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Photo courtesy of Best Friends Animal Society

Walking The Cat Harness a Curious Cat for a Lively Stroll

by Sandra Murphy

Cats live longer these days, due to improved food, regular veterinary care and indoor living, but there's another aspect of health to consider. To thrive, cats need mental and physical stimulation, which outdoor adventures naturally deliver.

"Leash walking's a great way for cats to get fresh air, exercise and explore," says Utica, New York, Veterinarian Debra M. Eldredge, author of *Cat Owner's Home Veterinary Handbook*. Kitty's senses are activated in such expanded horizons. For trips outside the yard, Eldredge advises, "Choose your places and times; you don't want to mingle with joggers and skateboarders."

Cats have definite preferences. "Jagger walks around the block with my husband, Rob," says Anna Easteden, an actress in Los Angeles. Jagger has no problems with dogs he meets, but not all cats are so tolerant. "Star walks only in the yard, accompanied by Fuzzy and Boots." All four are micro-chipped in case of an escape.

Carrie Aulenbacher, of Erie, Pennsylvania, author of *The Early Bird Café*, first got her cat Daisy used to a harness indoors before venturing outside. "Now he runs to the door and meows to go out," she says. Daisy's been hiking for 10 years. View some of his adventures at Tinyurl.com/DaisyTheHikingCat.

Boston insurance underwriting assistant, cat blogger and artist Koshka Koh routinely walks her Abyssinian therapy cat, Jake. "We can't hurry. People ask questions and want to pet him. They say, 'I wish my cat could do that.'"

Good to Know Tips

The Best Friends Animal Society, in Kanab, Utah, averages 625 cats in residence and Society Manager Michelle Warfle supports an enriched environment. "We teach as many cats as possible to leash walk," she says. Her tips include: Don't

June is Adopt-a-Cat Month

progress too quickly, keep walks fun and use a harness, not the collar. Warfle's own cat, Earl, hikes about two miles before tiring. A backpack-like pet carrier lets a feline take a break.

Adapt the walk's length or location to a pet's age and physical limitations, such as arthritis. "Jabez always loved to walk on Ventura's wet sandy beaches," says Californian Kac Young, a naturopath with a Ph.D. in natural health. "His second choice was a trip to Home Depot to ride in the cart." Now 18, Jabez doesn't travel as often.

Routinely check kitty's neck, tail, stomach and inner thighs to pick off fleas and ticks after an outing before they become a bigger problem. (For an infestation of fleas, comb the cat with natural dishwashing detergent and water to drown them and rinse kitty afterward.) Pet-grade diatomaceous earth is safe to rub into her fur and bedding.

Consider yard plants like mint, lemongrass, sage and lavender to repel bugs. Multiple studies suggest catnip, which kitty can roll in, may be an even more effective mosquito repellent than the toxic DEET (mosquitoes spread heartworm).

Cat companions agree that when kitty explores a blade of grass or pounces on a blowing leaf, it presents a delightful opportunity to be in the moment. A change of pace benefits those on both ends of the leash.

Connect with Sandra Murphy at StLouisFreelanceWriter@mindspring.com.

Cat Walk Savvy

by Darlene Arden

- Cats need to get used to an idea before embracing it. Proceed slowly.
- A collar is for ID tags, not walking—a cat can wiggle out of a collar. A harness, properly fitted at the pet supply store, is best. Designate a comfortable, padded, wider harness solely for walking, not to restrain the cat in the car (a crate is safer).
- Let a cat see and smell the harness before putting it on. Small treats help. Don't let the cat bat it like a toy. Put the harness on for short spans each day until he's used to it—cats tend to fall over, "paralyzed", when it's first introduced.
- After the harness has been worn comfortably, add the leash and let him drag it around in an enclosed outdoor space. Never use a flexi-lead/retractable leash. A six-foot bungee (stretchy) or woven leash allows space to explore without getting tangled in a bush or beyond reach.
- Leash walk around the house without pulling, yanking or dragging—just do some pet-paced walking.
- Don't force the next step, because the outdoors can be a big, scary place; most cats need to observe first before exploring.
- Use lots of praise and treats.

Darlene Arden is a certified animal behavior consultant from Boston and author of *The Complete Cat's Meow and Beautiful Cats*.



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