

Volunteer TNR guide

1. Read this important information before getting started:

- TNR means “trap-neuter-return”. It is [widely regarded](#) as one of the best ways to address overpopulation of street cats. In short, the TNR method is as follows:
 - A volunteer catches a cat in a way that is safe for themselves and the cat
 - The volunteer brings the cat to a vet
 - The vet neuters the cat
 - The volunteer returns the cat to the same place they found it on the street
- Please ensure that you use proper equipment to catch street cats. Some cats are very friendly and can be encouraged to walk into a carrier with some food after which you close the door on them. In these cases, we still recommend that you use gloves, as many street cats - even if they seem very friendly and cuddly - will get scared when put in a carrier and may defend themselves by clawing and biting. For the majority of street cats, we recommend using a cat trap that shuts close when the cat steps inside of it, protecting both the cat and the volunteer from harm.
- If you use a normal carrier instead of a trap, we recommend lining it with a pet diaper first in case the cat urinates or defecates.
- **Never** practice TNR on cats that you suspect might be ill. While neutering procedures are straightforward, the anesthesia weakens the cat’s immune system, which will make it much harder for the cat to recover from illnesses. If you believe that a cat has to be urgently neutered, and you are not sure if it is well enough for the procedure, please speak to the vet about your concerns.
- **Female cats:** Sterilisation of female cats involves removing the ovaries and the uterus, known as an ovariectomy. It is a routine but very invasive procedure, and it is therefore extremely important to use an experienced vet, especially for street cats that will be returned to the street the day following the surgery.
- **IMPORTANT:** It is VERY important that every time you take a cat to a vet to get it neutered you instruct/remind the vet to cut the tip of the cat’s ear while it is still under anaesthesia. This is a method widely used by vets to mark the street cat as having been neutered. The reason why it is so important is two-fold:
 - Prevents the cat from going through the stress of being caught again because people don’t know that it has already been neutered
 - Enables accurate data collection about the percentage of street cats that are neutered
- We recommend working with one of the following vets:
 - [Ветеринарен Кабинет Стоянов](#), ул. "Dr. Lyuben Popov" 28, g.k. Briz, 9010 Varna
 - Opening hours: Opening hours: Mon-Fri: 10:00-18:00, Sat: 10:00-15:00, Sun: Closed
 - [Veterinary office "best friend" \(Dr Petrov\)](#), ул. "General Parensov" 52, 9002 Varna
 - Opening hours: Mon-Fri: 9:00-19:00 (break at 13:00-14:00), Sat: 9:00-14:00, Sun: Closed
- **Minimum age of neutering:**
 - **Female cats:** Vets in Varna and [elsewhere](#) widely agree that females can be neutered from 4 months of age (while they are still kittens). ***It is a myth that females need to have given birth once before they can safely be neutered.*** Female cats should be neutered as early as possible in order to prevent population growth of street cats.
 - **Male cats:** Differing opinions exist as to the minimum age for safely neutering male cats. Some vets claim that early neutering increases the risk of urinary problems in males. However, there is [very little scientific evidence](#) that this is true. Organisations in the UK such as the [Blue Cross](#) and the [Royal Veterinary College](#) agree that it is safe to neuter a male from the age of 4 months. However, as most vets in Varna will not agree to neuter a male at the age of 4 months, we recommend that you only bring in males if you are certain that they are at least 6 months of age.
- In general, we only recommend working with vets that are able to perform the neutering procedure such that the cat can be returned to the street the following day. In order to ensure the highest chances of a

safe recovery using this method, TNR should ONLY be practised when the weather is consistently above 5 degrees celsius (incl. during the night) in the 24 hours following the return to the street and there is no forecast for extreme weather conditions such as heavy rain, strong wind, or sudden extreme drop in temperature in the 3-5 days following return to the street. In such extreme circumstances, you can only practise our TNR procedure if you are able to keep the cat inside your own home (ensuring that it has food/water/toilet, and is monitored) for 3-5 days following the surgery (in this case, always follow the vet's recommendations).

