

## What You Need to Know about Kittens

We would like to congratulate you on the acquisition of your new kitten. Owning a cat can be an extremely rewarding experience. It also carries with it quite a bit of responsibility. We hope this document will give you the information needed to make some good decisions regarding your kitten.

First, let us say that we are grateful that you have chosen us to help you with your kitten's health care. If you have questions concerning any subject related to your kitten's health or behavior, please feel free to call our hospital. Our staff will be happy to help you.

### Introducing Your Kitten to Your Home



A kitten is naturally inclined to investigate its new surroundings. It is suggested that the kitten's area of exploration be limited initially so that these natural tendencies do not create an unmanageable task. After confining the cat to one room for the first few days, you should slowly allow access to other areas of the home. Make sure that litter trays are nearby as the new kitten may not remember one that is far away. You can gradually move a tray farther away as the kitten ages and successfully navigates the entire home.

### Introducing a New Kitten to Other Cats in the Household

Most kittens receive a hostile reception from other household pets, especially from another cat. The other cat usually sees no need for a kitten in the household, and these feelings are reinforced if it perceives that special favoritism is being shown to the kitten. The existing cat must not feel that it is necessary to compete for food or for attention. The new kitten should have its own food and water bowl, and it should not be permitted to eat from the other cat's bowl. Although it is natural to spend time holding and cuddling the kitten, the existing cat will quickly sense that it is being neglected. The new kitten needs lots of love and attention, but the existing cat should not be slighted. In fact, the transition will be smoother if the existing cat is given more attention than normal.

Allow the kitten its own room, keeping the door closed or use a temporary screen door, so the resident cat can see, but not hurt the newcomer. Allow the kitten to explore the house with you each day and put the other cat in the kitten's room during this time. This will allow them to get used to each other's scent and presence. When you do introduce them, supervise, but do not hold either pet in your lap or arms. In an effort to get away, you could get bitten or scratched. Do have a squirt bottle of water or heavy towels to separate the two if there is any serious fighting. Gradually allow more and more time





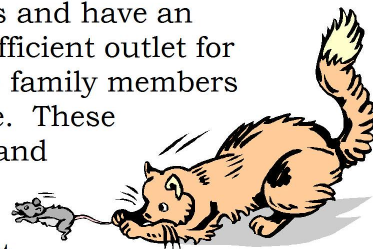
together as you see the hostility disappearing.

The introduction period will usually last one to three weeks and will have one of three possible outcomes:

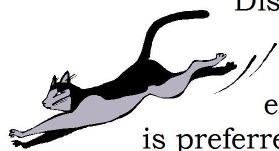
1. The existing cat will remain hostile to the kitten. Fighting may occur occasionally, especially if both try to eat out of the same bowl at the same time. This is an unlikely occurrence if competition for food and affection are minimized during the first few weeks.
2. The existing cat will only tolerate the kitten. Hostility will cease, but the existing cat will act as if the kitten is not present. This is more likely if the existing cat is very independent, has been an only cat for several years, or if marked competition occurred during the first few weeks. This relationship is likely to be permanent.
3. Bonding will occur between the existing cat and the kitten. They will play together, groom each other, and sleep near each other. This is more likely to occur if competition is minimized and if the existing cat has been lonely for companionship.

## Play Behavior

Stalking and pouncing are important play behaviors in kittens and have an important role in proper muscular development. If given a sufficient outlet for these behaviors with toys, your kitten will be less likely to use family members for these activities. The best toys are lightweight and movable. These include wads of paper, small balls, empty paper bags, boxes, and crinkly tissue paper. Any toy that is small enough to be swallowed should be avoided. Older kittens and adult cats eventually get bored with the same toys out all of the time, but it is very important for them to stay active and well exercised. So its best to rotate the toys you leave out on a weekly basis. This helps keep their interest in play. Another important thing to establish is a once a day interactive playtime with family members and the new kitten (don't forget play time with the resident cat, too!). This can be chasing a ping-pong ball down the hallway, chasing a laser pointer, cat dancer toys, or even just a ribbon or heavy cord. Kittens should *always* be supervised when playing with string or ribbons to avoid swallowing them.



## Disciplining a Kitten



Disciplining a young kitten may be necessary if its behavior threatens people or property, but punishment should be avoided. Hand clapping and using “shaker cans” or horns can be intimidating enough to inhibit undesirable behavior. However, remote punishment is preferred. Remote punishment consists of using something that appears unconnected to the punisher to stop the problem behavior. Examples include using spray bottles, throwing objects in the direction of the kitten to startle (but not hit) it, and making loud noises. Remote punishment is preferred because the kitten associates punishment with the undesirable act and not with you.

