

KITTENS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OWNERS

Owning a cat is an extremely rewarding experience, but also carries responsibilities. We hope these notes will be of help - if you have further questions concerning any subject related to your kitten's health, please do not hesitate to telephone us.

FEEDING

Early in life kittens need to eat often! They require relatively larger quantities of food because they are growing rapidly, but have limited space in their stomachs. At eight weeks they need to be fed about five small meals a day, we recommend this number is gradually reduced until at six months when nearly full grown they are down to two meals daily.

If possible try to find out what your kitten was being fed at the previous home and continue with this for a short time to reduce digestive upsets. Should you do decide that you want to change the type of food your kitten is being fed do so gradually over 7-10 days to allow the digestive system time to adapt. Rapid changes of diet are a frequent cause of diarrhoea in young kittens.

A good quality kitten food has advantages over adult cat food since it has been specially formulated to meet the demands of rapid growth in a compact form. Since growth is almost complete by 6 months, kittens may be switched to "adult" cat food at 6-8 months of age. Because cats have different dietary requirements from dogs feeding dog food to cats can lead to disease problems.

If possible, try to accustom your cat to a range of foods and flavours since it is common for cats to become fussy over the food they will eat. If this becomes extreme it may lead to nutritional deficiencies and may make the feeding of special diets required to manage health problems in later life more difficult.

Even though many cats do not seem to drink a great deal fresh water should always be freely available, and this is especially important if your kitten is being fed on dried food.



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Contrary to popular myth, kittens and adult cats do not need milk. In fact after weaning many kittens lose the ability to digest milk sugar (lactose). While small amounts of cow's milk may be tolerated, too much can lead to intestinal upset and diarrhoea because it is not being digested properly.

VACCINATIONS

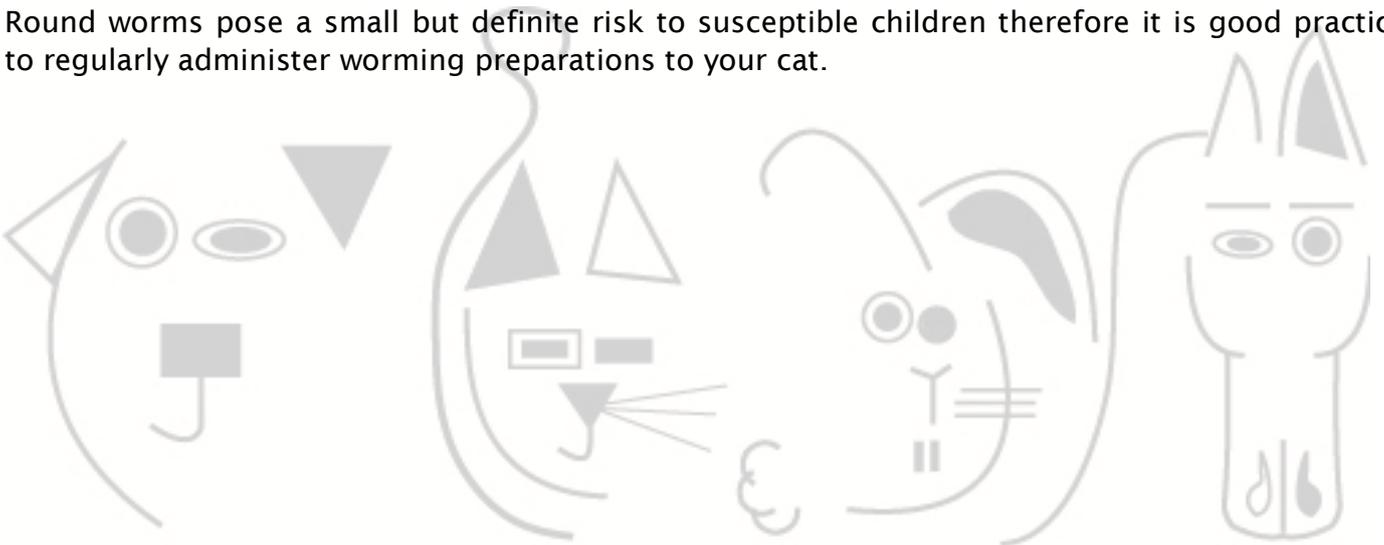
There are several diseases which can cause severe or even fatal infections in cats, see our enclosed leaflet on “**Infectious diseases of cats**”. Kittens gain some protection from disease in the form of antibodies passed in the queen's colostrum, (milk suckled in the first few hours after the birth). To ensure that the queen has sufficient antibodies to pass onto her kittens, it is important that she is properly vaccinated prior to mating. Protection gained from the mother lasts for only a few weeks, therefore a kitten's vaccination programme starts from **9 weeks of age**. A second vaccination is given **3-4 weeks later**. Vaccination is routinely carried out against Feline Infectious Enteritis, Herpes virus and Calicivirus (the viruses which cause “Cat ‘flu “) and Feline Leukaemia Virus. If you have any concerns or particular requirements concerning vaccination please do not hesitate to discuss them with the vet. An annual “booster” is given to ensure immunity is maintained.

