



Caring for Your Cat at Any Age

THE PURINA PET INSTITUTE'S
HEALTH AND WELLNESS GUIDE

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Congratulations! Whether you have shared your life with a cat (or cats!) for years or have just opened your home to a new kitten, you are in for quite an adventure. Cats may share certain traits, but they all have unique personalities and exhibit distinctive behaviors that endear them to their human companions. And they offer something very important to many of us: companionship. In fact, companionship was cited as the greatest benefit to owning a cat (61%) in the State of the American Pet Survey, done by the Purina Pet Institute in 2000. It has also been proven that cats can help lower blood pressure and relieve stress. No wonder cats are such popular pets!

So what can you do to repay the favor? Be a responsible cat owner. Learn what is expected of you and what you can expect from your cat, because the more you know, the better you can become at providing your cat with the best care possible. That's where this booklet comes in.

The Purina Pet Institute has developed this step-by-step guide to responsible cat ownership, for all life stages and levels of experience. It is meant to serve as a handy, factual reference tool and covers the basics of cat care, from selecting a cat to veterinary care, nutrition, grooming and many of the important milestones along the way.

This guide is not intended as a substitute for professional veterinary care, but can help you be an active partner in your cat's health care. Always consult your veterinarian for more information about your cat's health and behavior.

Here's to a long and healthy life with your special feline companion.





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Understand Your Obligations and Options

Despite their reputation for being “low maintenance” creatures, cats are nonetheless a huge responsibility. You should be familiar with cat behavior and know what to expect. Do your research. Cats are not like dogs nor should they be expected to be. Make sure you understand before you make this important decision that you are entering into a long-term commitment to provide daily care for a living creature that will be totally dependent on you. Things to consider include:

CAT BEHAVIOR – Cats are fascinating creatures with very distinctive, and instinctive behaviors. They are innately curious. They love to climb. They stalk. They scratch and often mark their territory. There are more than 30 registered breeds as well as mixed breeds that differ in looks and temperament. You should research the different breeds prior to selecting your pet. Some are very vocal, like the Siamese. Longhaired cats like the Persian require a great deal of grooming. Breeds such as the Devon Rex are active. Some breeds are also more susceptible to certain health problems, such as the tendency of Persians to develop upper respiratory problems. If you plan to adopt a mixed breed cat from a shelter, volunteers should be able to give you information on the cat’s personality and disposition. You should try to select a cat that best suits your personality and lifestyle. (You can visit <http://www.purina.com/cats/default.asp> and click on “breed selector” to complete a series of questions that will help determine the best type of cat for you.)

FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS – Can you realistically afford to own a cat? You should do a little upfront research about the costs involved, taking into consideration the annual costs for food, litter, grooming and other cat care supplies such as a brush and comb, litter box, cat carrier, collar or other form of identification, and vaccinations and other medical costs, which tend to be higher during your cat’s pediatric and senior years. Can you afford to provide medical care for your cat if he/she becomes ill or needs surgery or other medical care? Can you afford pet insurance? Are you able to save for an “emergency fund” if pet insurance is not an option? Will there be occasions when you need to board or hire a sitter for your cat? Can you afford this?

SPAY/NEUTER – According to the 2000 State of the American Pet survey of pet owners, nearly one quarter of pet owners have not had their pets spayed or neutered. The most common reason for this? They simply haven’t had the time (29 percent). Unless your cat or kitten is a purebred you intend to breed, it is very important that you have your cat spayed (for females) or neutered (for males). Not only does this help reduce the millions of unwanted pets that are euthanized each year, but there are also numerous health benefits: spayed females are less likely to develop uterine infections, mammary tumors and other health problems while neutered males have a reduced risk of developing prostate infections and testicular cancer. And both sexes may be calmer

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and more content after the procedure. The procedure also wards off unwanted behaviors in both sexes – from the loud, unnerving vocalizing and frenetic rubbing, jumping, rolling of females in heat that can last up to a week to the unpleasant urine “spraying,” roaming and fighting of intact males.

TIME COMMITMENT – Though cats may seem less social than dogs, it is important that you devote time to them so they receive regular mental and physical stimulation. Cats that are left alone too often or for too long may engage in excessive meowing or undesirable behaviors such as “missing” the litter box. Regardless of breed, all cats should be given regular “doses” of play or some type of physical activity to help ward off boredom and excess weight.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS – If you rent your home or apartment, are you certain your landlord allows pets? If required, can you afford to put down an additional deposit as a safeguard against any damage your pet may cause to your unit? Would you be willing to forgo the “perfect” apartment in the future if your cat is not allowed? Remember, responsible pet ownership is a lifelong commitment – returning your cat to a shelter should not be an option.

FAMILY MEMBERS AND ROOMMATES – Have you discussed your intentions to bring a new cat home with all family members or roommates in the home? Because it is important that everyone share in the cat’s care to some degree, this should be a unanimous decision – and the responsibilities of each member of the household regarding the cat’s care should be discussed and established upfront.

