

WHAT TO DO IF MY CAT GOES MISSING?

Cats are normally creatures of habit so when your cat doesn't come home at their normal time then it is reasonable to be a little worried.

Many will have the odd occasion when hunting or a dispute with another cat, for example, will have occupied them beyond their usual dinner time and they return a little later the same evening or in the early hours of the morning.

If your cat has been missing for 12 hours or overnight, especially if this is very unusual for them, then you can follow this 6-step action plan:

Step 1

Don't panic! There may be a perfectly good reason why your cat didn't come home at their usual time.

It's helpful at this point to think about any seasonal patterns that might be relevant - did they do the same sort of thing this time last year? Some cats just like to wander a little further and hunt for longer in the spring or summer months, for example.

Have they been keeping their strict routines recently or have you noticed a gradual increase in the time they have been spending outside? This may just reflect a new 'normal' for them as they expand their territory and find different sheltered places to rest outdoors.

Step 2

If the following morning comes and they are still not home then, before you do anything else, check the house from top to bottom – just in case they came in when you were not looking or have found a new secret place to hide as they aren't feeling well or have been hurt.

Once you have established that they are definitely nowhere indoors, the next thing to consider is that they may be very near home but are shut in your own garage, shed or outbuilding. Check everything; inside dustbins, water butts, compost bins, outside storage boxes and look under hedges. While you're searching, take time to stop and listen for the sound of scratching or faint miaows.

If you still cannot find them, ask your immediate neighbours to check their garages, sheds, outbuildings and greenhouses. Visit neighbours either side of you, across the road and in properties behind your garden or outside

space. If you can remember seeing your cat in a particular garden, or a neighbour has commented that your cat has been in their garden or outside space, speak to them specifically.

Step 3

Once you have established from as many neighbours as possible that your cat is not on their property, you can start notifying the appropriate people and organisations.

If your cat is microchipped, then firstly contact the microchip database (such as <https://www.petlog.org.uk/>) and register them as missing. If you have their microchip number but can't remember the name of the microchip database, then you can search for the relevant company using their unique microchip number on www.check-a-chip.co.uk.

Find recent clear photographs that show your cat from a number of different angles so that distinguishing coat patterns and marks can be seen to help with identification.

Make a note of all the details that may be required, for example, their name, age and colour. If they do have any distinguishing features (e.g. like a spot of colour that is heart-shaped), then mention it specifically. If they were wearing a collar then note this down too (but bear in mind that this may have been lost).

Once you have done this, call ...

- All the local vets in your area.
- Your local Police Station.
- All local animal rehoming charities.
- Your local newspaper (to put an ad in the 'lost and found' section of the classified adverts).
- All boarding catteries in the area.
- Your local radio station.
- Lost and found pet websites, for example www.petslocated.com and www.animalsearchuk.co.uk.
- Your local council (the Street Cleansing Department) will have a record of any cats found in your area recently.

Step 4

Now is the time to get out there and walk around but don't go alone if you plan to go after dark.

Don't forget to take a torch and your cat's favourite pack of treats or biscuits with you. Many cats will respond to the shake of a treat or biscuit box even if they don't to their name.

Pay particular attention to empty properties, stopping regularly to shake the box, call out their name and then wait quietly to see if you can hear anything.

Step 5

Make an A-4 sized poster or flyer to inform your local community that your cat is missing (easy to do if you have access to a computer) and include a large photograph (plus smaller ones showing them from different angles).

If you need help with the layout there are many websites that offer poster templates.

Offer a 'reward' for their return but don't specify the amount – just mentioning a reward should be sufficient. Just include your telephone number as a contact. Encourage people to look out for your cat and to check their sheds and garages.

Now distribute these leaflets as widely as you can, to ...

- Local shops
- Post Offices
- Doctor's surgeries
- Local supermarkets
- Vet clinics
- Village Hall notice board
- Local schools
- It's also really helpful to do a 'mailshot' through letterboxes to ask the local community directly to look out for them. Pop one through every letterbox in the area. A Google satellite map of your postcode may help you to decide which roads to mailshot by drawing a wide circle around your home.
- Social media is an extremely effective way to get as many people as possible to know that your cat is missing. For example, post a photo on your Facebook or Twitter pages and also those of:
 - Animal Search UK (<https://www.facebook.com/AnimalSearchUK/> and <https://twitter.com/animalsearchuk>).
 - Cat Aware <https://www.facebook.com/CatAwareFriends/> or ...
 - Missing Pets GB (<https://twitter.com/MissingPetsGB>).

Have you recently moved home? If so, and you've moved within a couple of miles of your previous home, then (if your cat spent a lot of time outside when they lived there) that is another area where you should focus your attention.

- Inform your neighbours in your previous home to look out for your cat.
- Inform the new occupier that your cat may be on their way back.
- Ask everyone not to feed your cat but to notify you immediately if they are seen.
- If your cat is easy to handle, ask a neighbour to pick them up and secure them somewhere safe to await your arrival.

You can also make another phone call to the local vet practices to see if any cats have been found and check notice boards in your local shops and your local paper for any 'found cat' notices.

Step 6

If someone calls to say they have found your cat, don't forget to ask all the important questions to make sure they can identify distinguishing features and confirm it really is them.

Arrange to meet them and take your cat's carrier but don't go alone. If it is your cat then make sure you call all the relevant agencies and inform them that you have found them and remove any posters that you may have put up in the area.

Unfortunately, some well meaning people may be spotting cats that are not yours but persevere as it is better to check out leads that don't amount to anything than have no possible sightings at all.

When your cat returns home ...

When you get your cat home, give them a little of their favourite food and a quick check to see if there are any obvious signs of injury. If they seem well then don't worry, just be glad they are home. If you have any doubts about their health then a consultation with your vet will put your mind at rest.

TOP TIP

If you cover them in a plastic clear folder or laminate them you can attach them to local lamp posts but ensure you remove them once your cat is found. Attach the posters with cable ties and don't use any method of fixing that could cause damage.

TOP TIP

Many pet insurance companies will cover the costs relating to the search for your missing cat. Some give free membership with 24-hour 'lost and found' services.