

Kitten Advice

Congratulations on your new kitten!

Introduction

You keep a cat as a friend and companion, but owning him involves you in a special responsibility. For you have made him dependent on you, particularly regarding feeding, shelter and care in sickness. Kittens should stay with their mother until they are at least six weeks old (preferably eight weeks), by which time they should be fully weaned and have learned the basics of toilet training. Give your kitten a lot of attention to help it settle into your home environment, but remember, like a baby, it will need much sleep and rest. To this end, children should be taught that a kitten is a companion and playmate, not a toy. Your new kitten should be bright and alert. If it is lethargic or obviously out of condition have it checked by a vet before accepting it into your home. Remember when choosing a kitten that some breeds of cats need more attention than others, particularly the longhaired breeds which need regular grooming.

Feeding

Providing excellent nutrition for your kitten is the most important thing you can do to ensure his/her good health! Your kitten has certain nutritional requirements, that are different from those of adult cats. Growing kittens require extra protein, energy, vitamins and certain extra minerals for example calcium. Cats are obligate carnivores which means they can't synthesise their own taurine like dogs. Taurine is an essential amino acid that is only found in meat. A deficiency of Taurine in cats will cause *Central Retinal Degeneration* (eye lesions) resulting in total blindness within two years if the deficiency is not remedied, *Dilated Cardiomyopathy* (enlargement of the heart's chambers resulting in thinner, weaker heart walls) and reduced reproduction in queens and the growth in kittens. Some meats and raw food diets are very high in protein but deficient in some important minerals and vitamins such as calcium and taurine. The biscuits that we have available especially designed for kittens are Hills Science diet, Eukanuba and Iams which have added taurine and calcium. Your kitten should be given biscuits as a main meal, as this will help to keep your kittens teeth strong and will help to limit the build up of plaque and tartar on it's teeth throughout it's life.



It is important not to vary the diet too much when the kitten is less than 16 weeks old as this can often cause an upset stomach and diarrhoea. Young kittens should have three to four meals a day until they are around 12 weeks old, then two to three meals a day until about 16 weeks old. Adult cats usually prefer two meals daily, but many cats are happy to be fed only once a day. A bowl of food can be left out for most cats so they can help themselves to their food and nibble throughout the day. This can work for some cats however others can not discover when they are full so can become grossly overweight. Your kitten should be given kitten food until it is a year old then should move to adult food. Spend about 2-3 weeks slowly changing over to the new food. You can feed wet food or dry food. Half of each is preferred to maintain urinary and dental health.



Water should be available at all times, especially when feeding dry foods
Certain foods should be avoided, or prepared in certain ways so as to prevent problems:

- ◆ Some forms of raw fish contain an enzyme, which destroys B vitamins in the body, so fish is best fed cooked.
- ◆ Liver contains too much vitamin A for cats and if fed too frequently can cause skeletal problems. Therefore liver should be given no more than once a week.
- ◆ Some supplements such as Cod Liver oil can result in an overdose of vitamins if given too often.
- ◆ It can be harmful to give extra supplements if your cat is already on a balanced canned or dry diet.
- ◆ Milk can cause diarrhoea in some cats due to a low tolerance for lactose (the sugar in milk) or milk protein sensitivities/allergies.

This is the best way to ensure your kitten/cat is getting a completely balanced diet with all the important vitamins and minerals required for good health.

Injections (Vaccinations)

Vaccinations are important to protect against some of the most serious diseases that can affect cats. Kittens are particularly likely to show severe symptoms or die if not protected. Three initial vaccinations are recommended. The first vaccination should be given at 8-9 weeks. This should be repeated twice 3-4 weeks later and followed by annual boosters to maintain protection. Kittens should be kept isolated as much as possible until the second kitten vaccination at 14-16 weeks as they will not be fully protected until that time. Annual boosters are usually required to maintain protection.



The diseases for which cats and kittens can be vaccinated are:

Respiratory Diseases

◆ **Feline Enteritis – core vaccine**

This highly contagious virus called Panleukopenia causes vomiting and diarrhoea, dehydration and frequently death. The disease is rapid in onset and affected cats become very depressed. The mortality rate is very high in young kittens.

◆ **Cat flu or “snuffles” – core vaccine**

This disease is caused by two viruses: Feline Rhinotracheitis and Calici Virus. The symptoms are like a severe head cold - snuffling, sneezing, coughing, runny eyes and nose. It affects cats of all ages and causes great suffering often for several weeks. Some cats may become chronically infected carriers. Young cats may die from pneumonia or suffer permanent eye damage. Both cat flu and enteritis are extremely contagious diseases and for this reason vaccination is compulsory for cattery entry. We strongly recommend vaccination of all cats for both of these diseases.