## Vaccinations



There are many diseases that are fatal to cats. Fortunately, we have the ability to prevent many of these by using very effective vaccines. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally, they are given at about 6-8, 12, and 16 weeks of age, but this schedule may vary somewhat depending on several factors.

### Routine vaccines

The routine vaccination schedule will protect your kitten from four diseases: distemper, two respiratory viruses, and rabies.

FVRCP: Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia

These are given as a combination vaccine at 6-8 and 12 weeks of age

Rabies: This is given at 16 weeks of age

### Non-routine vaccines

FELV: Feline Leukemia Virus

Necessary if your cat will go outside or if another cat in the house goes out

FIP: Feline Infectious Peritonitis

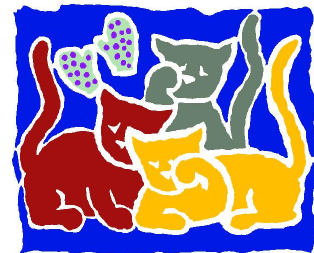
This is not necessary in most cats but is recommended in select situations.

FIV: Feline immunodeficiency virus

This is only necessary for cats in certain situations.

## Intestinal Parasites (“Worms”)

Intestinal parasites are common in kittens. Kittens can become infected with parasites almost as soon as they are born. Some parasites are passed to the kittens while still in the uterus, and others in the mother’s milk. The microscopic examination of a stool sample will usually help us to determine the presence of intestinal parasites. We recommend this exam for all kittens. We are looking for worm eggs in the stool and they might not be present every single day. So it is possible to get a negative stool sample and still have worms. So we still recommend the use of a deworming product that is safe and effective against almost all of the common worms of the cat. Several good drugs are available. It is given initially and repeated in 2-4 weeks, because the deworming medication only kills the adult worms. Within 3-4 weeks the larval stages will have become adults and will need to be treated. Cats remain susceptible to re-infection with hookworms and roundworms. Periodic deworming throughout the cat's life will be recommended for cats that go outdoors.



Tapeworms are another common intestinal parasite of cats. Kittens become infected with them when they swallow fleas; the eggs of the tapeworm live inside the flea.

When a cat with fleas chews or licks its skin a flea may be swallowed. The flea is digested within the cat's intestine; the tapeworm hatches and then anchors itself to the intestinal lining. Therefore, exposure to fleas may result in a new infection; this can occur in as little as two weeks. Eating mice and other rodents also transmits tapeworms.

Cats infected with tapeworms will pass small segments of the worms in their stool. The segments are white in color and look like grains of rice. They are about 1/8 inch (3 mm) long and may be seen crawling on the surface of the stool. They may also stick to the hair under the tail. If that occurs, they will dry out, shrink to about half their size, and become golden in color.

Tapeworm segments do not pass every day or in every stool sample; therefore, inspection of several consecutive bowel movements may be needed to find them. We may examine a stool sample in our office and not find them, and then you may find them the next day. If you find them at any time, please notify us so we may provide the appropriate drug for treatment.

### **Feeding a Kitten**



Diet is extremely important in the growing months of a cat's life. There are two important criteria that should be met in selecting food for your kitten. We recommend a NAME-BRAND FOOD made by a national cat food company (not a generic or local brand), and a form of food MADE FOR KITTENS. We recommend that you only buy food that has the AAFCO certification. Usually, you can find this information very easily on the label. AAFCO is an organization that oversees the entire pet food industry. It does not endorse any particular food, but it will certify that the food has met the minimum requirements for nutrition. Most of the commercial pet foods will have the AAFCO label. Generic brands often do not have it.

Feeding a dry or canned form of food is acceptable. Each has advantages and disadvantages. We like to introduce kittens to both types of food early in life. All new foods need to be introduced slowly, to prevent diarrhea or an upset stomach. There are a number of diseases and conditions that respond to diet changes. Your kitten will take to a new food more easily if exposed to different textures and flavors of food early in life.

