



Max taking a well-deserved rest. Photo: Animals Fiji

CAT CARE

# How to Care for your Feline Family Member



## Opinion



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Mary-Anne is a volunteer on assignment with Animals Fiji as part of the Australian Volunteers Program, an Australian Government Initiative.

Most people think cats don't need as much care and attention as dogs. However, it varies. Some cats are social and enjoy attention, while others may prefer to be left alone most of the time.

Each cat has a different personality, so it is important to watch and learn from their actions. Pay attention to their body language and respond to what they show you works for them.

Cats still need the same basic needs as dogs – a good and varied diet, fresh water, a safe environment, regular grooming, playtime and exercise, and regular veterinary check-ups.

But let's go over some basic needs.

**Feeding**

In Fiji, feeding cats with home-cooked meals is normal. This is suitable for most cats. Cats are car-

nivorous – that is, meat-eaters and meat must be included in their diet.

A suitable diet should include 80 per cent protein such as cooked meat, fish or eggs with an additional small amount of carbohydrates, such as rice, potatoes or bread and some vegetables for variety.

If you have access to commercially prepared dry or canned foods, you may include them but they are not essential.

As with most animals – some foods should not be given to cats. These foods include

- Cooked bones, especially from fish, long chicken bones or small pork bones, as they can splinter inside their mouth, throat or stomach and cause harm to your cat,

- Chocolate, coffee, onions, garlic, grapes raisins, and nuts can cause illness

- Adult cats cannot digest milk or dairy products properly which can cause upset stomachs, vomiting and diarrhoea

- Tinned tuna for human consumption can also cause issues.

Kittens require more frequent feeding than older cats. Generally, the rule is:

- 6-12 weeks – feed your kitten 3-4 small meals per day

- 12-16 weeks – 2-3 meals per day

- Three months and older – 2 meals per day

Of course, every cat loves a treat, but make sure these are not the primary source of their food. Also, remember not to overfeed as that leads to obesity and other health problems.

As we know, cats are independent creatures so if you have more than one cat in the house, to avoid fighting, make sure they have separate feeding bowls a small distance apart.

**Water**

Your cat needs to access fresh water throughout the day, especially in the hot weather like we have in Fiji.

**Safe and healthy environment**

Cats are curious creatures and will investigate anything, so anything that could harm them – keep



Max oversees the activities at the Savusavu marina. Photo: Animals Fiji

out of their reach.

For indoor cats, keep windows and balconies secure so they can't escape.

If your cat is outdoors, you need to protect them from fighting with other cats and from other predators such as mongoose or stray dogs. It is best to keep your cat indoors from dusk until dawn.

**Regular grooming**

Brush your cat regularly to prevent their fur from matting into furballs and to reduce shedding.

Most cats love being brushed, so it is part of giving your cat attention.

Brushing is especially important for long and medium-haired cats.

**Playtime and exercise**

As cats are natural hunters, hiding treats in cat toys (which you can buy or make yourself) gives the cat something to search for, stimulates the cat mentally and entertains it.

Spend quality time playing with your cat to build a strong bond with your cat. Use play sessions to en-

ertain your cat. Small things like your phone torch light or a fluffy ball on a string can entertain them for ages.

It is always good to have a scratch pole for your cat as scratching is an instinct and it will save your furniture from being scratched or torn by sharp claws.

You can easily make one by attaching carpet to a solid upright object for example a tree stump – there are many examples on the internet for you to try.

Kittens can be trained at a young age to walk on a leash outside your house. You may think it looks funny, but it keeps your indoor cat safe and involves their natural exploration instinct.

**Regular Veterinary visits**

The most important thing you can do to keep your cat and your community safe and healthy is to have them desexed.

It prevents unwanted litters and helps with better health by protecting them from some cancers and

can reduce their need to roam or get into fights with other animals.

Schedule regular check-ups with your veterinary clinic for vaccinations, flea and tick prevention and dental care.

Remember, if you live remotely, you can schedule a phone/video appointment to discuss your requirements and any problems you may have.

If you are worried about your pet's health, make an appointment with your Veterinary Clinic.

Animals Fiji helps animals all around Fiji, with clinics in Savusavu, Labasa, Nadi and Lautoka, and they also hold outreach clinics in other areas.

If you want to support Animals Fiji in their work or to find out more about Animals Fiji's services, contact their Savusavu Clinic (+679) 998 6253 or Nadi Clinic (+679) 993 6647 or visit their website at [www.animalsfiji.org](http://www.animalsfiji.org).

**Max's story**

Max is a well-loved cat at the Savusavu Marina. He was owned and looked after by a local Savusavu and Marina personality Robin Irwin. Unfortunately, Robin was in his 80s and passed on, but another yacht community member took on the responsibility of looking after Max.

Max soon became the Savusavu Marina community cat. He ventured from yacht to yacht for pats, cuddles, and the occasional treat. He had plenty of choice for shelter and people to ensure he had food and water.

Unfortunately, Max fought with another cat and lost the sight in his left eye – getting injured can be an issue for cats that are allowed to roam.

Luckily, one of the permanent yacht members was Animals Fiji Savusavu Clinic's first vet, Dr Jeff and his wife Jose, who keep a watchful eye on Max's health and welfare.

Max is a happy, healthy cat and an example of how a small community takes responsibility for the well-being of beloved pet.

Source: Animals Fiji