

## 5 Reasons Cats Are Given Up for Adoption — and How to Avoid These Problems

*Written by Dr. Marty Becker*

My career as a veterinarian — and really, my entire life — has been all about celebrating what I call “The Bond,” that amazing connection we have with our pets. But even as I’ve made a life’s work out of The Bond, I am keenly aware that it sometimes breaks, landing pets in shelters where they hope for new homes.

The good news is that progressive shelters are making tremendous leaps forward when it comes to re-homing pets in need. The success of [Maddie’s Pet Adoption Days](#) — with almost 8,000 pets nationwide placed in forever homes over a single weekend — highlights the amazing work that the shelter and rescue communities are doing these days.

But despite this positive news about pet adoptions, cats are still among the hardest animals to place in new homes. Fortunately, there’s good news for the felines too: The shelter community is studying the reasons cats are given up, with an eye to helping pet owners solve the problems that cause them to surrender their cats — or, ideally, to avoid those problems in the first place.

### WHY CATS END UP IN SHELTERS

I’ve worked in and with shelters for more than 30 years, and I have a pretty good idea why cats end up in them. But as always, I wanted to tap the expertise of a top colleague, so I talked with Dr. Brian DiGangi, clinical assistant professor of shelter medicine at the [University of Florida’s College of Veterinary Medicine](#). “Most people who make the decision to relinquish a pet are heartbroken and truly want to do what’s best for their animal,” he says. “They just don’t know where else to turn. While we need to respect those owners who have come to the decision that they can no longer care for their pet, many are just in need of some good advice and support.”

So what are the reasons a cat owner winds up surrendering a beloved pet? Here are Dr. DiGangi’s suggestions, along with some advice from him (and me) on what might help avoid these problems.

- **Allergies.** According to the [American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology](#), about a quarter of all Americans are allergic to cats, and experience occasional or mildly annoying symptoms to life-threatening ones. Additionally, 29 percent of all asthma cases are linked to cats. Obviously you need to balance the benefits of having a cat with the problems related to allergies, and in some cases, that might mean re-homing your pet. “Dealing with severe allergies may be among the hardest of challenges to overcome,” says Dr. DiGangi. See an allergist first: By getting proper medical care and [reducing allergens in your environment](#), you may be able to keep your cat. “We are only limited by our creativity!” says Dr. DiGangi. “Many cat owners have found ways to preserve the bond with their pet without compromising the quality of life for themselves or their cats.”
- **Moving.** Pet-friendly rental housing can be difficult to find, especially if you have only a short window of time to move from one place to another. Check with rescue groups and shelters in your new community to see if they maintain lists of rentals that accept cats. If it is financially possible, you might also consider an extended-stay hotel — many of which accept pets — to give yourself more time to look for permanent feline-friendly housing. If you are really struggling to find a place that will allow a cat, or you know your housing dilemma is relatively short-term (a few weeks or months), you might be able to arrange for your cat to live with a friend or relative until you can be together again.
- **Costs.** The cost of caring for a pet can be daunting, but there are always ways to [cut corners without reducing the quality of care](#) you provide your pet. I frequently warn pet lovers not to be penny wise and pound foolish; in other words, don’t skip regular veterinary checkups to keep costs down. Cutting out wellness care can mean setting your cat up for bigger — and more expensive — health problems down the road. One of the simplest ways to cut costs is to keep your cat lean; this can help save on food and also on health care, since obesity is linked to many health problems in cats, including diabetes. Dr. DiGangi recommends tapping into local resources, both for medical emergencies and basic care. “Many shelters and animal rescue organizations can offer assistance with common feline behavior problems,” he says, “as well as provide subsidized veterinary care for services such as spay-neuter and vaccination against common [infectious diseases](#).”
- **Litterbox issues.** It’s rare that a day goes by that we veterinarians don’t hear about a cat who has stopped using the litterbox — and sometimes this can be the issue that lands the cat in the shelter. In many cases, litterbox problems are fairly easily remedied by cleaning the box more often, adding extra boxes, or determining your cat’s preferred litter. Other times there’s a medical problem that needs to be dealt with before the cat can be retrained to use the box. With patience, many, if not most, [litterbox issues can be resolved](#). Start by asking your veterinarian for help. Dr. DiGangi notes that many shelters can help with litterbox issues too, with behavior hotlines, counseling and classes to assist people in learning more about their pets and how to work through this issue (and others) before the cat is surrendered to a new home.
- **Not getting along.** There are a variety of situations in which a cat will start acting unfriendly to members of a household, but this behavior is not necessarily a sign that the cat needs to go. Dr. DiGangi says issues can arise both when a cat cannot get along with other pets and when she takes a dislike to a new person in the home, such



as a boyfriend or roommate — or a baby. Fortunately, there's a lot of useful information available about strategies for handling all of these situations, and chances are good that if you read up and make some simple changes, the hissing and other signs of an unhappy cat will settle down and you can continue to live in harmony with your cat.

### **CAN THIS RELATIONSHIP BE SAVED?**

No matter what your issue, taking your cat to the shelter shouldn't be the first solution. "Many alternatives to giving up a cat are available for pet owners," notes Dr. DiGangi. For example, he says, "Most veterinary practices are well-equipped to assist with any medical or behavioral issues that are causing a pet owner to consider relinquishment."

I agree with him there, and I'd take it even farther: Talk to your veterinarian about any problem you're having with your cat. Many problems people think are behavioral — such as avoiding the litterbox — can actually have a medical issue at the root. Until that issue is correctly diagnosed and treated, you won't have much luck changing the problem behavior. Your veterinarian is also a great resource for finding help with other types of problems, including behavior issues and allergies. She might even know a cat-loving allergist for you!

Finally, do your research before you say goodbye to your cat. As Dr. DiGangi notes, these days you can find lots of assistance and advice that is geared toward keeping The Bond intact, and it's worth seeking out. And while you may still decide that it is in everyone's best interest to re-home your feline companion, you might instead find the help you need to get over this bump on your long road together.

Source:

- *Dr. Marty Becker: [http://www.vetstreet.com/dr-marty-becker/5-reasons-cats-are-given-up-for-adoption-and-how-to-avoid-these-problems?WT.mc\\_id=mbfacebook](http://www.vetstreet.com/dr-marty-becker/5-reasons-cats-are-given-up-for-adoption-and-how-to-avoid-these-problems?WT.mc_id=mbfacebook)*