LOCAL LAWS – It is important that you know the pet laws in your community. Many communities require licenses and certain vaccinations, such as rabies, are required by law. For more information on the local pet laws in your community, talk to your veterinarian.

LIFE SPAN – On average, indoor cats live to their mid or late teens, but they can live into their early twenties. Ask yourself if you can honor the commitment to care for your cat for this length of time.



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Pet Selection

Considering getting a kitten or cat? There are cats of all ages in need of homes. Older cats can provide the perfect companion older individuals. Whether you get your cat or kitten from a breeder, shelter or neighbor's litter, the cat's **appearance, demeanor and living quarters** can tell you a lot about the health of the animal.

Other things to consider:

- The best time to adopt a kitten is between 10-14 weeks of age. However, the ideal age can vary depending on a number of factors. These include whether or not the kitten has been abandoned by its mother, whether or not he has siblings, the age at which he received his core vaccinations and how much human interaction he is having. The most important part of a kitten's development is to have as much contact with humans as possible, starting as young as 2 weeks of age. This socialization process helps kittens become more confident, outgoing and affectionate with people.
- If adopting a kitten, he/she should be outgoing, active, curious and alert. The kitten should not exhibit hostile behavior or fear.
- Make sure there is no discharge from the cat's nose or eyes, no skin irritations or red blotches and no bald patches.
- Look for a shiny coat, clean ears, white teeth and pink gums.
- Check around the tail to be certain there is no evidence of diarrhea or inflammation.
- Make sure the cat's living quarters are clean and odor-free.
- Do the cat's caregivers – whether that is a breeder, shelter volunteer or current pet owner – exhibit affection and concern for the animal?
- If selecting a purebred cat, ask to see at least one of the parents. You should also be given registration papers as well as a record of vaccinations and any other medical treatment the cat has received. The breeder should ask questions about the kind of care and home you will provide.

If you have a multi-cat household, try selecting a cat or kitten that has lived with other cats. A cat that is similar in age and sex to the resident cat will be accepted more readily. A kitten is ideal. Your veterinarian will also have suggestions for acclimating a new cat to the household.

Visit <http://www.purina.com/cats/default.asp> for more help selecting the right type of cat for you.



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Supplies

You should have the following basic supplies on hand at all times to provide your cat with complete and proper care:

FOOD – Because the cat food you select will likely be your cat's sole source of nutrition, it can have a large impact on his/her health and well being. Cat food labels can tell you a lot about the quality of the food, so you should do a little upfront research. Select a food that is 100% nutritionally complete and balanced, from a manufacturer you know and trust. If you have just acquired a cat, you will want to feed him/her whatever food he/she was previously fed if he/she is thriving. If you need to change foods, gradually transition to the new diet over a 7-to-10 day period by adding more of the new food and less of the old until the transition has been completed. For specifics on the proper food to feed for his/her age and weight, refer to the nutrition sections for kittens, adult cats and senior cats.

FOOD AND WATER BOWLS – You should select bowls that are easy to clean and heavy enough so they will not tip over. Glass, stainless steel or ceramic bowls are recommended because they can be sterilized. (Some cats do not respond well to plastic, so twin, stainless steel bowls in a holder are ideal.) Get into the habit of washing the bowls daily and always make sure there's plenty of clean, fresh water on hand at all times.

CARRIER – These come in various styles and materials. You should select one that is large enough so your cat can comfortably stand up and turn around when he/she is full-grown. It should also be well ventilated, secure and easy to clean.

LITTER BOX MATERIALS – Purchase a litter box, cat litter and scoop. Choose a pan large enough for a full-grown adult cat and deep enough so your cat will not scatter litter around when he/she scratches it. There are various types of Tidy Cats® brand cat box filler, including conventional clay, scoopable clay, crystals and Yesterday's News® brand Environmentally Friendly Cat Litter® made from recycled newspapers. Check out the Tidy Cats web site at www.tidycats.com to learn more about choosing a litter or transitioning to a new litter. If you are getting a new cat, you may have to try several different cat box fillers to determine which formula your cat likes best. If you have more than one cat, a general rule of thumb is to provide one litter box per cat, plus one extra. Even in a one-cat household, it is a good idea to have a litter box on each floor.

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BED – You should determine the appropriate place for your cat to sleep from the beginning, as it's very hard to break the habit of sharing the bed with you once it's formed. You may want to see what your cat prefers before you spend a lot of money on a fancy bed. You can start with a roomy cardboard box with sides high enough to block a draft. Line the box with an old cushion and any soft, washable material for warmth and keep it in a quiet area of the house. To encourage its use, put an old item of your clothing in the bed – your scent will help him/her feel secure.

SCRATCHING POST – Scratching is one of the most innate cat behaviors. It helps them clean away dead scales from their nails and to mark their territory both visually and with their scent. Having a scratching post in the house provides your cat with an acceptable target for his/her scratching. The post should be sturdy and tall enough that your cat can stretch out to full length when he/she is an adult.