*At about 6 months of age the dry and canned food should be fed as 3 to 4 meals daily, not left out all day long.*

Dry food can be left in the kitten's bowl at all times. If given the choice, the average cat will eat a mouthful of food about 12-20 times per day. Canned foods are also acceptable foods. Depending on the age of your kitten, canned food should be meal fed (food available for 15-20 minutes and then removed), 3-5 times daily so it doesn't spoil. In general, at 4-5 months of age this should be three times daily. We encourage a combination of both types of foods. Soft and moist foods (like that found in pouches) are generally not recommended, as they tend to be high in sugar. They should be saved for treats or certain health situations that your veterinarian feels they would help.

Once the kitten has reached about 6 months of age, it is time to switch the dry food to three or four times daily meal feeding pattern just like the canned food. Leaving dry

food out all the time is easy for us, but contributes to overweight cats. It is much healthier to have three or four meals of canned or canned and dry food offered daily.

*Treats should be fed infrequently and in small amounts...*

We enjoy a variety of things to eat in our diet. However, most cats actually prefer not to change from one food to another unless they are trained to do so by the way you feed them. Do not feel guilty if your cat is happy to just eat one food day after day, week after week.

Treat foods should be fed in small amounts and infrequently, perhaps as a training treat. There is any number of pre-made products on the market that you can use. You can also use fresh foods like cooked chicken, turkey or fish. Some cats also enjoy small amounts of bitter greens like endive or other leaf lettuces, tomatoes, green peppers, and the occasional cat even enjoys peas! Just keep in mind that new foods should be introduced in small amounts to see if there is any digestive upset. Remember, these are treat foods and should not be used in large amounts. Always avoid onions and foods with onions in them, as they are toxic to cats.

## Socialization

The Socialization Period for cats is between 2 and 12 weeks of age. During that time, the kitten is very impressionable to social influences. If it has good experiences with men, women, children, dogs, other cats, etc., it is likely to accept them throughout life. If the experiences are absent or unpleasant, it may become apprehensive or hostile to any of them. Therefore, during the period of socialization, we encourage you to expose your cat to as many types of social events and influences as possible. Be sure not to force the issue with a nervous or shy kitten as that will simply reinforce the fear they feel.



## The Litter Box

The number one behavioral problem of cats is urinating out of the litter box (inappropriate urination). There are several things that cause this frustrating problem, but some of those are related to the litter box. The following comments are included to prevent problems later because cats are particular about their litter boxes, the litter, and the location.

Choose a litter box that is large enough for your cat to fit in comfortably. It needs to be able to turn around freely. An 18 X 14 inch box with 4-inch sides is appropriate for most adult cats. Kittens may need a box with shorter sides so they can get in and out easily. And don't forget to keep kitten and litter box in close proximity until he or she can navigate your entire home.

We do not recommend a box with a top (hood). Although hooded litter boxes are more private and help contain the litter, they also trap odors inside. Because cats are so fastidious, these odors often cause them to seek other places to urinate. Many cats exhibiting inappropriate urination will return to their litter boxes when the lid is removed.

There are many types of litter: clay, clump forming (scoopable), crystals, recycled paper, wheat and wood products.

Clay litter absorbs 75-100% of its weight in moisture. This is good but not adequate to keep urine from being absorbed throughout a widespread area of litter. Solid matter and wet litter should be removed 1-2 times per day, but the entire litter box should be changed weekly. Clay litter can be quite dusty. Cats with allergies can have increased problems when breathing the litter dust. Choose a very dust-free type.

Clumping litter is also called scoopable litter. It absorbs urine and swells to about 15 times its original volume. Therefore, you need only to remove the litter clumps; you do not need to change the entire contents of the litter box. It tends to control urine and stool odors better than clay litter. It has a sand-like texture that most cats love.

Organic litters are made of alfalfa, newspaper, peanut hulls, corncobs, or recycled, biodegradable materials. They appeal to many cats, but they are not received well by others.

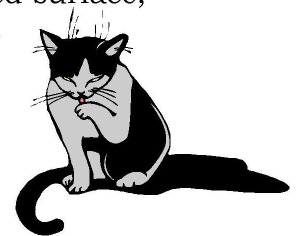
*It is very important to provide at least one litter box per cat...*

Litter crystals are hard crystals that seem to actually absorb the urine and wetness. This makes for excellent odor control, but the size and shape is uncomfortable to some cats and kittens.

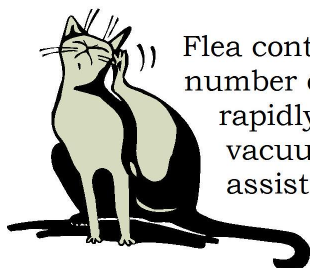
Litters also come both scented and unscented. Most cats are very sensitive to the perfumes used in litter, more so than people are. There are some that find it downright objectionable. We recommend the use of unscented litters to help prevent any bad habits starting.

