

CARING FOR KITTENS & CATS – WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Everyone loves kittens but kittens need a lot of care to keep them healthy and happy

With a kitten, you also need to put more effort into training, from making sure the tiny baby understands what's expected regarding the litter box to helping your kitten learn to stay off the counters. You also need to kitten-proof your home — or keep your baby confined in a safe part of the house whenever you're not watching him — and then spend a few months picking your kitten off the curtains, off the kids, off the back of the couch, or off your slippers.

An adult cat may be a better choice for families with very young children or for someone who's handicapped by advanced age or illness. For all their activity, kittens are fragile and may accidentally be hurt by young children who don't understand the concept of "gentle." Similarly, a kitten isn't the best choice for anyone who's a little unsteady on his feet or isn't able to chase or otherwise keep up with an energetic feline baby.

On the other hand, a kitten can be perfect for a family with older, more responsible children, or a source of delightful amusement to an active older adult. You just need to look carefully at your living situation and consider the problems and pleasures a kitten will bring.

Finally, consider the matter of time. An adult cat does quite well on her own alone in the house while you work — most of the time she's sleeping anyway. A kitten needs your time, for raising her and for watching over her to keep her out of trouble.

Where to get Your Pet

Consider carefully what sort of pet will best match your lifestyle. Do you have sufficient time/energy for a kitten? Could you give a loving home to a rescue cat? This website should help you www.yourright-pet.org.uk

Register with a Vet

Do this straight away and make an appointment to get your new pet checked over as soon as possible. You are also welcome to visit us before you collect him/her. Our vets and nurses will be able to answer all your questions and help clear up any concerns that come to you in the first days of getting used to your new family member.

Most things we find at your kitten's first general health check are straightforward. Simple things like ear mites, fleas and other visitors are common findings and easily cleared. However very occasionally we pick up other health problems like heart murmurs, cleft palates, retained testicles and hernias. When health problems are detected we are here to help you and will advise about how to manage them.

Vaccinations

To provide protection against potentially fatal infections such as feline infectious enteritis and feline influenza (cat flu) kittens need to be vaccinated. The first injection in the course is given at eight to nine weeks of age with a second at about 12 weeks. The kitten should be kept away from other cats and stay indoors for ten days after the second injection to ensure maximum protection. To maintain a protective level of immunity, adult cats require regular boosters.

Bringing the kitten home – Settling in

Supplies Needed

- Balanced, brand name food. Make sure it's for the right age. Dry food is better for your pet's teeth. Canned food is more similar to a natural diet for cats, so some of both is probably best.
- Food and water bowls. Ceramic and metal are best. Some pets are sensitive to plastic.
- Cat toys – make sure there aren't any small parts or string that can fall off and be swallowed
- A cat brush
- Cat toothpaste and toothbrush
- "Breakaway" collar and ID tag
- Scratching post or scratching pad
- Litter box – 1 per cat, plus 1 extra
- Litter – scoopable litter is best. Don't use dusty or perfumed litter.
- Cat carrier
- Optional: Cat condo, cat leash and harness, cat bed, cat "plants"

Experiencing a brand new home is daunting for a tiny kitten. Every kitten has a unique personality – some are shy while others are confident. With this in mind it's best to choose a room where he/she can be kept for the first few weeks to adjust to the new surroundings gradually. This confinement also aids in toilet training and avoids the risk of 'accidents' elsewhere in the house. Check the room for potential hazards such as fireplaces, full length curtains, breakable objects. Keep windows securely fastened. Give reassurance and time to adjust to new surroundings before making introductions to other animals and people in the household. Ensure all

windows and doors are closed and there is a guard in front of the fireplace. Ensure the kitten knows where the bed, litter tray and food bowls are.

The kitten's bed should be in a safe place to go when things get too much. It needs to be warm, dry comfortable and draught free. Buy a bed from a pet shop or use a strong dry cardboard box with a hole cut in the side. It should contain soft bedding and be placed in a warm safe place.