I.D./COLLAR – Even an indoor cat should always wear a safety collar designed specifically for cats with an up-to-date identification tag in the event he/she escapes outdoors. Make sure the collar is made of flexible or breakaway material to lessen the likelihood of choking if it becomes entangled in something. You may also want to explore other, more reliable identification options with your veterinarian, such as microchipping or tattooing.

GROOMING TOOLS – Cats are notoriously clean and spend hours a day grooming themselves. However, you should still regularly groom your cat to help remove excess dead hair and dander, which will lessen the likelihood of hairballs. Establishing grooming as part of your cat's routine and rewarding him/her after each "session" will make it a pleasant experience. Select a comb and brush according to the length and texture of your cat's coat. You may also want to consider shampoo or cleaning cloths and dental care supplies made specifically for cats as regular dental care is an important part of grooming.

You will also need a nail trimmer made especially for cats. Indoor cats may need their claws clipped once a week because short claws will be less likely to harm furniture and get caught in fabric, which can be painful for the cat.

TOYS – Cats will play with anything that moves, rustles, rolls or sways and many of these "toys" are safe items already in the house, such as empty plastic thread spools, unshelled walnuts, cardboard toilet paper tubes or waxed paper balls. A catnip toy or feather is also a good choice. Although cats tend to enjoy playing with string or yarn, these are not recommended as they pose far more threats than benefits.



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Routine Health Care

Establishing routine health care in your home as well as with a trusted veterinarian is an important element of your cat's well being. Some important considerations regarding your cat's health:

YOUR VETERINARIAN – The veterinarian should be the primary source of healthcare information for cat owners. You may also want to look for a veterinarian who is a feline specialist. Regardless of who you choose, it's important that he/she is someone you and your cat like. You should feel comfortable asking questions and feel confident that you are getting those questions answered. If possible, the location and hours of your veterinarian's office should be convenient to you and your schedule. The office should be clean and orderly and the staff should be friendly, knowledgeable and helpful. If your veterinarian does not offer emergency care facilities late at night or on the weekend, make sure you identify the nearest 24-hour facility and keep the information accessible. (Also consider driving by the facility so you are familiar with its location.) Not sure how to select a veterinarian? Get a recommendation from a breeder, shelter or Humane Society or other cat owners in your neighborhood.

Important: If possible, make an appointment with your cat's veterinarian or a feline specialist before you bring your new cat home.

ROUTINE VETERINARY EXAMS – Establishing regular veterinary care throughout your cat's life has many important benefits – from identifying potential problems, to setting behavioral expectations to overall cost savings. Regardless of your cat's age or where he/she was acquired, he/she should receive thorough veterinary exams on a regular basis. These visits will likely include inspection of your cat's various organ systems including his/her eyes and ears, mouth, abdomen and coat as well his/her heart and breathing patterns. The veterinarian may also suggest tests to on a blood or stool sample.

DENTAL EXAMINATION – Regular dental care for your cat is important. Plaque buildup is the most common dental problem in cats and can lead to deposits of hardened calculus on the tooth surface that, left unchecked, can cause inflammation of the gums. This condition can worsen until the teeth eventually loosen and fall out. To prevent this, begin regular at-home dental care early in your cat's life. Gently rub around your cat's cheeks, mouth and gums so he/she becomes accustomed to this form of touch.

To clean the teeth, gently wipe the outer surface with a gauze pad dipped in a paste of baking soda and water or use a toothpaste formulated especially for cats. Feeding a dry, crunchy cat food and tartar control treats are other good preventative measures, because as your cat chews, particles from the dry food act like a toothbrush and scrape against the teeth to help remove plaque. And don't forget regular dental exams by a veterinarian.



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SPAY/NEUTER – Unless you have a purebred cat for breeding purposes, it is very important that you have your cat spayed or neutered as early as possible. Check with your veterinarian to determine the best time for the procedure. This helps prevent unwanted litters and manage overpopulation, and may improve your cat’s disposition and prevent undesirable behaviors such as urinating or “spraying.” Spaying also helps reduce the risk of uterine infections, tumors of the reproductive system and hormonal imbalances, while neutering lessens the likelihood of testicular cancer and behaviors such as aggression and “roaming.”

CLAW CARE – Clawing is a natural behavior, but one that can be stressful for you if your cat claws on your furniture. However, you can alter this behavior so that it is performed on an acceptable target. Teaching a cat or kitten to use a scratching post and regularly clipping his/her nails can usually solve the problem of objectionable clawing. (If your cat’s claws start snagging - on fabric or on you - it’s a good indication that they need clipping.) Your veterinarian can show you how to clip the nail correctly.

Whether or not to declaw your cat is a very serious and irreversible decision, so you should discuss your options with your veterinarian before making such a decision. There are other options, including regular trimming of nails, nail covers and tendonec-tomies. Your cat will likely allow regular trimming of his/her nails if you begin regularly handling the paws at a young age (gently touching or petting them).