Fecal matter and wet litter need to be removed once daily for each cat that uses the litter box. Even with clumping litter, a monthly scrubbing of the litter box removes odors that may collect in the box itself. Use warm, soapy water and avoid scented disinfectants.

The location of the litter box is important. It should be on an easily cleaned surface, as some cats don't always aim well. Litter is also scratched out or tracked out of the litter box frequently. It is very important that the litter box be placed in a quiet, non-threatening location. Cats need their privacy and will avoid a litter box that is in a high traffic area or a location accessible to dogs. It is also very important to provide at least one litter tray per cat, plus one extra if possible.



### **Flea Control**



Flea control is much easier and safer today than it used to be. There are a number of once a month spot-on products that are extremely effective at rapidly killing fleas and inhibiting eggs from hatching. Thorough vacuuming of your house, the furniture and washing any bedding will assist in the rapid removal of flea eggs and larvae. Ask us for the best choice for your kitten. There are many choices and not all are safe for kittens. We do not recommend the use of flea collars.

### **Ear Mites**

Ear mites are tiny insect-like parasites that live in the ear canal of cats (and dogs). The most common sign of ear mite infection is scratching of the ears. Sometimes the

ears will appear dirty because of a black material in the ear canal; this material is sometimes shaken out. The instrument we use for examining the ear canals, an otoscope, has the necessary magnification to allow us to see the mites. Sometimes, we can find the mites by taking a small amount of the black material from the ear canal and examining it with a microscope. Although mites may leave the ear canals for short periods of time, they spend the vast majority of their lives within the protection of the ear canal. Transmission generally requires direct ear-to-ear contact. Ear mites are common in litters of kittens if their mother has ear mites.

### Heartworm Infections in Cats



Heartworms are parasites that live in the blood vessels of the heart and lungs. It is a very common problem in dogs, and less common in cats. The parasite is transmitted by the bite of a mosquito. Obviously, cats and kittens that go outdoors are at the most risk, but since mosquitoes can also get indoors, even an indoor cat can get heartworms. We recommend giving your kitten a once-a-month heartworm prevention tablet May through December.

### Spaying Female Cats

Spaying is the removal of the uterus and the ovaries. Therefore, heat periods no longer occur. Spaying prevents unplanned litters of kittens.

Spaying offers several advantages. The female's heat periods result in about 2-3 weeks of obnoxious behavior. This can be quite annoying if your cat is kept indoors. Male cats are attracted from blocks away and, in fact, seem to come out of the woodwork. They seem to go over, around, and through many doors. Your cat will have a heat period about every 2-3 weeks until she is bred. Some female cats will spray urine to alert males to their availability.

It has been proven that as the female dog gets older; there is a significant incidence of breast cancer and uterine infections if she has not been spayed. Spaying before she has any heat periods will virtually eliminate the chances of either. There is mounting evidence to believe that this is also true of cats. If you do not plan to breed your cat, we strongly recommend that she be spayed before her first heat period. This can be done between 4 and 6 months of age depending on the kitten's health.

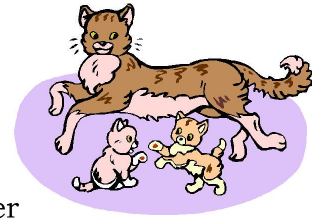


### Neutering Male Cats

Castration is the surgical removal of both testicles. It offers several important advantages. Male cats go through a significant personality change when they mature. They become very possessive of their territory and mark it with their urine to ward off other cats. The tomcat's urine develops a very strong odor that will be almost impossible to remove from your house. They also try to constantly enlarge their territory, which means one fight after another. Fighting results in severe infections and abscesses and often engenders rage in your neighbors. We strongly urge you to have your cat neutered at about 4 to 6 months of age. If he should begin to spray his urine before that time, he should be neutered immediately. The longer he sprays or fights, the less likely neutering is to stop the behavior.

## Breeding Cats

If you plan to breed your cat, she should have at least one or two heat periods first. This will allow her to physically mature allowing her to be a better mother without such a physical drain on her. We do not recommend breeding after 5 years of age unless she has been bred prior to that. Having her first litter after 5 years of age is more physically draining and increases the chances of her having problems during the pregnancy and/or delivery. Once your cat has had her last litter, she should be spayed to prevent the female problems older cats have.



