



Nine Feline Myths

MYTH: *Cats steal the breath of babies.*

FACT: Cats are heat and comfort seekers. Curling up next to a newborn in a crib meets both these needs. However, if the cat chooses to press up against the face of a bundled infant who is too young to turn away on her own, her breathing may be hampered. Keep cats out of the nursery during naptime/bedtime.

MYTH: *Pregnant women must give up their cats.*

FACT: While toxoplasmosis is a risk for fetuses, a woman is more likely to catch it from handling raw meat or digging in the garden, than from her cats. Cat guardians can protect themselves from cat related exposure by emptying the litter box daily, having someone else clean the litter box or wearing rubber gloves and a mask if the job can't be foisted onto anyone else.

MYTH: *Black cats are bad luck.*

FACT: There are nearly as many superstitions about black cats bringing good luck as there are about them bringing bad luck. In different cultures around the world, other colors and coat patterns are seen as lucky-or not. However, in one 2000 study of 321 patients reported in the Annals of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, patients with dark colored cats were 4 times more likely to suffer a moderate to severe allergy attack than those with light colored cats. Researchers speculate that darker cats produce more allergens in their skin and saliva. So if you're mildly allergic to cats, it may be smart to visit with lighter colored felines.

MYTH: *Cats have 9 lives.*

FACT: The myth most likely originated from Egyptian gods and religions, where sun god Atum-Ra, one of the Ennead, or the Nine would assume the form of the cat when visiting the underworld. Throughout the ages, cats continued to be considered magical and otherworldly, and their resilience surviving falls from high places and long confinements without sustenance continue to amaze us.

MYTH: *Cats always land on their feet.*

FACT: As a tree climbing species, the cat's survival depends on its ability to survive falls when possible. The feline vestibular system and vision work together with the cat's flexible spine to allow the cat to right himself and, when there is enough time to "parachute out" in a manner similar to a flying squirrel. While they can usually right themselves, they can still sustain serious injury to limbs, jaws and the thoracic region which may result in death.

MYTH: *A cat purrs when it's happy.*

FACT: Purring is one of the first sounds kittens can make. They can purr by the time they are 48 hours old. While nursing, both mom and kittens can be heard purring. But while purring is often heard at times of contentment, cats also purr when in pain and in the throes of death.

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Strengthening the Bond Between Pets and People

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MYTH: *Cats hate water.*

FACT: While most cats hate baths, many find running water fascinating and spend time pawing at dripping faucets or demanding their guardians turn on the water for a fresh, cool drink. Kittens, in particular, find sinks and showers a source of amusement, although for most, the thrill lessens with age.

MYTH: *Cats are nocturnal creatures.*

FACT: Cats are crepuscular, most active at dusk and dawn when prey abounds and hunting is best. The construction of their eyes allows them to see well in low light. Cats only need 1/6 of the light humans do in order to decipher shapes. However, they cannot see in absolute darkness.

MYTH: *Cats are loners.*

FACT: Outdoor cats are solitary hunters, but most will choose to live in a colony near a food source. Un-neutered males will roam the farthest, in search of food and females in heat. Studies of barn cats showed matrilineal groups were created by a founding female, her daughters and their kittens. When males reach approximately 18 months of age, they leave the area and strike out on their own. The kittens of domesticated house cats are best prepared to fit into a multi-cat household when they are kept with their littermates until at least 8 to 10 weeks of age.