On the first few nights a warm water bottle (not hot) under a blanket may help compensate for the absence of the kittens mother or litter mates. If you happen to have or can borrow a large secure pen then this is ideal for providing a safe den and can hold a kittens litter tray and bed. It is also an excellent way to introduce other animals

Feeding Your Cat/Kitten

Kittens (under 6 months): 3-4 times a day

Over 6 months: Feed twice a day (amount depends on food type and how active your cat is)

Training your cat to eat twice a day: When your kitten turns 6 months old, offer food to him/her twice a day only. Leave the food out for ½ hour only. Your cat will quickly learn to eat all of his/her food during the half hour.

Avoid giving your pet too many treats since cats can become overweight as they age

Limit milk, as cats and kittens don't need it and it could cause diarrhea.

Chores

Daily

Clean litter box, feed (see above), clean water/food bowls, change water, play with your cat, brush teeth once, walk (optional)

Weekly

Thoroughly clean the litter box using a mild soap and replace litter

2 Times a Week

Brush hair (gently)

Yearly

A trip to the Vets for a check-up

Training Your Cat to Walk on Leash

- Use a leash and harness for cats
- Start in a fenced-in yard
- Reward good behaviour with treats

Dangers -- Never Feed Your Cat/Kitten:

- Alcoholic drinks
- Chocolate
- Coffee
- Grapes and raisins
- Moldy or spoiled food
- Onions, garlic and chives
- Bones
- Tomato plants
- Unripe fruit
- Yeast dough
- Any houseplants – some are poisonous

Scratching Post

Cats love to scratch! Train your cat to use a scratching post by:

- Placing catnip around the base of the post
- Rewarding your pet when he/she uses the scratching post

Brushing Your Cat's Teeth

It is not easy, but cats are healthier if you brush their teeth. Use cat toothpaste and brush. Start when they are kittens, so they get used to it.

SPAYING AND NEUTERING

Female cats should be spayed and male cats neutered by 6 months old. This reduces unwanted behaviour like urine spraying and some diseases like Feline AIDS later in life as well as unwanted pregnancies..

MICRO-CHIPPING

It is a very good idea to microchip your kitten before he/she is old enough to start going out. A microchip is placed just under the skin between the shoulder blades and if the kitten gets lost the chip can be read by veterinary Practices and rehoming centres so you and your kitten can be reunited.

HEALTH INSURANCE

It is worth considering a reliable pet insurance policy to help with any possible costs due to illness and injury. Our staff have been trained to advise you on what cover would best suit your needs.

INTRODUCING OTHER PETS

First, be sure that your new kitten is vaccinated. Still, quarantine him/her for one week (two to three weeks is even better); then put her in his/her own room in your house to start the introduction process.

The key to introducing a new pet is to GO SLOW! Give the new cat about one to two weeks in her own room where the two cats can sniff each other under the door. Once they are doing this with minimal hissing, switch the situation. Put your cat in the room for a few hours and let the new kitty roam the house. This allows the resident cat to smell the new cat's scent and explore without worrying about having to fight the newcomer. It also allows the new cat to explore the new house and become familiar with hiding areas.

The next step is to let them see each other from across a room or through a tall baby gate you put across the doorway of the room where the new kitty is. Then, when they're used to this, let the cats out together SUPERVISED, and put down a treat (canned cat food, tuna, etc.). Use two dishes on opposite sides of the room so that both cats are in the same room eating their special treat. Do this at roughly the same time every day, and soon the cats will be running to be in the same place at the same time. When hissing and growling subsides, and then start moving the dishes closer together. If they start growling at each other, you have moved the dishes too close, too quickly and need to back off. Soon they will associate a good thing with seeing each other.

Do not let them together unsupervised, as they could fight and hurt each other. The entire process will probably take about 6 weeks, and even then they may not be buddies but can be in the same room without hissing at each other.

Special care should be taken with introductions to dogs. Those not used to cats need to be kept as calm as possible, on a lead and told to sit quietly. The kitten should be in a safe place, so as to have time to get used to the dog and make an approach on his/her own terms. This might take quite some time and requires patience and rewards for the dog behaving well.

Good luck, and remember -- patience!