If you do choose to declaw your cat, veterinarians recommend Yesterday’s News™ cat litter for post-surgical use because larger pellets won’t get caught in sutures. To learn more visit www.yesterday’snews.com.



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COAT & BODY

Smooth, thick, shiny coat. Free of lumps, tumors, ticks, fleas, greasiness, dandruff and bare patches. When scanning the body, pay attention to the nose, ears and eyes. Nose should be moist and free of discharge or sores. Eyes should be bright and clear without discharge, irritation, discoloration, tearing or cloudiness.

ACTIVITY

No changes in activity level. Make sure your cat is not showing signs of stiffness, pain or limping when walking. Also watch out for excessive panting or changes in breathing patterns when engaging in physical activity. Make sure your cat is getting the proper activity on a daily basis.

TEETH

No evidence of excessive tartar build-up. Pink gums with no redness or swelling, bad breath, sores or growths.

SENSES

Any changes in response to smells, the sound of your voice, tastes; etc. Such changes are often signs that you cat is getting older and his senses are becoming dull.

CHANGES IN YOUR CAT'S

EATING AND DRINKING Any changes in appetite or the amount of food and water normally consumed.

URINE AND BOWEL MOVEMENTS Any changes in elimination habits, including appearance of waste. There should be no signs of pain when your cat urinates or defecates. Anus should be free from swelling, with no evidence of internal parasites (excessive scratching, licking or chewing in this area are signs.)

ATTITUDE

Any changes in normal responsiveness and interaction with family, sleeping or meowing patterns, signs of confusion, disorientation or lethargy.

NUTRITION

Kittens, cats and senior cats have different nutritional requirements so be sure to provide your cat with food that is appropriate for his/her age. Is your cat in ideal body condition? Ask your veterinarian to do a Body Condition Score to make sure your cat is not carrying too much weight for his breed and size. Or perform a Purina Rib Check:

1. Begin by placing both thumbs on your cat's backbone. Run your fingers along the rib cage. If you can't easily feel the bony part of each rib, your cat may need to lose weight.
2. While your cat is standing, stand directly over him/her and look down at him/her. You should see a clearly defined waist behind the ribs. If your cat doesn't have an "hour glass" figure, he/she may be carrying extra pounds.
3. Check your cat's profile. If you don't see a clearly defined abdomen tucked up behind his/her rib cage, he/she is probably overweight.



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Proper nutrition

Cats have gotten their reputation for being finicky not necessarily because it's their nature. It's usually because of the way we, their owners, feed them. The more variety a cat is offered, the more likely he/she will develop finicky eating habits. The best advice is to provide a 100% nutritionally complete and balanced cat food that your cat likes and stick with it. This will likely be your cat's sole source of nutrition, so it should include the proper levels of vitamins, minerals, protein, calories and fat for the life stage. Use the feeding instructions on the cat food label as a guideline, and monitor your cat's body condition to avoid overfeeding. You may need to decrease or increase the amount to meet your cat's needs.

The following are important considerations:

FEEDING SCHEDULE – Consistency is key. Feed your cat at the same time and in the same place each day. If feeding a dry cat food, you can put out a whole day's supply in the morning or feed half in the morning and half at night. It is recommended that you place the food and water dishes in an area away from foot traffic, noise and your cat's litter box. You should also use your cat's name in a pleasant tone when feeding him/her. This can help to reinforce your cat's name while associating it with a pleasant activity.

WHAT AND HOW MUCH TO FEED – Nutritional requirements differ by age and size. Due to their rapid growth and high energy level, kittens, like babies, need their own specially formulated food. So do senior cats, because their energy requirements are lower but it is still important to maintain lean body mass. The average 7-to-9 pound cat, with normal activity, requires about one eight-ounce measuring cup of dry or semi moist food per day.



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WHAT NOT TO FEED – Cats are carnivores with very specific nutrient requirements. Often, out of love, many cat owners will supplement their cat’s diet with “people food” or scraps. It’s best to avoid feeding the following:

- Some people food, such as chocolate, can be toxic to cats. Others, including dairy products, can cause digestive upsets in some cats.
- Because of their need for high levels of protein and other nutrients, never feed your cat an exclusively vegetarian diet.
- Avoid raw foods, as they can create problems. (Raw eggs can cause a deficiency of the vitamin biotin, which can lead to dermatitis, hair loss, and poor growth; some raw fish can cause a deficiency of the vitamin thiamine; raw meat may contain parasites; and raw liver can cause vitamin A toxicity.)
- Avoid bones, especially pork or poultry bones, may splinter and lodge in a cat’s mouth or throat.
- Avoid human medications, unless prescribed by your veterinarian, as they can be deadly to cats.

TREATS – If you want to reward your cat with a treat, read the guidelines on the packaging so you do not overindulge your cat. Keep a food and treat log on the refrigerator to track the type and number of treats you and other family members feed him/her daily.

