

Cats are individuals and do not have a 'pack' or 'herd' mentality such as dogs and must be respected accordingly. Some cats enjoy the company of other cats or even other species like dogs, but generally prefer to be alone or close to their human guardian.

All cats, large or small, learn by observing their human guardians, so do not be surprised when a cat knows how to open a cabinet or door. With that in mind, be careful about what is stored in the cabinet or behind the door as curiosity may get the better of the cat as they investigate a new place or smell. Remember to keep all cleaning materials, chemicals or other toxic/dangerous items out of places a cat may find interesting.

Food

Virtually all domestic cats descended from the African Wild Cat (*Felis silvestris*), pictured below, and do not have a thirst mechanism like dogs and humans. Cats meet most of their water requirements by consuming prey and **must not** be fed a diet of dry food (kibble) on a regular or on-going basis. Many commercial dry cat foods contain grains such as corn, wheat or barley, which can wreak havoc with the digestive system of a cat. Some domestic cats develop food allergies or inflammatory bowel disease (feline IBD) as a result of this type of diet. Symptoms of feline IBD can include, but not be limited to, vomiting, diarrhea and weight loss. If your feline companion displays any of these symptoms, seek immediate veterinary assistance as these symptoms can become life threatening.



Female Wild Cat (*Felis silvestris*) resting

All cats are 'obligate carnivores' and require meat as the basis of their diet. In addition to muscle meat, cats also require organ meats that contain taurine (2-aminoethanesulfonic acid), a derivative of the amino acid cysteine. Unlike dogs and humans, cats cannot synthesize taurine and must obtain it from their food on a daily basis to maintain healthy heart function and vision. Any fruits or vegetables ingested by cats are derived from consuming the stomach and intestines of their prey.