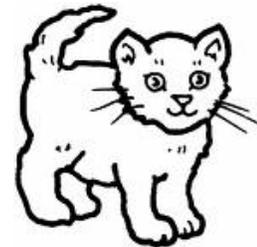
◆ **Chlamydia**

This organism is thought to be responsible for between 5-15% of respiratory disease in cats. Typically it causes severe conjunctivitis in one or both eyes, but can also produce sneezing or coughing with a discharge from the nose. Transmission is as for snuffles, and in some cats the disease can be persistent or recurring.

Immunosuppressive Diseases

◆ **Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)**

This virus affects the immune system. Like the human HIV virus symptoms may not appear for some years after infection and do not affect all cats equally. Some cats show initial fever, loss of appetite, lethargy and enlarged lymph nodes. In time weight loss and chronic infections occur and eventually the immune system becomes too weak to fight off other infections resulting in deterioration and death. There is no cure for this disease. Up to 14% of cats tested in New Zealand are positive (depending on area). Cats from multiple-cat households or who fight, use catteries, or attend cat shows are most at risk from these viruses and should be vaccinated. Cats from single-cat households who have little or no contact with other cats are at low risk. Neither of these “AIDS” viruses are transmissible to people.



◆ **Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV)**

This virus also attacks the immune system. It causes leukaemias (cancers of the blood system) or reduces the effectiveness of the immune system so that cats may suffer chronically or die from infections which would not normally be so serious. We currently do not vaccinate for this as it not a very common disease.

The core or essential vaccines are for cat flu and enteritis. These are also a requirement for cattery entry. The need for vaccination against Feline Immunodeficiency Virus and Chlamydia depends on each animal's lifestyle and environment. We are happy to discuss your pet's individual requirements.

Worming

Worming should be done fortnightly from 4 weeks of age until 12 weeks of age, then every month until 6 months of age, then every 3 months for life. We have Endogard or Drontal tablets available at our clinic which kill all intestinal worms. If you have any problems with giving tablets to your cat just pop into the clinic and our veterinarian or veterinarian nurses will be able to help. For kittens over 8 weeks of age, there is now a new product called Broadline. One treatment on the back of their neck kills worms, fleas and ticks for one month.

◆ Roundworms

Kittens are often born with roundworm infections and they can cause severe illness. Symptoms with large numbers may include diarrhoea, weight loss, a pot belly, or poor coat condition.

◆ Tapeworms

These are often seen as small white moving objects around the anus (the size of a grain of rice). They are picked up by cats when they eat fleas while grooming. Worming for these should be done at 3-6 month intervals from 3 months of age. A good flea control program will also help prevent tapeworm infections.

Fleas

Fleas have the potential to be a major problem for all pets and owners in our climate—the warm humid climate in spring through to autumn can result in rapid rises in the flea population. People are often mystified by the appearance of fleas on their pet or in their house, but an understanding of the flea life cycle and life-stages can help in developing a strategy for preventing flea problems. The development of highly effective and safe flea control products over the last 10-15 years means that complete elimination is now possible. The flea population has four main life stages, which at any one time are approximately the following proportions:

eggs(50%)
larvae(35%)
pupae/cocoons ... (10%)
adults (5%)

Less than half of the adults will actually be on an animal so approximately 98% of the flea population is in the environment! Female fleas can lay between 25- 50 eggs per day each! The flea life cycle can be completed in as short a time as 3 weeks or longer than

12 months (where pupal stages hibernate for long periods). These factors can lead to sudden exponential flea population growth when the conditions are suitable. Each owner/pet situation is different so please feel free to discuss your needs with one of our staff. The most effective flea control products available now are topical treatments which are applied to the skin on the back of the neck and provide continuous cover:

Advantage - applied monthly in cats and kills fleas.

Broadline - Applied 4 weekly in cats. Treats fleas and ticks and all worms (including tapeworm).

Advocate – applied monthly and kills fleas. It also has an extra drug, which also treats roundworms at the same time and ear mites. This product doesn't treat tapeworm so it's a good idea to get your cat wormed with an Endogard or Drontal tablet by your veterinarian every 3-6 months.

Revolution – This product is applied monthly. This product also kills earmites and roundworms but not tapeworm.

Comfortis – This is a monthly tablet for fleas.

