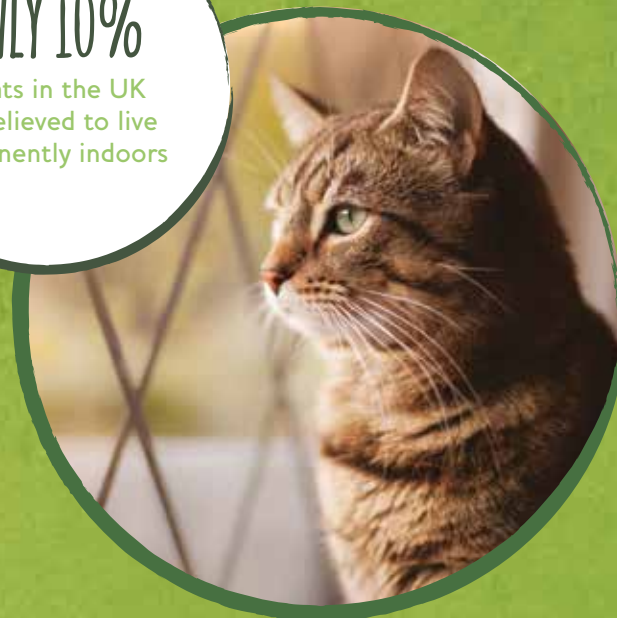


INDOORS VERSUS OUTDOORS

Most cat owners in Europe allow their cats the freedom of the great outdoors while caring for, feeding and interacting with them when they return home. Until fairly recently, cats had to be able to get outside in order to relieve themselves.

The introduction of cat litter in the 1950s gave cat owners the choice of keeping their cats wholly indoors. This coincided with a gradual change in the cat's status from vermin catcher to companion; a greater value was placed upon the cat, and there was increased concern for the cat's health and welfare.

ONLY 10%
of cats in the UK
are believed to live
permanently indoors



WHY DO PEOPLE KEEP THEIR CATS INDOORS?

As city living becomes more and more common, cats living in high-rise apartments may simply not be able to get outdoors. Other owners may prefer to keep their cats indoors because of concerns for their physical safety; going outside may expose cats to threats posed by traffic and other animals. The risks to indoors-only cats, such as stress caused by sharing space with incompatible cats, or from boredom and frustration linked to the lack of opportunity for many natural behaviours like hunting and exploration, may be less easily recognised by owners. Choosing a cat's lifestyle can be a difficult decision and should be made according to the individual cat's home environment, dangers in the local area, physical health and temperament. This article discusses some of the pros and cons of both ways of keeping cats.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING ALLOWED OUTDOORS?

Given what we know about cats' highly evolved senses, many people feel cats should be allowed outside to express normal behaviours such as hunting, and marking and patrolling territory. We have a duty of care to allow cats the freedom to express normal behaviours, as defined in the Animal Welfare Act 2006. The many benefits of cats having outdoor access include:



Regular exercise: Hunting, climbing and patrolling territory all provide opportunities for exercise. Cats with outdoor access tend to be slimmer than their indoor counterparts, which puts them at a relatively lower risk of developing health problems such as diabetes and obesity



Opportunities to satisfy behavioural needs: Outdoor cats can scratch-mark territorial features such as tree trunks, and can choose where to urinate and defecate. They can also establish, mark and defend territory



A larger home territory for cats from multi-cat households: Cats are self-sufficient and territorial. Many behavioural problems are the result of being kept in close proximity to other cats. Outdoor access allows cats to get away from each other and to establish their own individual territories involving the garden and wider area (or to be able to timeshare space more easily)



Ease of care: Owners of a cat that goes outdoors to the toilet and to scratch, have less mess to clear up at home. Keeping an indoor cat, or cats, happy takes a lot of work. Cleaning out litter trays, and providing the mental stimulation and exercise the cat would get from going outside, requires time and effort from an owner



More control: A cat which has outdoor access has more control over its situation. Less confinement can lead to reduced frustration