SWITCHING FOOD – To avoid turning your cat into a finicky eater, try using one cat food exclusively. If you must switch foods, such as transitioning from a kitten to an adult food, do so gradually over the course of 7-10 days to avoid digestive upsets.

FRESH WATER – Provide your cat with fresh, clean water daily. Avoid milk or other liquids as they may cause intestinal upsets.



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Obesity Prevention

Obesity is the number one nutritional disorder among cats in the U.S. It can shorten a cat's life span, impair heart and breathing functions, cause digestive distress, impair liver function and lead to diabetes. Due to a cat's small size, it only takes a few extra pounds for obesity to become an issue. (For instance, a cat that is just three pounds over his/her optimum weight of 10 pounds is the equivalent of a woman with an optimum weight of 120 pounds weighing 156 pounds.) Some general guidelines to keep your cat's weight in check:

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES – Avoid feeding table scraps and excessive treats and, rather than filling the bowl, measure the food. Adjust the amount fed to maintain your cat's lean, trim figure. Make sure every member of the family knows and complies with these rules. You may also consider switching to a lower-calorie food if your cat's activity level slows down.

WEIGHT MONITORING – Unfortunately, few owners know how to tell if their cat is overweight. A few easy hands-on and visual checks can help you be on the lookout for signs of obesity before serious health problems develop: the Purina® Rib Check™ and Purina® Body Condition System®:

- 1. Purina® Rib Check™** – Once a month, place both thumbs on your cat's backbone. Run your fingers along the rib cage. If you can't easily feel the bony part of each rib, he/she may need to lose weight. Also stand directly over your cat as he/she is standing and look down at him/her – you should see a slight indentation or waist behind the ribs. If your cat curves out instead of in, he/she may be carrying extra pounds. Finally, check your cat's profile. If you don't see a clearly defined abdomen tucked up behind your cat's rib cage, he/she is probably overweight.
- 2. Purina® Body Condition System®** – Visually assess your cat's BCS, against the chart below. The Purina BCS was developed by veterinarians and scientifically verified as one of the most accurate tools for estimating body composition. Your veterinarian should confirm your suspicions and can help you choose the proper weight management plan for your cat.



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BODY CONDITION CHART



1 Emaciated

Ribs visible on shorthaired cats; no palpable fat; severe abdominal tuck; lumbar vertebrae and wing of ilia easily palpated.



2 Very Thin

Shared characteristics of BCS 1 and 3.



3 Thin

Ribs easily palpable with minimal fat covering; lumbar vertebrae obvious; obvious waist behind ribs; minimal abdominal fat.



4 Underweight

Shared characteristics of BCS 3 and 5.



5 Ideal

Well proportioned; observe waist behind ribs; ribs palpable with slight fat covering; abdominal fat pad minimal.



6 Overweight

Shared characteristics of BCS 5 and 7.



7 Heavy

Ribs not easily palpated with moderate fat covering; waist poorly discernable; obvious rounding of abdomen; moderate abdominal fat pad.



8 Obese

Shared characteristics of BCS 7 and 9.



9 Grossly Obese

Ribs not palpable under heavy fat cover; heavy fat deposits over lumbar area, face and limbs; distention of abdomen with no waist; extensive abdominal fat deposits.





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PLAY AS EXERCISE – In order to stave off extra pounds, cats must burn the calories they consume. The best way to do this is through regular calorie control plus exercise. Exercise is also a great way for you to bond and stimulate your cat’s instincts. Toys, perches and cat “trees” can all provide some measure of physical activity. You may also want to initiate some activities with your cat, including:

- **Peek-A-Boo:** Crawl behind a doorway or furniture and say your cat’s name in a high-pitched voice. When your cat locates you, pet or nuzzle him/her as a reward. Then find a new hiding location and repeat the game.
- **Chase:** Flick a crumbled piece of paper or small stuffed mouse across the floor for your cat to chase. Some cats can learn how to fetch and will return for another round.
- **Flashlight:** Turn on a flashlight in a darkened room and wave it around so the beam of light “dances” around the room. Your cat will likely chase the light (just don’t shine it in your cat’s eyes.)
- **Feather toy:** Attach a feather toy to a kitty fishing pole. As you move the pole the feather dances in all directions exciting your cat and awakening his natural predatory and pounce behaviors.



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Cats, and especially kittens, are playful, naturally curious creatures. They are always looking for a new place to explore, which can pose certain dangers. Try to think like a cat and be on the lookout for those places and objects that may catch your cat's attention. (Keep in mind that they have a lower vantage point than you and may be attracted to things that you do not see when you are standing.) Here are some suggestions to keep your cat safe:

SECURE POISONOUS MATERIALS – Common household materials such as laundry detergent, antifreeze, disinfectants, pesticides, rodent poisons, insecticides, cleaning fluid, fertilizer and mothballs can be deadly. Store all harmful substances in tightly closed areas where your cat cannot gain access. Keep your cat out of areas that are being cleaned.

