



The Costs of Responsible Cat Ownership



The decision to bring home a cat or kitten is an exciting event, but not to be entered into lightly. Cats and kittens require a financial commitment, which, of course, is compensated by the extreme pleasure of watching them grow and develop, and the loving companionship they provide. If you are thinking of getting a cat, be aware of the cost and time commitments required, and then choose one from a rescue group or shelter.

Being a responsible pet owner carries with it certain financial obligations. If you are not in a position, or are not willing, to meet these costs, it may be better not to take in a cat at all. It can be difficult to resist that cute kitten advertised as "free to a good home" but if you can't afford to give it the bare necessities, you are probably doing the cat/kitten no favour.

Fortunately, there are options, if your love for cats far outweighs your means to properly care for them.

Cats have certain basic needs, which often mean the difference between a stray on the street and a cat in a home with a responsible owner. (The irresponsible ones often dump their cats back into the streets or at the nearest "shelter").

Meeting these needs is of paramount importance, and a person who is not prepared to pay for them, or can't afford them, should reconsider whether owning a cat is right for them. It is important to keep these costs in perspective. Some costs are associated with responsible cat ownership and some are hidden costs associated with "free" cats.

- **Initial Costs:** To set up your home with pet carrier, litter box, food bowls, scratching posts, nail clippers, and toys will cost approximately \$100 - \$200. This is a one-time cost and major items, like the pet carrier, will not have to be replaced.

- **Initial Veterinary Costs:**

Vaccines: Kittens will require 3 sets of vaccines (including check-ups and one rabies inoculation) at a total cost of approximately \$250. Initial vaccination costs for an adult cat will be approximately \$100.

Spay/Neuter: In the GTA, the OSPCA (Newmarket branch) and Toronto Animal Services both operate low-cost spay/neuter clinics. The OSPCA clinic can be reached at <http://www.spayneuter.ontariospca.ca> or by telephone at 905-898-6112 (Newmarket).

The Toronto Animal Services website is http://www.toronto.ca/animal_services/faq.htm#spay_clinics and they can be reached by telephone at 416-338-6281. The waiting lists tend to be long, but the savings are significant. Low-cost spay/neuter clinics typically charge \$50 - \$75. A private veterinarian might charge in the neighbourhood of \$200 - \$350 for a neuter (male) to \$300 - \$450 for a spay (female),

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• Ongoing Costs:

Food: Good quality food will save you money in the long run. If you feed low-end food, your cat can end up with urinary or intestinal problems, resulting in high veterinary bills. A good quality food will cost approximately \$15 - \$25 for a 3 – 4 kg bag that should last several weeks.

Litter: Clumping clay litter is the most economical and is available at all pet stores, grocery stores, and “big box” stores. The cost of approximately \$10 - \$15 for a 11 - 22 kg. bag and regular scooping will make it last for several weeks.

Annual Veterinary Examination: Cost Varies A thorough exam, including dental and a blood profile, will start at \$200 for a healthy cat. Additional testing, treatment and medication would carry additional costs. Cats cannot tell you when they are ill, so it is extremely important to make sure that they are examined by a veterinarian annually.

Emergency Veterinary Care There is no real way to estimate these costs, since they vary as to the age, overall condition, and accident-proneness of the cat. Pet Insurance can mitigate these costs somewhat, but the average cost of pet insurance is \$30 per month per cat.

Shelters are so full that **millions of cats** are euthanized each year. Other cats eke out a fragile existence on the streets, and meet tragic early deaths. The cause for these needless tragedies can be traced directly to irresponsible pet owners.

Adopting a cat through a not-for-profit organization that includes the cost of spay/neuter, early vaccines and loving care as part of an “adoption fee” will often save you money in the long run. These cats and kittens have had quality food, clean water, and veterinary care since their rescue. “Free” cats often have not had appropriate veterinary care and may come with illnesses or parasites that need to be treated.

If you love cats but can't afford to give them responsible care, do the *really unselfish thing* and volunteer at a shelter or rescue group, instead of taking on another cat. Becoming a **foster home** for a cat/kitten from a rescue group can be very rewarding as you play an important role in caring for cats and kittens without taking on the financial burden of cat ownership. It is a win-win situation. Most shelters could not operate without volunteers and foster homes and foster parents benefit from the companionship of the cats and kittens in their care.

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