WORMS

Intestinal worms are common in kittens which can become acquire infection from their mother's milk. Modern worming preparations are safe and effective and we recommend their use at four week intervals from 2 to 6 months of age. It is important that the medication is repeated since it is only the adult worms that are killed. Within 3-4 weeks, the larval stages will have matured and will need to be treated again.

Combined preparations which eradicate both roundworms and tapeworms are available, as well as preparations which treat one type of worms or a combination of internal and external parasites.

Round worms pose a small but definite risk to susceptible children therefore it is good practice to regularly administer worming preparations to your cat.



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Tapeworms are the most common intestinal parasite of cats, which become infected either by eating small rodents or swallowing fleas during grooming. Cats infected with tapeworms will pass small segments of the worms in their faeces. These are white in colour, 3-5mm long, and look like grains of rice. They may be seen crawling on the surface of the faeces, or stick to the hair under the tail. When this occurs they will dry out, shrink to about half the size and become golden in colour.

We recommend that kittens are wormed with a spot-on product such as “**Advocate**” or a three day course of “**Panacur**” each month until they are 6 months old. All adult cats should be wormed every three months with a single dose broad spectrum oral wormer such as “**Drontal**” or “**Milbemax**” or a spot-on wormer such as “**Profender**”. Please ask the veterinary surgeon to prescribe the most appropriate product for your cat.

Please see our leaflet “**A Guide to Worming your Cat**” for further details.

FLEAS

It is quite possible for your new kitten to arrive with fleas, and if so early treatment is essential to avoid infestation of the environment and other pets. Although **many flea control preparations for use on adult cats are not suitable for use on kittens** there are now effective products, such as “**Advocate**” (from 9 weeks) and “**Frontline**” (spray from 2 days) suitable for use on young kittens. Please ask us about the best product for your individual circumstances

It must be emphasised that flea control in the kitten is equally as important as with the older cat and must be coupled with the control of fleas in the house and environment.

Please see our leaflet “**Fleas the facts**” and related handouts for further details.



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EAR MITES

Ear mites (*Otodectes cyanotis*) are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal of cats (and dogs). Infestations are common in young kittens, most commonly seen as head shaking or scratching of the ears. The ears may appear dirty with black wax which is sometimes shaken out. The mites are just visible to the naked eye as white specks against the dark wax. Transmission is by direct contact between animals and can also occur between cats and dogs.

Options for treatment are applying drops to the ears to kill the mites, or a monthly application of “**Advocate**” spot on. If drops are used treatment must be carried out for at least 14 days as they are unable to prevent eggs hatching. All in- contact animals should be treated at the same time.

NEUTERING

Neutering offers a number of advantages, as well as preventing the birth of unwanted kittens it will reduce behavioural characteristics that develop at puberty. The male will become territorial and often start to mark his territory by the spraying of strong smelling urine. He will also start to wander more and may become involved in fights with other cats or road accidents. The female will start to “call” to attract tomcats for about one week in every three throughout the breeding season (approximately January to September) until she is mated. In most cases it is desirable to neuter before puberty at around 6 months of age. This is also a good opportunity to insert a microchip before your cat starts to go further afield.

For further details please see our leaflet on “**Neutering your Cat**”.

HANDLING/DISCIPLINE

Your interaction with your new kitten begins during the ride home and all cats should be transported in some kind of carrier in the car. When you get home you should place the kitten in a small, quiet area with water and a litter tray. If possible, duplicate the type of litter material used in the previous home.



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When you start to introduce your kitten to the house you should begin the process calmly and ensure the first room you allow your new kitten to explore has been inspected for places where it might hide or get stuck. The kitten needs to be given time to investigate its new surroundings and this process can be helped by limiting the space available and initially supervising the kitten closely but not interfering with exploratory behaviour. After your new kitten has had some quiet time in a restricted location, you can slowly allow access to other areas of the home.

