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# How Much Does a Cat Cost? Breaking Down Expenses

Daily care and feeding, along with medical expenses, can add up. And considering many cats live 15 years or more, it can be a major financial investment.

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first year and about \$340 per year after that.<sup>1</sup> Of course, how much that adds up to overall will depend on your kitty's lifespan, and that's not counting irregular expenses involved in boarding or pet sitting, travel or major medical expenses. Those can be costly, but of course the love and companionship your cat provides in return are priceless.

Below, we provide an in depth breakdown of the various costs of cat ownership.

Beyond the cost of getting a cat -- which may cost you nothing; it's not as though stray cats or free kittens are difficult to come by -- you'll need to stock up on food and supplies that will make your home cat-friendly. But the biggest expense you'll encounter once you've taken ownership of your new kitty will by far be first-year medical expenses. Here's what you can expect to spend in the first year.

## Getting a Cat

As mentioned, free cats are easy to come by, and the best cats I've ever had were street cats who adopted me. But if you don't have skinny kitties following you home or friends and relatives begging you to take free kittens off their hands, there are certain advantages to paying for the cat you want, whether you adopt from a shelter or opt to invest in a purebred feline.

The adoption fee for a shelter cat can cost up to \$200,<sup>1</sup> although shelters often run low-cost or even no-cost adoption events during which they steeply discount their fees or wave them completely. If you do end up paying a fee, keep in mind that this usually covers the cost of a **spay/neuter** as well as a **veterinary checkup** and **vaccinations**

Got your heart set on a specific breed of cat? Purebred cats can cost anywhere from a few hundred to several thousands of dollars, depending on their popularity

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You'll need some supplies to **get your kitty home** safely and help them settle in. A cat leash and/or cat harness is optional, but may come in handy for trips to the vet and other kinds of travel, or for safely taking your cat outside. **Cat food** and cat litter prices vary widely depending on whether you buy premium or opt for bargain brands, and litter boxes range from cheap plastic pans to robotic self-cleaning contraptions.

Fortunately, cat toys tend to be inexpensive. Not only that, but cats are easily entertained by everyday household items like cardboard boxes, hair bands and cotton swabs, which may mean you don't need to spend on toys at all. Here is an idea of what you might spend on supplies during the first year of owning a cat.

Cat Leash and harness: \$15<sup>3</sup> - \$20<sup>4</sup>

Cat carrier: \$20 - \$75<sup>1</sup>

Cat Bedding: \$20 - \$100<sup>1</sup>

Food and water dishes: \$5 - \$30<sup>1</sup>

Cat food: \$120 - \$500<sup>1</sup>

Cat Litter: \$70 - \$150<sup>1</sup>

Litterbox: \$10 - \$200<sup>1</sup>

Cat Toys: \$0 - \$25<sup>4</sup>

## Initial Health Costs for Your Cat

If you adopt a cat from a shelter, some of the initial costs of healthcare, including spaying or neutering, may already be covered. Otherwise, you'll need to pay for those services yourself. Either way, you may still need to provide wellness checkups, exams, and booster shots, as well as heartworm and flea and tick

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consider.

## Cat Grooming and Maintenance Costs

Cats are good at keeping themselves clean and don't often need baths, if ever. While the coats of short-haired cats are virtually maintenance-free, long-haired cats will need regular attention to keep their coats free of mats and tangles and stay on top of shedding. This may involve spending as little as \$5<sup>6</sup> for a basic detangling brush if you've got the time to brush your cat daily. Otherwise, from time to time you may need the help of a professional groomer to deal with severely matted fur, a service that could run as much as \$50.<sup>4</sup>

If your cat prefers to file their nails on your furniture rather than their scratching post, a monthly nail trimming might be in order, a service most groomers provide for around \$10 to \$20.<sup>7</sup> And you may need to call in a pro as well for help with ear cleaning if you've got a feisty feline, a service many vets provide for \$5.<sup>5</sup>

Your biggest annual maintenance expense is likely to be **dental care**. For cats, a professional **dental cleaning** performed by a veterinarian costs \$250 on average,<sup>5</sup> though the cost can fluctuate based on whether your cat needs pain medication or a blood test to make sure they're healthy enough to undergo anesthesia. And if your vet ends up needing to extract teeth or perform other types of oral surgery, the price can skyrocket without warning.