Neutering/Spaying

Like most cities Auckland has a big cat overpopulation problem. Thousands of unwanted and stray cats are destroyed by the SPCA each year. These operations do not change a cat's basic personality. Spaying a female cat involves the removal of both the ovaries and uterus. This prevents her from coming into heat or becoming pregnant and also totally eliminates the chance of ovarian cancers and reduces the chances of mammary cancer. Neutering a male cat involves the removal of both testicles. This will also totally eliminate the chance of testicular cancers. Cats which are not neutered or spayed are much more likely to stray from home, get into fights which can cause abscesses, pick up infectious diseases such as FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus), and develop undesirable habits such as spraying. We recommend neutering or spaying your kitten at 6 months of age. Try to ensure he/she doesn't leave your home until then after the surgery has been done.



Destructive Behaviour

Cats love to sharpen their claws. A scratching post made from timber covered with pieces of old carpet or tree branches will help to deter your kitten from using your furniture to sharpen those claws.

House Training

Cats are clean by instinct. A dirt tray should be provided for the kitten in a place that is easily accessible at all times. The tray can be filled with dirt, sand, kitty litter, or torn newspaper. Keep the dirt tray in the same place, and show it to the kitten immediately after eating and drinking. If the kitten starts scratching the floor, pop it quickly on its tray, and give lots of praise after toileting. The tray can be gradually moved towards the garden when your kitten can go outside (after vaccination/neutering), and then done away with.

Bladder Problems

Cats are quite prone to getting urinary tract infections or inflammation. If a cat squats or strains frequently, with little or no urine produced, the cause is usually cystitis (inflammation of the bladder). This may require antibiotics or pain relief. But male cats have a very narrow urethra and will sometimes have a blocked urethra from crystals and mucus forming a plug. **This is a life-threatening condition and needs urgent veterinary attention if your cat is straining to urinate and not much urine is produced.**

This can be more of a problem in winter, as cats don't like to go out into the wet and cold to toilet. It can be a good idea to make a litter tray available for your cat to use in the colder months. Cats will hang on for a while which can cause the crystals to build up. Encouraging your cat to drink water (water fountain, offering wet food as well as dry food) can help ensure regular urination.

Ringworm

This is a fungal disease and one of the few common diseases of cats that can spread to humans. The usual sign is scaly hairless patches or areas where the fur is short and stubby (where hair shafts have broken off) most commonly around the head or forelegs. In most cases examination with a Wood's Lamp (UV lamp) will confirm diagnosis. Ringworm usually requires treatment topically or by giving oral antifungal tablets.

Grooming and Furballs

Short-coated cats do not usually require grooming - they are very good at keeping themselves clean and tidy. However long-coated cats often develop knots, particularly underneath on the belly and between the front or back legs.

To help prevent knots forming and to lessen the frequency and severity of furball problems, you should try to brush or comb the coats of these types of cat every 2-3 days. Most cats will vomit up a fur ball from time to time. The accumulation of fur from grooming, especially when moulting, is normal. Cats with fine or long coats are likely to be the worst affected (in particular Birman). The use of a



paraffin-based furball product such as Laxapet, or the feeding of furball preventing diets can help prevent severe furball problems.

Wounds and Abscesses

Cats are particularly susceptible to abscess formation from the many bites sustained in cat fights. Having your male cat neutered at or before 6 months of age and keeping cats inside at night will help to minimise the risk of fighting. However with the high density of cat population in this area territorial battles do take place, particularly when a new cat moves in and has to establish a territory. Bites are often not seen under the fur but dried blood can often be felt. An abscess may take a few days to develop after a fight and will develop into a lump that is literally filled with pus. If you think your cat has been in a fight and has been bitten or is showing signs of pain or lameness or not eating and is lethargic, a visit to the vet will be required. Infections will often be treated with antibiotics and pain relief they often require surgical treatment once they have formed.

Microchipping

It is not a legal requirement, however we do recommend microchipping your kitten. This can be done at the second or third vaccination, or when he/she comes in for their desexing procedure at 6 months of age. Having your pet microchipped can enable us or the SPCA to return your pet to you if he/she is lost. If your cat isn't microchipped then it may end up going to a new home. We register our cats and dogs with the New Zealand Microchip database on www.animalregister.co.nz.

Insurance

Pet insurance is designed to take some of the financial burden away from pet owners in the event their pet suffers an unexpected illness or accident. A host of new treatments are now available to pet owners, but they are increasingly expensive. Tests such as MRI's and treatments such as chemotherapy, and increasingly sophisticated surgical procedures now mean your pet has a good chance of recovering from events when only a few years ago euthanasia would have been the only option.



Pet insurance gives you some protection against potentially major veterinary bills, and means you can make decisions about your pet's future based on maintaining and improving quality of life, not around whether or not you can afford the treatment. Pet insurance policies can range from covering only major medical and surgical events, through to helping you pay for a more comprehensive range of pet and pet-related expenses.

Any other questions you can contact our friendly, trained staff on (09) 299 8932.