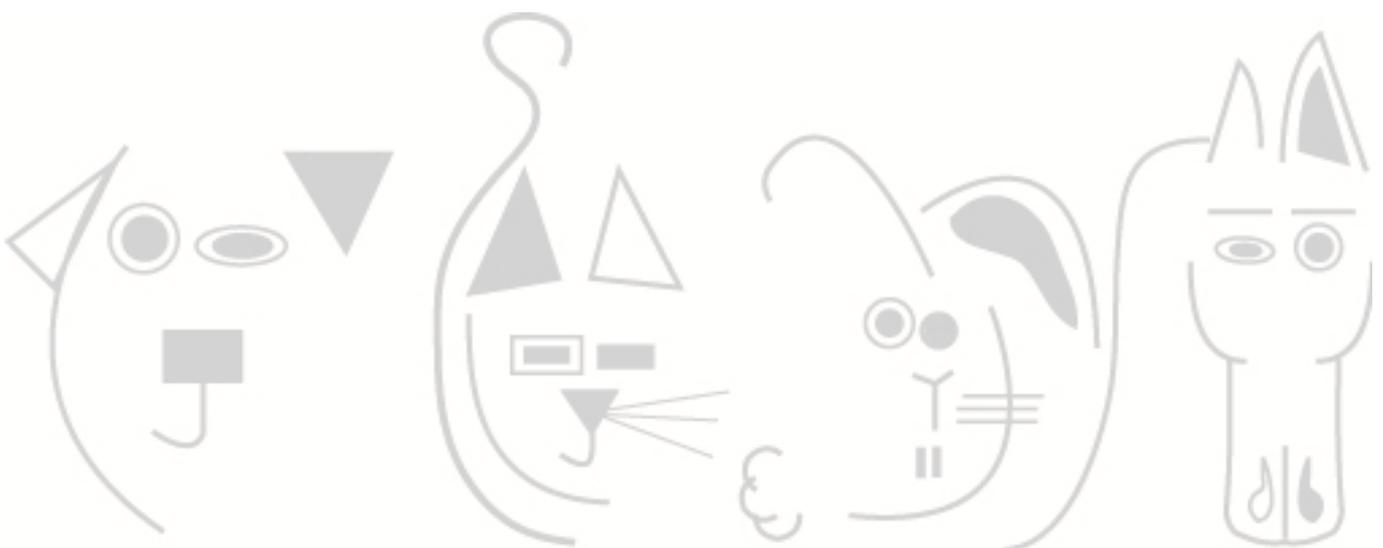
PLAY AND HANDLING

Kittens need plenty of outlets for play. Stalking and pouncing behaviours are important play behaviours in kittens and aid in developing coordination and muscular control. Sufficient outlets for these behaviours with toys and perhaps a playmate make humans less likely to be used as targets. Good toys are ones that move rapidly and are light enough to be picked up, but large enough so that they are not swallowed. Never use your hands or body parts for play. This can lead to dangerous play and human injury.

Depending on personality and early experiences as a kitten, your cat may enjoy, accept, or dislike, certain types of handling from stroking to bathing. In order for the cat to accept and enjoy a variety of types of physical contact from humans, it is important that the human hand is only associated with positive experiences and that all physical punishment is avoided.

You should begin with those types of handling that the cat enjoys or is willing to accept, and provide small treats at each of the first few sessions. Once the cat learns to associate food with these sessions, slightly longer or more intense sessions can be practised. Handling your cat in this way can be used to help the cat become accustomed to and enjoy, patting, grooming, tooth brushing, claw cutting and even bathing. Never force handling upon your cat as any negative experience will only make the problem worse and the cat more resistant to further handling.

It is important to remember that physical discipline is inappropriate. It can scare your cat and make him or her afraid of being picked up or held throughout its life.



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TOILET TRAINING

Initially we suggest the kitten be confined to a small area with an appropriate sized litter tray. This allows you to take advantage of a cat's tendency to eliminate in a loose material. As long as the litter is the only loose substrate available, and especially if it is the same as that used in the previous home, very little effort should be required to litter train the kitten. The other indoor area that may appeal to a cat is the soil around houseplants, avoiding access to houseplants except when under supervision should deal with this problem. Kittens will need to eliminate after they eat, after they wake up and after play. At these times place the kitten in its litter tray and praise him or her for toileting. A kitten does not need to be confined continuously, but should be supervised to prevent accidents and brought back frequently to the appropriate elimination location.

LIFETIME HEALTHCARE

PRIMARY VACCINATIONS

MICROCHIP IDENTIFICATION

ADVICE on BREEDING or NEUTERING

ADOLESCENT HEALTHCHECKS

ANNUAL VACCINATIONS and HEALTHCHECKS

FLEA and WORM CONTROL

NUTRITIONAL ADVICE and WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

DENTAL CARE

SENIOR HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

PRESCRIPTION DIET FOODS



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ADVICE FROM OUR NURSES

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BEHAVIOUR & ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT
GROOMING
NUTRITION and DIETARY ADVICE
WEIGHT CONTROL
DENTAL



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