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www.ufaw.org.uk

*Animal Welfare* 2021, 30: 131-144  
ISSN 0962-7286  
doi: 10.7120/09627286.30.2.131

## **Caring practices of pet cat and dog owners in Northern Ireland vs potential implications for animals' health and welfare**

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### **Abstract**

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*This prospective, descriptive study assessed caring practices of pet cat and dog owners in Northern Ireland with a survey questionnaire, focusing primarily on feeding and exercising. Owners of both pet cats and dogs reported that they fed their pets either twice or three times a day (53 and 78% for cats and dogs, respectively). However, in the case of nearly 40% of pet cat owners it transpired that they fed their cat(s) as often as the animal demanded (18.8%) or that food was available all the time (20.7%). Cat owners reported that their pets had access to outdoors (84%) and were not provided with any play time (53.1%). The highest number of pet dogs (46.1%) were reported as being walked daily for less than 1 h, and the highest number (38.4%) were played with daily for less than 1 h. Both cat (60%) and dog (61%) owners perceived the body condition of their animal 'as it should be' for animal age/sex. However, both pet cat (76%) and dog (63%) owners reported that neither their pet's bodyweight nor its body condition was monitored. Our results suggest not all pet cat and dog owners are aware of the fundamentals of their animals' feeding requirements as regards health and many provide insufficient physical activity required for their animals' health and welfare. The major strengths of the study include the size and geographic distribution of the study population allowing the generalisation of the results to other locations.*

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**Keywords:** animal welfare, body condition, exercise, feeding pattern, pet cat welfare, pet dog welfare