



KITTEN CARE

~ GUIDELINES ~



Congratulations on your new kitten! The information presented here is meant as an outline of the most important health care topics to be covered during your first few visits to our hospital. The key to being a good pet owner and helping your kitten live a long and healthy life is to be well informed. Remember, we

are always here to help you or to answer any questions you may have.

VACCINES

Kittens should receive their first DISTEMPER “4 in 1” vaccine at 6-8 weeks of age followed by boosters at 3-4 week intervals until 16 weeks of age. This combination vaccine protects against the respiratory viruses RHINOTRACHEITIS and CALICIVIRUS, as well as PANLEUKOPENIA. At 12 weeks, kittens receive their first RABIES vaccine.

FELINE LEUKEMIA is a serious viral disease in cats that is transmitted from the mother or through direct close contact with carrier animals. All new kittens should be tested to make sure they are not infected with this virus. As long as they test negative, they may be vaccinated against feline leukemia anytime after 10 weeks of age with a booster 2-4 weeks later.

FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (FIV) is another serious viral disease of cats. It is rarer than feline leukemia, but we do recommend testing older cats (particularly stray or outdoor cats) and kittens. A vaccine against FIV is available but is not routinely administered at this time.

DEWORMING

Most kittens are born with ROUNDWORMS, which cross the placenta from the mother during fetal development. For this reason, we routinely treat all kittens for roundworms at their vaccine visits. **YOU SHOULD BRING A STOOL SAMPLE WITH YOU TO EACH VISIT** so we can check for the less common HOOKWORMS, COCCIDIA, TAPEWORMS AND LUNGWORMS.

SPAY/NEUTER/DECLAW

Kittens should be spayed or neutered at six months of age. Male cats that are not neutered often develop a strong odor to their urine and territorial behaviors such as spraying and fighting. Studies have shown that cats live longer if spayed/neutered due to reduced fighting tendencies and exposure to disease. Female cats that are not spayed will go into heat and remain in heat off and on for months until they are bred by a male cat. Cats that are in heat tend to cry a lot and can generally be unpleasant to have around. Intact females also have a high incidence of mammary cancer and uterine infection later in life.

Nail trimming at an early age is strongly encouraged to prevent household damage. Declawing can be done if your cat scratches your furniture and cannot be trained to use a scratching post. This surgery is easier to perform on cats that are less than one year old, but can be performed at any age. An alternative to declawing is to use “SOFT PAWS” nylon caps on your cat. Ask about them during your next visit.

WELLNESS TESTING

Although pets are well adapted to provide affection and companionship, they are not designed to communicate well about health issues they may have. The first sign you may notice of a problem often reflects a disease process that has been ongoing for some time. We therefore recommend periodic laboratory testing of all pets to screen for sub-clinical illness and to establish normal baseline lab values. This will begin prior to spaying/neutering with a PRE ANESTHETIC PROFILE and continue at 3-4 year intervals until the senior years (over 7) when annual wellness testing is suggested.

DENTAL CARE

If you start young, you may be able to brush your cat’s teeth. Daily brushing will decrease the chances of developing dental disease as your cat gets older. Ask about brushes and paste for your kitten. Dental diets for adult cats such as Hills TD also help prevent tartar accumulation.

LITTER BOX

The rule of thumb for litter pans is one for each cat in a household with *daily scooping* of deposits. Some cats will refuse to use the pan if it is not completely clean leading to inappropriate stool or urine behaviors that can be difficult to resolve. There are many types of kitty litter and most cats will use any kind, but occasionally a cat will have a litter preference. Research has shown that cats in general prefer unscented clumping-type litters over other types.

Most kittens are litter-trained by their mothers before you adopt them. Nevertheless, when you first bring a kitten home, you should keep them in one room with the litter box for a day or two to make sure they know it's there. Make sure the sides are not too tall for a small kitten to get over!

GROOMING

It is a good idea to comb or brush your cat on a daily basis. Brushing longhaired cats will prevent matting of the fur and reduce the vomiting of hairballs. Combing shorthaired cats is also helpful in keeping the skin and coat healthy and is a good way to check for fleas.

TOYS/SAFETY

Kittens will play with almost anything. **FOR OBVIOUS SAFETY REASONS, GREAT CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN TO PREVENT YOUR KITTEN FROM CHEWING ON ELECTRICAL CORDS.** Make sure the toys you choose are safe. Strings of any kind-RIBBON, THREAD, YARN, RUBBER BANDS, should always be taken away from kittens. Also, CELLOPHANE/PLASTICWRAP can be very dangerous. Cats will often swallow these items and become extremely ill. Make sure stuffed toys do not have small pieces that can come off and be swallowed. In addition, HOUSEPLANTS should be hung up out of reach if possible. A very large number of houseplants are poisonous to cats. Especially common and toxic are lilies and poinsettias.

FEEDING

You may feed your kitten a combination of wet and dry food or just dry food. Any major brand of kitten food is acceptable. When your kitten is young it will be very active. It is best to feed three times a day until four months of age, and then decrease to twice a day feedings. The amount you should feed will depend on

the type of food you are feeding and the activity level of your cat. Free choice feeding may be acceptable for some cats, but often leads to overeating and obesity later in life.

FLEAS AND TICKS

Fleas are a common external parasite that can be found year round in our area. Fleas spend their entire adult life on the pet but lay thousands of eggs, which fall off and subsequently cause infestations of the home. In contrast to dogs, most cats infested with fleas will not scratch, making infestations of your home even more difficult to predict. The most effective way to prevent fleas is with the topical agents **Advantage, Advantage Multi or Frontline.** These are applied monthly after 8 weeks of age especially during warm weather. Flea and tick collars have some repellent activity but are not nearly as effective as these topical agents.

Cats tend to pull ticks off of themselves more efficiently than dogs do, so it is less common to find ticks on cats. Nevertheless, some outdoor cats will tend to pick up ticks. Cats are not known to be affected by Lyme disease so tick infestation is less dangerous than in dogs.

MEDICATION

Cats have a difficult time metabolizing many drugs and medications that we would commonly use ourselves. Never give your cat any medication unless a veterinarian has prescribed it. **TYLENOL (ACETAMINOPHEN) AND ADVIL (IBUPROFEN) ARE EXTREMELY TOXIC TO CATS! NEVER GIVE THESE DRUGS TO YOUR CAT! ONE TYLENOL OR ADVIL CAN KILL YOUR CAT! ASPIRIN IS TOLERATED ONLY SLIGHTLY BETTER AND SHOULD ONLY BE GIVEN UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF YOUR VETERINARIAN.**

