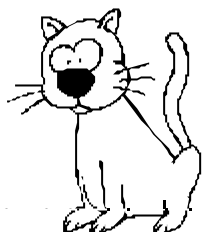


# KITTEN CARE



Congratulations on the arrival of your new kitten. At Cedar Veterinary Group we like to feel we are not only here to help when your cat becomes ill, but we are also interested in preventative care and this is why we have prepared this handout for you.

Before you get your kitten home there are some things you will need to get ready for him. There are a wide variety of cat beds on the market but very often cats will choose their own place to sleep. To help your kitten settle an old cardboard box with one side cut out can provide a very useful bed lined with an old blanket or jumper. You will need bowls for food and water that are easy to clean and can be kept separate from your own.

## **TOILET TRAINING**

Until your kitten is old enough to go outside, if you intend to let him, you will need a litter tray and cat litter. There are a number of suitable litters on the market and the litter tray should be deep enough to hold plenty of litter and wide enough for an adult cat to turn around inside. Encourage your kitten to use it by placing the tray in a quiet corner and putting him into the tray after every meal. If your kitten is scratching at the floor, turning in small circles and starting to crouch he is also about to pass something so, if you can, without upsetting him, pick him up and put him in the tray. If the tray is dirty your kitten will not want to use it, so make sure you clean up after him regularly. Do not clean the litter tray with any very strong smelling cleaners as this will discourage your kitten from using it, rather use a weak household bleach solution. As your kitten gets old enough to go outside start to slowly move the litter tray nearer to the cat flap or door every day. Then put it outside for a day or two and finally sprinkle a little litter wherever you wish your cat to go. Very often cats will choose to use a neighbour's garden rather than their own but if you can, try to keep them well away from children's play areas.

## **FEEDING**

Deciding which food to give your kitten needn't be as daunting as some of the supermarkets make it appear. Your kitten is best fed on a specifically produced kitten food. A lot of the pet food manufacturers are now realising that there is a difference in the nutritional requirements of adult cats and kittens and have therefore produced balanced diets for both. It is also not a good idea to change your kittens food when you first get him home, let him settle in first on the food he's been used to and then you can change it if you wish to. A kitten's stomach obviously isn't very large so while he is still small feed him four to five times a day, slowly reducing the number until by the time he is six months old he is on two meals a day. Very young kittens get all the nutrients they need from their mother's milk but as they get older and are eating solid foods cow's milk ( which has a reduced lactose content) can cause stomach upsets, so don't expect all adult cats to enjoy a saucer of milk. Make sure that you feed your kitten at the same time every day and if you are feeding a tinned food throw away any that is uneaten. It is also important to feed the food at room temperature, your kitten may be put off by cold food straight from the fridge.

## **BASIC TRAINING**

Cats as well as dogs need to have some basic training to make them acceptable members of your family. When your cat has done something that you wanted him to do reward him. The best reward for a cat is usually extra fuss and attention, but it must be immediate. If, however, he has done something that you didn't want him to don't punish him. Cats don't understand this kind of treatment and you will only convince him that humans are a very strange species and not to be trusted all the time. So make sure you are consistent in your treatment of your kitten, it isn't fair to confuse him by letting him do things one time and then stopping him the next. One problem you may find with your kitten is that he scratches at the furniture not realising that it wasn't put there for his benefit. To avoid this either make or buy a scratching post. Encourage your kitten to use it by hanging a toy from it and playing with him.

## **HEALTH CARE**

As with all young animals you need to keep a close eye on your kitten for any signs of ill health. One way you can do this and also help to build the relationship between you is by grooming. Most cats are fastidious groomers but they will all benefit from regular grooming and for the long haired cats it is especially important. We regularly have cats in for a 'dematt' which requires a general anaesthetic and often total shaving (we are not feline beauticians!) so the more you can groom your cat the better.

While you're grooming it will also give you the chance to find any problems such as skin parasites, cuts or lumps and bumps. You may not see any actual fleas but what you are more likely to find is the flea dirt. This looks like very small dark particles but if you put it onto damp paper you will see it spread out into red patches. To treat your cat for fleas there are a number of different products. You can choose between sprays, drops, collars and mousse. If you are not sure which one would be best for you we would be happy to help. It is also important to treat the house and we can supply a spray for this.

You will also need to worm your cat regularly. There are two main types of worm that your cat can get, roundworm and tapeworm. Cats can become infected with roundworm by eating worm eggs shed by infected cats but your kitten could become infected from his mother. So we advise you to worm your kitten when your first get him home and again in two weeks time. From then on we recommend worming every six months unless you see any signs of worms. Tapeworms can be picked up by your cat catching and eating infected 'intermediate' hosts. These can be rats, mice, birds and the cat flea and the most common way of seeing that your cat has tapeworm is to find what looks like grains of rice around their tail or wherever they have been lying. A word of warning, these 'grains of rice' can move, so don't be surprised if you see them wriggling! If your kitten grows up to be a great hunter we recommend that you worm him every month for tapeworm but if they don't catch a lot of animals then six monthly is sufficient ( at the same time as you worm him for roundworm). There are also various preparations for worming your cat which include liquid, granules, tablets and injection. We will be happy to help you decide which is best for your cat.

Your kitten will need vaccinating at 9 weeks of age and again at 12 weeks of age. The diseases you are protecting against are cat 'flu', infectious enteritis and also now available is a vaccine against leukaemia. Your cat will need a booster vaccination every year. We do very strongly recommend that you have these vaccinations done as all of the above diseases are definitely still around in the environment and can prove fatal to your cat.

If you are not going to breed from your cat you will need to think about having him/her neutered. Most cats are mature by six months of age and capable of producing kittens. The operations are very straight forward and your cats will be back to normal within a couple of days. They come into us in the morning and go home in the afternoon, the females need to come back ten days later to have their stitches out and should ideally be kept in at home until then. We do very strongly recommend that you have this done, not only for your cats benefit and to help stop the amount of unwanted cats around but also for your own peace, as there can be very little worse than cats of both sexes 'yowling' all night during the mating season.

Cats can cause a disturbance in other ways i.e. by fighting. You will get the odd cat who doesn't seem to get on with the neighbours and will often go looking for fights. There is very little you can do to stop this, if it is not your cat but another there are various tactics you can use to dissuade them from coming in your garden, if you are having a problem please speak to our Pet Health Advisor, Jo Scott, who will be happy to help.

We also very strongly recommend that you take out insurance for your kittens. We never know when accidents might happen and if you can have peace of mind about the financial side of things you can make sure every thing possible can be done for your cat.

Most important of all however, is that you enjoy your kittens while they are still young. To watch a kitten at play is one of the most enjoyable time wasters possible, so make the most of it and if you have any questions concerning the care of your cat or his behaviour please speak to our Pet Health Adviser Jo Scott who will be happy to help you with any problems.