SECURE HIGH PLACES – Windows, balconies, upper porches and high decks are all dangerous places. Keep your cat away from these when you are not there to supervise and make sure these places are secured to prevent accidents.

KEEP DANGEROUS OBJECTS OUT OF REACH – Don't leave nails, needles, staples, push pins, and aluminum can tabs or items such as buttons, string, ribbon, yarn, thread and dental floss where a cat can chew and swallow them. Don't put used dental floss in the trash; rather, flush it in the toilet to keep it out of your cat's reach. Store plastic bags where your cat can't get inside them and suffocate or chew or tear them, swallowing bits of plastic.

KEEP DANGEROUS PLACES CLOSED – Cabinets, dresser drawers and washing machine/dryer doors should remain closed at all times as your cat could become trapped inside. Keep toilet lids down too, as cats may play in the water and the lid could close and trap them. Also, residual toilet bowl cleanser left in the bowl is harmful if swallowed.

USE CAUTION WITH MEDICATIONS – You should never give your cat any medications unless under the directions of a veterinarian, as many medications that are used safely in humans can be deadly for cats. Also, store any prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs in closed cabinets. Many human medications, vitamins and diet pills can be potentially lethal, even in small dosages. (Just one extra-strength acetaminophen tablet (500mg) can kill a 7 lb. cat.)



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PROTECT EXPOSED ELECTRICAL WIRES – Cover electrical wires with special plastic covers or cover with a harmless but unpleasant-tasting substance such as lemon juice to prevent the risk of injury from chewing.

DO NOT KEEP POISONOUS PLANTS IN THE HOUSE – Many common household plants such as philodendron, English ivy, dieffenbachia, and caladium are poisonous. Ask your veterinarian for a complete list of hazardous plants and avoid keeping those in the house. If you decide to have any of those plants, place them in hanging baskets completely out of your cat's reach. The ASPCA National Animal Poison Control Center at 888-4ANI-HELP (888-426-4435). There is a consultation fee.

KEEP FOOD OFF COUNTERS, TABLES OR OTHER EASILY-ACCESSIBLE PLACES – as some people food, such as chocolate and onions, are toxic to cats.

CONDUCT A "PET CHECK" – Get in the habit of conducting a "pet check" before leaving home to make sure that your cat has not accidentally been locked in a closet or empty room.



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Training

Contrary to popular belief, cats can be trained. However, their behavior is largely based on instinct and the way you react and the training techniques you use will affect how your cat or kitten responds to training. In general, the earlier you start training, the better, but cats' behavior can be modified at any age. One rule of thumb: always be gentle; never resort to yelling or physical threats as it will damage the relationship you have with your cat. Some additional tips:

HOUSETRAINING/LITTER BOX – Cats and kittens instinctively bury their waste after eliminating so housetraining is usually relatively easy. As soon as you bring your cat or kitten home, show him/her where the litter box is located. Make sure the litter box is easy for your cat to access and is in a quiet, private location. Children should be instructed never to bother a cat who is using the litter box. If you have acquired a kitten, you should stimulate the kitten's natural instincts in the litter box by holding his/her paw and "pawing" at the litter. Make sure you clean the litter box daily, remove all solid waste and any urine saturated litter. If your cat takes to using another, unacceptable location, it may be because the litter is dirty or he doesn't like the type of litter you are using. It may also be a sign of a serious health problem or behavioral issues so if these "hit or miss" behaviors continue, consult your veterinarian.

CARRIER/CRATE TRAINING – The cat's carrier should be kept in a location that is always visible to the cat so he/she does not become startled or agitated by its presence when it's time to take him/her to the veterinarian. Placing a blanket or article of your clothing with your scent on it, a favorite toy or catnip in the carrier is a great way to encourage its use. Or only feed treats in the carrier so he/she learns to associate it with a pleasant experience.

If you plan to include your cat in your travel plans, get him/her used to riding in the car. Take him/her on short car trips in his/her crate or in a safety harness. Make sure your cat is secure in the car – your cat should never be allowed to sit on your lap as he/she could be injured in the event of an accident. If going on a longer trip, bring your cat's food, water, medication, litter box and litter, favorite toys, identification and important medical papers.



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MANAGING UNWANTED BEHAVIORS – Most unwanted behaviors can be corrected, regardless of whether or not they are instinctual. One rule of thumb: you should never hit or yell at your cat as it can damage his/her trust. Some other general guidelines:

• **Scratching** – Scratching is one of your cat’s most natural behaviors and the one most owners dislike. The key to getting your cat to use a scratching post instead of your furniture is to make the post more appealing than other objects in the house. You can do this by putting it in an ideal location near a large window or his/her favorite napping spot, placing your cat’s treats or catnip on the post or by playing with your cat often near or around his/her post. Stimulate your cat’s urge to scratch by petting him/her with firm strokes down the neck and back, and try to place the scratching post near your cat’s bed to encourage its use when he/she wakes up and stretches. When your cat uses the scratching post, reward him/her with praise. If your cat has already started scratching something, cover it with plastic or double-faced tape and he/she will likely turn to the post instead. Consult your veterinarian if scratching of unacceptable objects continues to be an issue.