- Before returning the cat to the street, you must ensure, by consulting with the vet, that the cat has recovered fully from the surgery and is well enough to be returned. Pay special attention to its recovery from anaesthesia - the cat has to be fully alert and awake, as the streets are very dangerous for a disoriented cat.



Image 1: Hard carrier (example)



Image 2: Medium-sized animal trap



Image 3: Trap on level surface



Image 4: String attached to trap

2. Get the right equipment

The minimum equipment you need to catch a cat and get it neutered:

- 1 person
- Hard carrier for cats (approx. 30-60 leva from any pet shop) [image 1]
 - Ensure that it's big enough for cats to stand up)
- Thick gloves (approx. 10 leva from Alati, Praktiker, Homemax)

As most street cats can be hard to catch, it is easier (and safer) to catch them with more equipment. We recommend the following:

- 2-3 people
- Medium-sized animal trap (around 100-110cm long, approx. 100 leva from Alati) [image 2]
- Long roll of string that is thin but strong. At least 3m, ideally 5+m long.
- Thick gloves (approx. 10 leva from Alati or Homemax)
- A small 80-100g of wet food (approx. 1 lev from any pet shop or supermarket)
- Access to a car

3. Catch the cat

- Decide which cat(s) you want to neuter, and determine where (and potentially, at which time) the cats are most likely to come out for food.
- When you arrive at the destination, prepare all your equipment, and try to remain as calm as possible; if the cats sense that you are stressed or in a hurry, they are less likely to come out.
- Prepare the trap :
 - Put the trap down on a level surface (it doesn't need to be perfectly level, but ensure that it doesn't wobble when cats are inside it [image 3].
 - Tie one end of the long string around the activation bar on the side of the trap and tighten it to ensure that it is secure. Set the mechanism so the door closes when the cat steps on the platform [image 4].
 - Insert the door into the opening of the trap, and hold it up while setting the mechanism (see previous step) [image 5].

- Place some appetising wet food as far back on the platform as possible. Sprinkle small amounts of wet food at the trap opening and in a path leading to the main portion of food on the platform [image 6].
 - Distract the group of cats that you do not want to catch by placing some food or interacting with them elsewhere.
- Prepare the cats - different options for different number of volunteers participating:
 - 3 people: one person can distract the cats that will not be captured, one person can ensure that the cat for capturing remains close to the trap, and one person can set the trap
 - 2 people: one person can distract the cats that will not be captured, and one person can set the trap
 - 1 person: the person first tries to distract the cats that will not be captured, then tries to keep the cat for capturing close to the trap, and then prepares the trap
- Set the trap and capture the cat:
 - With one end of the string attached to the activation bar on the side of the trap, move away from the trap (behind the trap), holding on to the other end of the string. Ensure that the string is kept loose so as not to activate the trap. We recommend stepping back at least 3 m. If the cat is very wild, you may need to step back 10-15 m. That's why you need long string!
 - If the cat walks in to the trap and does not activate the trap mechanism by stepping on the platform, pull the string to activate the mechanism that will close the trap door
- Once the trap has been set, you may need to wait for 10-20 mins before the cat enters the trap. If you are on your own and the cats that you do not want to capture are scaring away the cat that you do want to capture, you may also need to switch between holding the string and going away to distract the other cats.
- The trap is designed in such a way that when the cat steps on the platform, the door behind it shuts immediately. Therefore it is important to place food on and behind the platform to encourage the cat to walk far into the trap and step on the platform. However, sometimes the cat manages to eat the food without stepping on the platform, and in these cases, you can use the string to activate the mechanism. ONLY use this method when the cat's body is at least 90% inside the trap to prevent the cat from getting injured by the door closing - you don't want a metal trap door falling on its tail or any other part of its body! Once the cat's body is at least 90% inside the trap, and you believe that the cat may not step on the platform, simply pull the string, and the door will shut behind the cat. Experience makes this judgement call easier.
- If you manage to capture the cat, gather all your equipment, and move the cat to your mode of transport. Regardless of which mode of transport you choose, please ensure that the trap is kept as level as possible before and during transport so as to not scare the cat excessively. Being trapped is an extremely stressful experience for cats, so it is very important to try to minimise the stress. If at least 2 volunteers are involved, we recommend that both volunteers put on gloves and carry the trap on each end to ensure that it remains as stable as possible.
- If the cat has not entered the trap after 20 mins, we recommend that you end your attempt to catch it and instead come back another day, as it is unlikely that the cat will enter the trap. Upon leaving the site, please pack up as calmly and quietly as possible, as it is important not to scare the cat. This will ensure that it feels more comfortable around the trap and will thus make it more likely that you can capture it another day.
- **Important**: Some carriers and traps have two openings, so please, before you transport the cat, ALWAYS double-check that all openings are securely locked, and that there is no chance that the cat could escape by pushing hard (they can exert a surprising amount of force when they are scared). It is important to