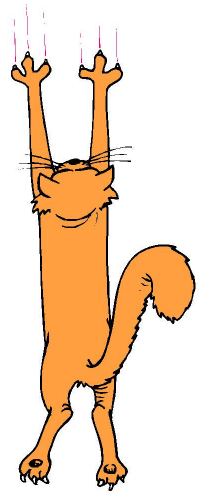
## Neutralizing Destructive Behavior with the Claws

There are four options to consider: nail clipping, nail shields, surgical declawing, and tendonectomy.

### Trimming Toenails

Kittens have very sharp toenails. They can be trimmed with your regular fingernail clippers or with nail trimmers made for dogs and cats. If you take too much off the nail, you will get into the quick; bleeding and pain will occur. If this happens, neither you nor your cat will want to do this again! Kittens should have their feet and toes gently handled on a regular basis, even when not clipping nails, just so they learn to relax with the procedure. Here are a few helpful points:

1. If your cat has clear or white nails, you can see the pink of the quick through the nail. Avoid the pink area, and you should be out of the quick.
2. When cutting nails, use sharp trimmers. Dull trimmers tend to crush the nail and cause pain even if you are not in the quick.
3. Always have styptic powder available. This is sold in pet stores under several trade names, but it will be labeled for use in trimming nails. This can be used to help stop the bleeding if you do cut one too short.
4. When starting a kitten out with nail trimming, be prepared to just do a toe or two per session. Follow this with a great treat. Soon, your kitten will allow you to do all of the nails with very little effort.



Your cat's nails will regrow and become sharp again in about 7 days. Therefore, to protect your property, it will be necessary to clip them weekly.

You will need to provide a surface for scratching. Scratching is a territorial marking behavior and the kitten will eventually want to stake his or her claim in the house. So a scratch post needs to be placed in an area of the house that the kitten spends most of his time. You need to decide whether the cat prefers a vertical or horizontal scratching surface. Finally, find out what the preferred surface is. Some cats prefer carpet, others sisal rope, and still others a wooden or bark surface. Once you and your kitten have made all the right choices, getting him or her to play on the post by dangling string or scratching with your fingers usually begins to entice them to start scratching. You can praise or offer a treat to keep the behavior going. Please be sure and let us know if you are having difficulty. We want to help.

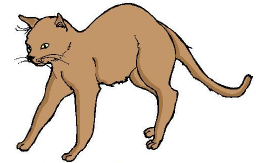


## Nail Caps

There are commercially available products that are called nail caps. The most common one is called Soft Paws. These are generally made of smooth plastic and attach to the end of the nail with a special glue. The nails are still present, but the caps prevent them from causing destruction. After 2-4 weeks the nails will grow enough that the caps will be shed. At that time, you should be prepared to replace them.

## Declawing

Surgical declawing is the removal of the nail at its base. This is done under general anesthesia. It is a procedure that some people find offensive partly because of the post surgical pain involved. We provide appropriate pain relievers while in the hospital and when your kitten goes home. This is a surgery that is usually done when the kitten is spayed or castrated. Feel free to ask us for more details about the surgery and recovery time. Once declawed, your cat should always live indoors since the ability to defend itself is compromised.



## Tendonectomy

Tendonectomy is the surgical removal of a small part of the tendon on the bottom of each toe. This tendon is needed to make the nail extend. The cat retains its nails, but it cannot extend them for sharpening and scratching. The disadvantage of this procedure is that the nails continue to grow and may grow into the pads. Therefore, the nails should be clipped every 7 to 14 days.

## Pet Identification

The latest in lost pet identification is microchipping. This tiny device is implanted with a needle so the process is much like getting an injection. Our scanner can detect these chips; humane societies and animal shelters across the country also have scanners. A national registry permits the return of microchipped pets throughout the United States and Canada. We recommend it.

## Dental Care



Regular home dental care is very important. Although not all cats will tolerate tooth brushing at home, if you start training as a kitten success is more likely. This involves working with the kitten's mouth to get them used to handling. Gently rub the teeth and gums with your finger, lifting the lips to get all the way to the back teeth. Using a bit of water or tuna fish juice can make the procedure more pleasant. Once the kitten is used to this you can progress to using a cat toothbrush, or a bit of gauze and a cat safe toothpaste. We can show you how, anytime. Just ask Try to brush teeth daily, just like your own.