



Harness Training for Your Cat

Some confident kitties may enjoy supervised outdoor time, both for exercise and enrichment. The best way to do this safely and securely is with a harness. Below are some guidelines for feline harness training.

Choose the right cat. If your cat is generally fearful around new people and new places, use care when deciding how scary a harness excursion might be. Some cats are confident enough for hiking and biking—for some, even the back garden may be too overwhelming. If you're on the fence, take it SLOW, let the cat tell you when they've had enough.

Choose the right harness. Choose an H-type harness or a [walking jacket](#). Note: Figure-eight type harnesses are not secure.

Choose the right fit. Adjust the harness so when it is on the cat you can place two fingers between the cat and the harness. For a larger cat, you may need to buy a harness made for a small dog. If starting when your cat is very young (6-8 weeks), finding a harness small enough will be difficult! Start with cutting holes in an appropriately sized sock instead.

Getting your cat used to the harness

START IN SHORT SESSIONS, 1-2 minutes at first. Some cats you will want to pair treats with just having the harness around their neck unfastened. Expect some odd behavior when you first put the harness on. It takes time to get used to the feeling of the harness, so you'll want to distract your cat in some way while the harness is on. You can put the harness on them at feeding time and have them wear it for a few minutes while they are eating; play a favorite game with them while they are wearing it or just give them a tasty treat. Take it slow, making each subsequent session with the harness slightly longer. Once the cat is wearing the harness for extended periods of time (five minutes or more) and acting normally, you can add a leash.

- Don't leave a cat unsupervised while wearing a harness.
- Remember to associate the harness with good things, play, food or treats.
- Start out with short sessions, 2 minutes or 10 treats at the most.
- Be patient –harness training is a process that can take days for some cats and weeks for others.
- If your cat consistently fights the harnessing process, contact a professional trainer!

For more information or to request behavior assistance, visit eastbayspca.org/behavior.
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Getting your cat used to the leash

Your cat should be comfortable wearing a harness for 10 to 15 minutes before starting to work on leash training. Start in a quiet, safe place. Attach a six- to eight-foot, lightweight leash to the harness (never attach a leash to the cat's collar). Set up a scenario where you can move freely, and encourage your cat to follow you. As they move with you, offer them a treat or toy! Allow them to move around with the leash on, following them to prevent tension on the leash. If your cat is toy motivated, try moving a toy in the same direction that you are walking to encourage them to follow you. Our goal is to show the cat that moving with you predicts good things!

- **Choose your locations with care.** For many cats, a garden, alley, or hallway is a good place to start. They will explore higher traffic places more confidently if they start out by gaining confidence in lower traffic ones.
- **Be aware that walking a cat on a leash is different from walking a dog.** Sometimes you can ask them to follow you using a toy. Other times, you will follow them allowing him to explore. Don't expect them to "heel!"
- **Keep your walks short – 10 to 15 minutes.** Make sure your cat can "retreat" back to home base if they choose.
- **Bring treats/toys to keep your kitty engaged and encourage desired behavior.** Some cats may be too distracted by a new environment to eat even their favorite treats, so toys are helpful to have on hand.
- **Never use your leash to drag your cat.** If needed (such as in an unexpected situation like a dog rounding the corner) calmly pick up your cat and carry them to a safe/secure place.
- **Make sure your cat is wearing identification** such as a collar with tags, and is microchipped with up-to-date information in case they escape outdoors.

Plan to have a cat backpack or pet stroller for your outings!

Having a "traveling home base" that can offer your cat a safe place to run to if they get scared is important. Trying to hold onto a panicking cat can lead to injuries, and making sure you can offer them a secure space is important when encountering unexpected challenges, such as dogs, garbage trucks, motorcycles, etc. These options also offer a way to transport them quickly and safely back home if needed.

For more individualized assistance, you can contact our free behavior helpline at:

www.eastbayspca.org/behaviorhelp

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