## Cat Health Costs

Apart from keeping them fed, the most expensive part of keeping a pet is usually veterinary costs. While routine vet checkups and medications can be costly enough, illnesses, accidental injuries and other health emergencies can carry such hefty price tags that they leave some pet owners faced with difficult and, at times,

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You should also plan for the unexpected. An **emergency vet visit** with your cat for things like accidental injuries, heat stroke, seizures or other life-threatening conditions starts at \$800 to \$1,500<sup>10</sup> on average, and if emergency **pet surgery** is needed, expect that cost to double or triple. Even planned surgeries for your cat, like torn **ACL repair**, cost between \$1,200 and \$5,000.<sup>11</sup>

As for illnesses, something as simple as an ear infection can cost up to \$150<sup>9</sup> to diagnose and treat. A more serious illness like diabetes, heart disease or cancer can cost hundreds, or even thousands if advanced treatments or long-term medications are needed.

## Travel With Your Cat Costs

Chances are, if you do any traveling, it will be without your cat. Cats tend to do well being left alone for a weekend with plenty of kibble and water left out for them, but if you'll be gone longer, you may need to hire a pet sitter or board your cat at a kennel, both of which typically cost between \$15 and \$50 per day.<sup>1</sup>

But there may be times when bringing your cat along on a trip is necessary. Some cats even enjoy traveling as much as dogs do. If you'll be road tripping with your cat, you'll need a car crate with enough room for a small litter box, which you can find for around \$50.<sup>4</sup> For air travel, an airline approved cat carrier will also start around \$30.<sup>12</sup>

Pet-friendly hotels and motels aren't hard to find, and most charge pet fees starting at \$20 per night, although some luxury hotels charge as much as \$100 per night for pets.<sup>12</sup> And most domestic airlines charge \$125 each way<sup>13</sup> for letting your cat ride under your seat. The carrier will count as your carry-on, so you might also face

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additional \$25 to \$100<sup>14</sup> onto your monthly rent to help cover the cost of pet damage. Of course, if you're a homeowner, you'll have to pay to replace any damaged carpets, walls or furniture yourself.

To protect your furniture, you'll also want to invest in alternative pieces that your cat can scratch. A scratching post starts at around \$15 to \$20,<sup>15</sup> and will need to be replaced periodically. A cat tree and condo, starting around \$55,<sup>16</sup> will provide your kitty with scratching, climbing and lounging surfaces to help keep them off your sofa. Expect to pay significantly more for a design that blends well into your home decor.

## End of Life Care Costs for Cats

Although it's painful to think about, the fact is your cat won't live forever, and end-of-life care brings its own list of expenses. A cat nearing the end of their life, whether from **advanced age** or terminal illness, may need palliative care to help manage pain and improve the quality of their remaining life. Your vet can help you put together a plan, and depending on where you live, you may be able to find a vet who makes house calls for hospice patients. The costs of this type of care can vary widely depending on the type and amount that's needed.

When the time comes to ease your pet's transition from this life, you may opt for in-home euthanasia, which can cost as much as \$225<sup>17</sup> for a home visit from a qualified vet. Otherwise, the cost to euthanize a cat in a clinic generally starts at \$25.<sup>17</sup>

Once your cat has crossed the rainbow bridge, you may have the option of a backyard burial, if you own your property and live in an area where it's legal to bury pets. Otherwise, you'll need to pay between \$100 and \$150<sup>17</sup> to have them cremated. If you'd rather lay them to rest in a pet cemetery, a burial plot may cost

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