• **Aggressive behaviors like nipping or biting** – If you have a new kitten, you shouldn’t allow him/her to bite or nip at your hands, even in a playful manner, as the behavior will likely continue through adulthood. If your cat already engages in this behavior, take immediate steps to correct it and be consistent. Disengage your hand by gently pushing towards your cat (if you try to pull away, he/she will hang on even tighter). Give your cat toys instead of your hand. Or give your cat a “time out” – put your cat alone in a room for a few minutes and let him/her out only after he/she has calmed down.

• **Climbing on countertops and other “off limits” places** – Climbing is an instinctual behavior so it’s no surprise that you may find your cat perched on top of the highest spots in the house – on countertops, above cabinets and refrigerators and atop high window ledges. If you object to your cat using a particular location, you’ll need to make the location less appealing and create a more acceptable and pleasing alternative. Place double-sided tape or a few empty soda cans filled with a few coins along the ledges of these spots – your cat will likely knock them over and be startled by the noise. Or place a cat tree in front of a window and put catnip on the different “branches” of the tree to encourage its use.



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• **Nocturnal play** – Cats are nocturnal animals that instinctively sleep in the daytime and “hunt” at night. If your cat’s schedule is keeping you up at night, try feeding your cat’s last meal earlier in the evening. Also play with your cat early in the evening to release any pent-up energy before you go to bed. And avoid playing with your cat or feed him/her right after he/she awakens you, as this may reinforce the behavior.

• **“Talking” for attention** – Some cats are more vocal than others but loud or constant meowing, commonly called “talking,” may be your cat’s way of telling you he/she is lonely, anxious or bored. Notice when your cat engages in “talking” and how you respond. If he/she is most vocal when you return home after being gone for hours, he/she may just be lonely so get in the habit of playing with your cat for a few minutes when you get home. If he/she is very vocal in the morning while you are still in bed and you get up to feed or lavish attention on your cat, you may be reinforcing the behavior. Try ignoring your cat or, at the very least, do not reward the behavior with food or attention.



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Socialization

Positive experiences with people and other pets early will help make your cat a well-adjusted pet. It may take some time and effort to acclimate your kitten or cat to family members and other pets but follow these guidelines:

CHILDREN – Introduce the cat gradually, during short, supervised periods of time. Frequent handling and gentle play are important but children must understand cats are sensitive, living creatures with limits. Teach children how to pick up a cat and hold him/her appropriately by slipping one hand under his/her chest, holding the front legs gently but firmly with your fingers and at the same time, cupping the other hand under his/her hindquarters. Many cats, however, will resist being picked up so teach children how to identify when your cat is agitated (body language such as a twitching tail or low ears).

You should teach children boundaries – no pulling the cat’s tail or ears, squeezing, poking or chasing him/her or making loud, threatening noises.

OTHER PETS – Introduce other pets with care and caution. Most cats will accept a new kitten gradually but do not leave them alone together until they are friends. After a few days of isolation for your kitten, try putting the two in the same room but with their food and water dishes at opposite sides. That will keep the older pet from feeling threatened. It may take longer to introduce older cats or cats and dogs but in general, they will eventually get along. In multiple-cat households, most cats are able to arrive at a compromise without a face-off, as long as each cat has enough territory to satisfy his/her sense of ownership. For instance, Cat 1 rules the first floor, while Cat 2 rules the second. Problems result when there is not enough territory to go around.

VISITORS – Cats prefer the status quo so any change, particularly new people, can make your cat uncomfortable or even hostile. Never force your cat to interact with a guest. Rather, let him gradually get acquainted on his/her own terms (some cats will remain in hiding though, which is acceptable if they are more timid in nature.)



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Believe it or not, grooming is a great way to gauge your cat's health because inflamed areas, itchiness, sudden loss of hair, lumps and tenderness may signal illness. Regular grooming also helps prevent hairballs.

If possible, introduce grooming early and perform it regularly, especially during the spring and fall when there may be heavier shedding. Start with short sessions and reassure and praise your cat as you groom him/her to reinforce it as a pleasant experience. Bathing is usually unnecessary. Kittens are especially sensitive to catching colds so bathing should be done only if absolutely necessary. Also, never trim your cat's whiskers as they help him "sense" the world around him.

LONGHAired CATS – Use a long-toothed metal comb and a stiff brush daily to manipulate the haircoat against the way it lies so it is fluffy when you finish

SHORTHAired CATS – Groom weekly with a soft rubber brush or hand mitt with short bristles.



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Warm Weather Cautions

Mingled with the joys of summer are possible dangers to our pets. Being aware of threats to their comfort and safety can make summertime living easier for pets and pet owners alike.

HEARTWORM - Summer means mosquitoes and the danger of heartworm disease.

