Cats Living Inside and Outside

The luxury of cats being able to peruse both indoors and outdoors can sometimes bring risks. Do you have the appropriate precautions in place to ensure safe environments and a healthy life-style for your cat?

Many cat owners choose to provide stimulating indoor environments complete with climbing towers, areas to scratch, and hunting simulation tools. Many other cat owners choose to allow cats to also explore the outdoors, as it is their natural environment, according to Ken Lambrecht, DVM, of Westside Family Pet Clinic in Madison, Wis.

“Although controversial in terms of dangers to cats and songbirds, many people feel that as the cat is originally an outdoor creature, a hunter and only partially domesticated, that it truly needs the outdoor experience,” says Dr. Lambrecht. “The outdoors as their natural environment can be beneficial to allow them more natural activity and to burn calories.”

Cats that remain indoors are safer for many reasons. If your cat must be outside at times, take precautions. Dr. Lambrecht explains enclosed outdoor play areas and runs can be constructed for cats. He advises any cat that travels outdoors should have a microchip. Harnesses and quick release collars with tags provide other options to cat owners. According to Dr. Lambrecht, a new technology is currently evolving towards cat-sized wearable GPS technology. In this developing technology, when a cat travels outside of a certain geo-fence, an alarm would be sent to the owner’s smart phone. If allowing your cat to be outside, ensure your cat is spayed or neutered.

There are other measures cat owners can take to ensure their indoor-outdoor cat stays healthy. Because cats can bring in fleas, internal parasites including roundworms, and ringworm, certain health measures should be taken, states Dr. Lambrecht.

“Medication that provides good prevention against these parasites that also protect against heartworm is available from your veterinarian. Consumers need to be careful as some over-the-counter products are ineffective and dog products, if accidently used on cats, can be deadly,” he explains. “Heartworm disease is transmitted by mosquitoes, so any cats outside should have heartworm prevention prescribed by their veterinarian.”

Dr. Lambrecht notes that cats may bring home prey, such as mice, that owners should be prepared for. If multiple cats are in the household, cats can also bring in scents from outdoors other cats in the household will notice but should not cause a problem.

With winter quickly approaching, owners should keep a close eye on temperatures, wind conditions and other weather variables. Dr. Lambrecht suggests watching the body language of your cats as they will usually let owners know when they are ready to come inside.

“Short stays outside in an enclosed pen or harnessed on a leash are the safest ways to allow a cat outside,” Dr. Lambrecht clarifies. “Anything below 20°F and especially low wind chills should be watched closely. Sheltered areas close to the house and enclosed would be safest.”

To learn more about cats living both inside and outside, contact your local WVMA member veterinarian. Find one online at www.wvma.org .

Dr. Ken Lambrecht has been a practicing veterinarian and cat owner and lover for more than 31 years. He regularly takes walks outside with both of his cats, Lance and Bug, and supervises their outdoor activities.

 Bug is even more adventurous, accompanying Dr. Lambrecht on camping trips, paddling and skiing adventures, and has even visited Washington D.C., Atlanta, Denver and Seattle. See the Amazing Adventures of Little Bug at facebook.com/amazingadventuresoflittlebug or amazingadventuresofbug.com.

Healthy Cows

Home to more than 1.2 million dairy cows, Wisconsin is known as “The Dairy State,” and veterinarians work hard every day to ensure the health and well-being of those dairy cattle. One way they do this is work with dairy farmers and nutritionists to deliver a healthy, well-balanced diet daily.

Many of Wisconsin's cows eat a diet comprised of feeds called TMR, or total mixed ration. This mixture of feed contains every nutrient a cow needs except for water, according to Neil Michael, DVM, a veterinarian who works as a Technical Field Consultant for Vita Plus Corporation, a livestock feed and nutrition company based in Madison, Wis.

"TMRs provide a consistent balance of nutrition in each bite. When cows are fed as a group, TMR ensures that all cows get essentially the same diet," Dr. Michael explains. "This is important to avoid some animals eating more of a few ingredients they 'like,' resulting in digestive upsets following the meal or becoming deficient in another nutrient."

Hay, fermented forages, vitamins, minerals and corn, soybean or canola meal are all examples of ingredients which may be included in TMR, says Dr. Michael. Fermented forages are field crops that have been stored in a silo or covered with plastic which enable the feed to ferment. Depending upon the animal's age, size and desired milk production or desired weight gain, dairy farmers, dairy nutritionists and veterinarians work together to determine the optimal rations. If a diet isn't balanced, cattle can experience digestive upset that could lead to acute metabolic problems or long-term health issues such as liver disease and lameness.

Veterinarians work together with dairymen and their consultants to monitor how much feed their cows consume since that impacts milk production and long-term health among their animals.

"In addition to the specific ingredients [which] we monitor for palatability (taste), we also often add water to TMRs to improve intake and prevent sorting of the individual ingredients," describes Dr. Michael.

Individual ingredients like minerals, corn and hay are dumped into a mobile or stationary mixer which is used to blend the TMR daily on a dairy farm. These giant mixers are used to make a consistent TMR and then dispense the feed to the cows. According to Dr. Michael, a single mature dairy cow will consume more than 110-120 pounds of TMR and 20-35 gallons of water daily.

TMRs are a tool that veterinarians and dairy consultants can use to help improve overall health of animals, says Dr. Michael.

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