



A New Leash on Life

Training Your Cat to Walk on a Leash

Leash training is not for every cat. It is an option that can be explored based on where and how you live, and your cat's personality and needs. Ideally, the decision to leash train or not should be made during kittenhood.

Some cats love to explore outside, eat grass, and chase butterflies. They can become unpleasant housemates if they cannot pursue some of these primal needs. In cases like these, leash training becomes a viable option for both owner and cat.

Basic Training

The basics of leash training are simple. You need a cooperative cat, preferably a young one, a harness designed for a cat, a leash (4-6 feet long), and a willing cat owner.

Introduce your cat to the new tools by presenting the leash and harness as toys. Let your cat sniff them, play with them, and work through any fear of the new items. When your cat sees the new contraptions as no big deal, put the harness on your cat and let him/her wear for about five minutes. At first your cat may refuse even to get up and walk. Ignore the bluff. Self-inflicted paralysis is boring, and sooner or later your cat will get up and gingerly move around. Always monitor your cat any time they are in harness.

Gradually extend the time that your cat wears the harness and drags a short leash, up to about 20 minutes. When your cat seems at ease, pick up the end of the leash and talk a short walk around the inside of the house. Never pull or drag the leash, use just enough pressure so your cat knows you are there at the other end. Your cat may relapse into the "no legs" syndrome. Call your cat to you, praise and pat kitty for the effort. If need be, offer a treat to draw your cat to you. Do not go to your leashed cat, pet it and pick it up during this training stage. Make sure you are rewarding performance, and not reinforcing lack of performance.

Expand your walks through the house slowly, until it is easy for both of you. You will have to get used to walking at your cat's pace, rather than your own. Moving from walks through the house, to walks around the yard, and then the block, should be done very gradually and at your cat's comfort level. The progress comes naturally because cats, as nature's investigators, will spend less time sniffing familiar objects and will be more interested in analyzing new discoveries.

Fitting Your Cat's Harness

How big is your cat? You'll need to know before you buy a harness. Take a measuring tape and get the circumference of your cat's neck, then take a chest measurement just behind the front legs.

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There are two basic styles: figure 8 and figure H. Figure 8 harness is one continuous strip that wraps around the cats neck, crosses over the shoulders and then around the cat's chest. The leash is attached to a loop at the shoulder crossing. If the cat pulls, it is designed to distribute the pressure to chest and shoulders. The H harness works on the same principle, but is a neck collar and a chest collar joined by a strip that goes over the shoulders. This design may be more escape proof before it does not slip as much and if one collar comes undone, the other will probably stay fastened.

Tips

- Make sure your cat's harness fits correctly and is securely fastened each time you take kitty out.
- Keep a spare harness on hand, incase of breakage or other damage.
- Be ready at all times to scoop your cat into your arms while walking, in case of danger or threat.
- Be to keep your cat is current on all vaccinations.
- Always step off the curb before your cat; it is even more preferable to carry your cat across any streets.
- Buy your cat a simple harness. Fancy decorations that might look cute, could be frightening to your cat.

Adapted from: Charlene Beane