Contrary to popular belief, cats can also become infected, but the incidence is lower. If you live in an area with a heavy mosquito infestation, ask your veterinarian about heartworm protection for your cat.

FLEAS - Your veterinarian can recommend flea control products for your pet and its environment. Just be certain that any product you use for your cat is labeled safe for cats.

FOOTPAD PROBLEMS - Hot pavement, sticky tar or gravel may cause footpad problems. To remove tar from footpads, rub them with petroleum jelly and then gently wash with mild soap and water and rinse thoroughly. Never use kerosene or turpentine to remove tar. These chemicals irritate the skin and can be toxic to your pet.

PROVIDING PLENTY OF COOL, FRESH WATER - will help keep your pet cool throughout the summer.

MAINTAINING A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT - for our pets is important. Pets who are left outside should have plenty of shade and cool water.

CONFINEMENT IN A CAR OR ANY OTHER POORLY VENTILATED ENCLOSURE CAN BE FATAL TO A PET - One study reports that when the outside temperature is 78 degrees Fahrenheit, a closed car will reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit in five minutes, and 110 degrees in 25 minutes. This can quickly lead to hyperthermia, which can be fatal.

AS TEMPERATURES SOAR, PETS BECOME MORE VULNERABLE TO HEAT STRESS - Kittens and geriatric cats tend to be more susceptible. Others at risk include short-nosed breeds, like the Persian cats; overweight pets; pets with cardiac or respiratory disorders; and those who recently moved from cool to warmer climates.



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HEATSTROKE - is the most common kind of heat stress. It develops rapidly and is often associated with exposure to high temperatures, humidity and poor ventilation. Symptoms include panting, a staring or anxious expression, failure to respond to commands, warm, dry skin, extremely high temperature, dehydration, rapid heartbeat and collapse.

To treat heatstroke, immerse the pet in cool water or soak it with a garden hose to help lower its body temperature. A gentle breeze from a fan may also be used. With any form of heat stress, prompt veterinary attention is important.

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Cold Weather Cautions

The cold winter months present special concerns to cat owners, particularly if your cat is kept or allowed outdoors.

PROPER NOURISHMENT - is a prime consideration. Well-nourished pets, particularly those housed outdoors, are better prepared to withstand the rigors of winter. Outdoor pets normally need more food to generate enough energy to cope with the cold. This is easily accomplished by feeding a high-quality nutritionally complete and balanced cat food. You don't need any supplements unless your veterinarian recommends them for a health condition. If this is the case, chances are your pet should not be housed outside.

ALONG WITH A GOOD DIET, OUTDOOR PETS NEED FRESH WATER - They cannot eat snow in sufficient amounts to prevent dehydration. Offer your cat fresh water several times during the day. Electrically-heated water bowls are available but they must be installed safely and monitored regularly.

OUTDOOR PETS NEED HOUSING TO HIDE FROM SEVERE COLD - Your cat's shelter should be insulated, elevated, protected from prevailing winds and watertight. Because they use their own body to keep warm, the shelter should be small enough to preserve your cat's body heat. Bedding should be kept clean and dry.

You may also want to make "paw checks" a regular part of your winter care routine. Remove packed snow or ice from between the toes of your pet's paw pads and wipe the paws thoroughly. Otherwise, moisture can be trapped and cause sores. Salt and other de-icers spread on sidewalks and roads may also irritate the pads and cause them to bleed.

DAMPNESS IS A WINTER DANGER - Dry your cat if he/she gets wet and do all you can to keep him/her dry.

ANTIFREEZE - Another winter danger is antifreeze, which is toxic to pets. Cats are attracted to it because of its sweet taste and lap it up when it is not properly disposed of. Store antifreeze where your cat cannot reach it. Anti-freeze poisoning is serious and requires immediate veterinary treatment.

DRY SKIN AND SHEDDING - You may find your cat experiencing dry skin and shedding. This is usually the result of low humidity. Frequent brushing helps remove dead hairs, skin and stimulates oil glands.



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FIREPLACES - Although a fire in the fireplace is cozy, it may create problems for pets. If your cat lies too close to the fire, he/she could be in danger of hot cinders or sparks. Fireplace heat also contributes to dry skin and fumes from the fireplace may cause respiratory problems in some pets. Keep fireplaces screened and train pets to keep a safe distance.

FROSTBITE - Sometimes a cat may accidentally be left outside or become lost during a heavy snowstorm. Frostbite may result. Signs are flushed and reddened tissues, white or grayish tissues, evidence of shock and scaliness of skin and possible shedding of dead skin. The ears, paw pads and tail are more frequently affected.

Let's hope your cat never experiences frostbite. If the unthinkable happens, please remember – frozen tissues should never be rubbed. This causes additional tissue damage. Prompt veterinary treatment is needed. If this is not possible, warm the affected area rapidly by immersing in warm, never hot, water or by using warm, moist towels that are changed frequently. As soon as the affected tissues become flushed, discontinue warming. