

## Caring for your Kitten

Owning a cat can be an extremely rewarding experience, but it also carries with it quite a bit of responsibility. Some cats will live as long as 20 years so they will be a part of your family for a long time.

### Choosing a Kitten

Most kittens should be ready to go to new homes between 6 – 8 weeks of age. You should choose a kitten that is outgoing, friendly and playful. Their eyes, nose and ears should be clean and free of discharge. Avoid all kittens within a litter if any of them show signs of sneezing and weeping eyes as they may be infected with cat flu.

The most popular type of family cat is the Moggy. Moggy's can be a cross of any number of cat breeds, can be long, medium or short haired, and come in a variety of colours. They tend to be quite hardy, and do not usually suffer the breed specific diseases of pedigree cats. You should be able to easily find a moggy that suits you at the SPCA, pet shops, or by checking the pet listings in your local paper.

If you do choose to own a pedigree cat, you will need to consider what breed you choose carefully to ensure their maintenance needs, and temperament will suit your lifestyle. Visiting the library or researching breeds on the internet will help you to choose the best cat for your family. Talking to your Veterinarian or Vet Nurse is also a good idea, as they will be able to point out any potential health issues a particular breed may be prone to.

Once you choose your kitten it is wise to have it vet checked before completing the purchase. This will help to ensure the kitten you choose is healthy without any congenital defects that may be difficult for you to detect.

### Transporting Your Kitten

Your kitten must be transported in a safe cat box or cage. Having a cat or kitten loose in a car is very dangerous. They could get under your feet preventing braking, or distract you from safe driving. Cats do not like being in strange surroundings and will often try to escape. Holding them in your arms is not an effective restraint, and they may get free and end up getting lost or being hit by a car.

### Vaccination

There are many diseases that are fatal to cats. Fortunately, we have the ability to prevent many of these by the use of very effective vaccines. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally the first one should be given at 8 – 10 weeks of age, and a booster 2 – 4 weeks later.

The routine vaccination schedule will protect your kitten from four diseases: Feline Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia and Chlamydia psittaci. Your vet may also recommend that you vaccinate your cat against Feline Leukaemia when they are an adult.

In adulthood your cat may only need a 3 yearly booster vaccination depending on their lifestyle.

Your vet will also discuss other health and kitten care issues with you, and answer any questions you may have during your kitten's vaccination visits.

### Intestinal Worms

Intestinal parasites are common in kittens. Kittens can become infected with parasites before they are born or later through their mother's milk. Sometimes you can see the worms in the kitten's faeces; they can look like a grain of rice, or like spaghetti. However, not all parasites are visible, so microscopic examination of a stool sample will usually help us to determine the presence of intestinal parasites.

We recommend the use of Drontal or Endoguard, a de-worming product that is safe and effective against several of the common worms of the cat. It is given every two weeks until twelve weeks old, then every 3-6 months for the rest of the cat's life. It is important that it be repeated because the de-worming medication only kills the adult worms. Within 3-4 weeks, the larval stages will have become adults and will need to be treated.

Tapeworms are the most common intestinal parasite of cats. Kittens become infected with them when they swallow fleas; the eggs of the tapeworm live inside the flea. When the cat chews or licks its skin as a flea bites, the 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.

## Flea Treatment

Fleas do not stay on your kitten all of their time; occasionally, they will jump off and seek another host, and all eggs end up falling from your kitten's coat and onto your flooring or furniture. Therefore, it is important to kill fleas on your new kitten before they can become established in your house.

Flea collars, powders, and other supermarket/pet shop flea products usually contain organophosphates. These older chemicals no longer kill fleas effectively, and also have toxic effects on mammals. Combining a flea collar and powder can overdose a kitten and cause poisoning.

There are now new, very safe, effective flea products available. They kill fleas within minutes, have no toxic effects on mammals, are easy to apply, and last for up to 6 weeks per treatment. These products are only available from your vet.

We recommend:

### Fleas Only

**Frontline** Apply 6 weekly (from 8 weeks old)

**Advantage** Apply 4 weekly (from 6 wks old)

### Fleas & worms (excl Tapeworm)

**Advantage Multi** Apply 4 weekly (from 9 weeks old)

**Revolution** Apply 4 weekly for kittens (from 6 wks old)

**Note:** If the mother is treated with one of these flea treatments, the kittens should be flea free until weaning.

## Nutrition

Diet is extremely important in the growing months of a cat's life, and 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 or international pet food company (not a generic or local brand), and a form of food MADE FOR KITTENS. This should be fed until your KITTEN is about 9 -12 months of age.

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 organisation 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.

Feeding a dry, canned, or semi-moist form of cat food is acceptable. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is definitely the most economical. It can be left in the dog's bowl without drying. The good brands of dry food are just as nutritious as the other forms.