Image 5: Set trap door



Image 6: Sprinkle food

double-check this EVERY time you capture a cat, because a cat that escapes during transport has a high risk of being injured on the road or ending up in a foreign and dangerous location.

- Once the cat is in the carrier/trap, we highly recommend that you cover it with a blanket, as this helps keep the cat calm.

4. Bring the cat to the vet

- Use one of the two vets listed on page 1 of this guide or speak to Emanuil and Camilla from LeoLife to decide on a vet to use.
- While driving the cat to the vet, please drive extra carefully, speak quietly, and do not play music in order to avoid stressing the cat unnecessarily.
- Normally, street cats are brought directly to the vet after they have been captured. If possible, cats should not eat or drink 12 hours before their operation, but the trap is not suitable for long-term habitation. Therefore we recommend speaking to your vet of choice in advance about whether you can bring the cat directly to its appointment after catching it. If not, we recommend catching the cat the evening before, keeping it inside the trap/carrier for one night only, and bringing the cat to the vet the following day.
- Make sure you ask the vet in advance whether an appointment is required.
- Upon delivering the cat to the vet, make sure to agree with the vet on when you should pick up the cat for release following the neutering procedure.
- It is VERY important that every time you take a cat to a vet to get it neutered you instruct/remind the vet to cut the tip of the cat's ear while it is still under anaesthesia. This is a method widely used by vets to mark the street cat as having been neutered. The reason why it is so important is two-fold:
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5. Pick up the cat

- Ensure that you pick up the cat within the time slot agreed with the vet.
- Ask the vet whether any complications arose during the surgery and whether any medications were given following the surgery.
- Check that the cat's ear tip has been clipped so it's clear the cat has been neutered.
- Ensure that you get explicit instructions from the vet about whether it is safe to return the cat to the street immediately.
- In the rare case that the vet recommends that the cat should be kept indoors for a while before being returned to the street, please follow the vet's instructions. If you are not able to keep the cat yourself, please contact Camilla and Emanuil at LeoLife, and we will try to provide assistance.

6. Return the cat to the street

- Ensure that the weather is suitable for returning the cat to the street. In the rare case that the weather for the day of return is suddenly dangerous (e.g. heavy storm / heavy rain / sudden extreme drop in temperature), please keep the cat inside your own home until the conditions are safe again (always follow the vet's recommendations). If this is not possible, please contact Camilla and Emanuil at LeoLife, and we will try to provide assistance.
- In general, the cat should always be returned to the spot where it was found, as it will be best able to find food, water, and shelter in its familiar surroundings. The exception would be if the cat is found in a very dangerous location, e.g. a place with many dangerous objects lying around, right next to a very busy road, or in a location where it is known that there are people who may hurt the cat. In such cases, please return the cat to the nearest safe location or speak to Emanuil or Camilla at LeoLife about finding a place where the cat can safely be returned to.