

# Open windows can be dangerous for cats

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Especially June, July and August are dangerous months for cats to fall out of windows or jump from balconies. Credit: Christina Braun

The summer months are dangerous for indoor cats. A large number of cats have accidents every year when they fall out of open windows or from balconies. Every year the University Clinic for Small Animals at the Vetmeduni Vienna treats about 70 to 80 cats that suffer from bone

fractures or internal injuries after such accidents. These days, vets strongly recommend to keep windows closed or to secure windows in an appropriate way.

Cats have a very strong hunting instinct. Flying birds or insects outside an apartment can provoke a leap out of the window or the balcony. But also noise can frighten the animals and make them flee through the window. In some cases the animals slip off the window sill or lose balance. "Sometimes such a plunge has no consequences for the cats. But often they suffer serious injuries," says Roswitha Steinbacher, vet at the Clinical Department for Anaesthesiology and Perioperative Intensive-Care Medicine at the Vetmeduni Vienna.

## **Cats do not always land on their feet**

"It's not totally correct that cats always land on their feet," says Steinbacher. "It mainly depends on the height of fall. If it is too low, the animals often hit the ground on the side of their body. When cats fall from very high, they can correct their body position and land on their feet, but often their legs can't hold the bounce. Their joints are heavily bended, single bones break and the cat's head and thorax hit the ground."

The consequences of such a bounce can be significant. The cats often suffer lung injuries such as lung bleedings or bursting of lung tissue where the air leaks into the thorax. This life-threatening situation requires quick action. Other frequent injuries are broken legs, pelvis, jawbones and ribs or traumatic brain injuries.

Even if there are no visible injuries after a plunge out of the window, the cat should undergo a check by a vet. Internal injuries can lead to a life-threatening situation even hours or days after the accident.

"Bone fractures and dislocations cause a severe pain for the animals. As

a consequence, one or several surgeries can be necessary which might cause quite high costs for the keepers," says Steinbacher.

## **Scientific investigation of plunges out of the window**

According to a study by the Clinical Unit of Small Animal Surgery at the Vetmeduni Vienna in 2010, accidents are on average more frequent among younger cats than among older ones. Furthermore, male cats fall more often from very high. The study found that statistically June, July and August are the most dangerous months. The most frequent fractures are broken pelvis as well as broken forefoot and midfoot bones.

## **Tilted windows can be life-threatening for cats**

Some patients get trapped in a tilted window. These dramatic situations often happen in the summer months. Cats slip into the window gap and get stuck while trying to reach the outside. Most of the time the [animals](#) get stuck with the back of their bodies. When trying to free themselves they slip even deeper into the gap. The blood supply in their rear legs gets clamped and vital organs are crushed. "Depending on the duration, being stuck in the window gap can lead to a life-threatening situation for cats," Steinbacher explains.

## **Protection is mandatory**

From about the second floor upwards, a plunge is dangerous for cats. Cat keepers in Austria are legally bound to protect their pets from a possible plunge out of windows or from balconies. There are suitable safeguards such as nets or grilles. Steinbacher emphasises: "Do not leave your [cats](#) alone when windows are tilted or open without appropriate safeguard. If an animal is injured after a plunge, see a vet immediately."

Provided by University of Veterinary Medicine—Vienna

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