Semi-moist and canned foods are also acceptable. However, both are considerably more expensive than dry food. They often are more appealing to the cat's taste; however, they are not more nutritious. If you feed a very tasty food, you are running the risk of creating a cat with a finicky appetite. In addition, the semi-moist foods are high in sugar.

Fresh meat is not recommended for cats and kittens. It is an unbalanced food and is very low in calcium. In the wild cats do not only eat the muscle, liver or kidneys of a mouse or bird; they eat the entire animal which provides them with a balanced diet. Cats will also often become very overweight if their main food is fresh meat. If you choose to give your kitten fresh meat, be sure that at least 90% of its diet is good quality commercial kitten food.

## Unsafe Foods

Cats are obligate carnivores which means they must have a meat based diet to remain healthy. It is therefore important that they are never forced to eat a vegetarian diet to fit into a vegetarian household.

A diet based mainly on fish, or dog food, can also cause major problems. These diets are deficient in thiamine which can cause neurological problems. With fish, it doesn't matter if it is tinned, fresh/raw or cooked; they all have mineral, vitamin and amino acid deficiencies that cats are unable to cope with.

Bones of birds (chicken, turkey, etc.) are hollow and splinter easily producing very sharp pointed pieces of bones. These can easily pierce the oesophagus, stomach, and intestines resulting in peritonitis and death. Please never feed cooked bones, or bones that are small enough to swallow, as they can splinter, or cause obstructions.

## Housetraining

By the time you get your kitten, he/she should have been litter trained by his mother. To ensure this continues you will have to follow a few simple rules.

- 🐾 Place the litter tray (or more than one) in an easy to find, private place/s where the kitten will usually be playing and/or sleeping, and well away from food areas.
- 🐾 Place the kitten in the tray when they wake up, after feeding, and during play if they start to sniff around and show signs of wanting to go. Do this until they are using the tray well on their own.
- 🐾 Use the litter that they have been used to at their previous home, and make any changes to litter type gradually.
- 🐾 Use a litter tray that has raised sides low enough for the kitten to climb over, but high enough to keep the litter from being pushed out.
- 🐾 Remove the soiled litter frequently or the kitten may decide to go elsewhere.
- 🐾 Wash the tray with plain detergent at least weekly or more often if very dirty. Lining with newspaper will help keep it cleaner.
- 🐾 Once your kitten is old enough to start going outside (2 weeks after their last vaccination), you can start gradually moving their litter tray closer to the door, out onto the deck, etc and into the yard to encourage them to go outside when they need to go to the toilet.
- 🐾 Leave a litter tray inside at night or when they are locked inside until the kitten is at least 5 – 6 mths old when they are old enough go outside or to use a cat door.
- 🐾 If they do have an accident, rubbing their nose in it will not help! Ensure all the rules are followed, try leaving a small amount of their urine soaked litter in the tray (especially after washing) so they can smell where they are meant to go. If all this fails, lock the kitten in a small area with only hard flooring, a small bed, food and litter tray. This will give them little choice of where to go, and should encourage litter tray use. Leave them here until they are using the tray well.

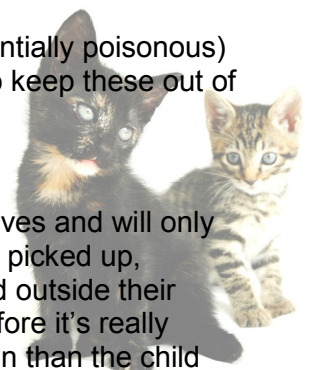
## Chewing

Kittens are not as renowned for chewing as puppies are, but they will still chew things while they are teething. The kitten's baby teeth are present by about 4 weeks of age. They begin to fall out at 4 months of age and are replaced by the adult (permanent) teeth by about 6 months of age. Therefore, chewing is a kitten characteristic that you can expect until about 6-7 months of age.

Kittens may chew things like electrical cords, rubber bands, pot plants (potentially poisonous) and string. These can all be dangerous objects to chew, so you will need to keep these out of your kittens reach as much as possible.

## Fitting into the Family

Unlike dogs, cats are not very social animals. They tend to keep to themselves and will only show affection or play with you when they feel like it! They will resent being picked up, cuddled or petted if they don't want to be. If kittens are continually harassed outside their terms, they may well grow into resentful and non affectionate adults. Therefore it's really important that children are taught to allow kittens to come to them more often than the child



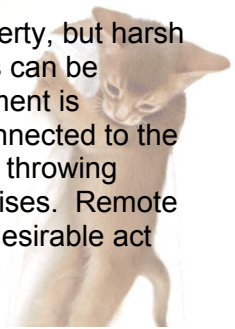
approach's the kitten for play and cuddles; and to allow the kitten to rest alone when they are tired.

Forcing kittens to accept cuddles does not work!

Avoiding rough play with kittens such as hand attack and wrestling games is also a good idea. This learned behaviour can continue into adulthood, which can turn gentle patting into a biting and scratching frenzy!

## **Discipline**

Disciplining a kitten may be necessary if its behaviour threatens people or property, but harsh punishment should be avoided. Hand clapping and using shaker cans or horns can be intimidating enough to inhibit undesirable behaviour. However, remote punishment is preferred. Remote punishment consists of using something that appears unconnected to the punisher to stop the problem behaviour. 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.



## **Trimming Claws**

Kittens have very sharp claws and they can often get caught in clothing and furnishings. The very tip of the claw can be trimmed with your regular finger nail 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.

Adult cats that go outdoors should not have their claws trimmed, as they are their main form of defence against other animals, and also allow quick escapes up trees!

## **De-sexing**

If you don't plan to breed - spay or neuter your kitten. Only serious breeders who have the desire, expertise, time and facilities to breed well should breed cats.

Statistics show that neutered animals are less susceptible to disease, live longer and fit into our society a lot better. Neutering reduces territorial behaviour such as spraying, scratching and cat fighting, and also reduces the huge problem of the thousands of unwanted kittens that end up being euthanased each year.

## **Spaying Females**

Spaying offers several advantages. Entire females (queens) come into season 3 – 4 times a year. They are very noisy and yowl constantly to attract a mate. Tom cats are attracted from blocks away and will flock to your cats territory, fighting with each other and with your neighbours cats. Your cat will become pregnant and can have up to eight kittens up to four times a year.

Allowing your cat to have a litter of kittens provides no benefit whatsoever to her personality, etc. In fact it can stunt her growth as most cats get pregnant when they are only 5 – 6 months of age and are still growing. It can also expose them to diseases such as Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (Feline AIDS), and Feline Leukaemia from unvaccinated, stray tom cats.

Spaying is the removal of the uterus and the ovaries. Therefore, seasons no longer occur. It has been proven that as the female cat 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 chance of either. If you do not plan to breed your cat, we strongly recommend that she be spayed before her first season. This can be done anytime from 5 - 6 months old.

## **Neutering Males**

Neutering offers several advantages. Entire males (tom cats) are attracted to a female cat in season and will go for miles to find her, often going missing for days on end. Tom cats are more aggressive will fight frequently, often developing cat bite abscesses that require veterinary attention. They will also be exposed to diseases such as Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (Feline AIDS), and Feline Leukaemia from unvaccinated, stray cats.

Neutering will make your cat calmer and more pleasant to live with. Once neutered male cats will not develop the large head, tough skin, and smelly musk gland (on the tail base) of tom cats, and will be much less likely to spray around your house. They will also prefer to stay at home with you, rather than wandering off looking for a mate and contributing to the overpopulation of unwanted and stray kittens. The surgery can be performed any time from 5 - 6 months old, and in male cats is usually a very simple and quick procedure.

As with any surgery there is a small risk of complications. However we use modern monitoring devices and anaesthesia techniques; and well qualified Vet Nurses will care for your cat to minimise the risk. Your cat will also be given pain relief equivalent to what you would receive for a surgical procedure, to ensure they are as comfortable as possible. And they will recover in a heated ward with a comfortable bed and blankets.

### **Pet Identification**

We strongly recommend the use of collars with ID tags for cats. If they are found injured or wandering they can be quickly reunited with their owner. This allows an injured cat to be treated without delay, giving them the best outcome possible.

The latest in pet retrieval is micro-chipping, and it is now mandatory in New Zealand for dogs over 3 months of age to be micro chipped. However it is optional in cats. This rice grain sized device is implanted with a needle so the process is much like getting an injection. The code from the microchip is recorded by your vet and is also registered on an Australasian Microchip Register. Our scanner can detect these chips; humane societies and animal shelters across the country also have scanners.

### **Pet Insurance**

Unlike human health care, your pet's health care is not subsidised by the government. This means if your pet suffers a serious accident or illness you will have to cover the entire cost yourself. Years ago if a pet broke their leg it often meant they were euthanased. However this type of injury is now usually very treatable, with many patients returning to perfect health and living a long and happy life with their family.

As vets we find it heartbreaking when a loved pet is brought into our practice following an accident, and we are unable to treat it because the owner is forced to make their decision based upon their finances.

Pet Insurance is very popular overseas and is becoming more common in New Zealand. It gives you the peace of mind that if your pet does suffer a serious injury or illness, you will be able to make the decision to treat it without having to consider the cost. Some policies will also partially cover the costs of vaccination and neutering.

**We provide 24 hour emergency medical care. In the event of an emergency, ring our usual phone number, and you will be advised on who is providing care at that time.**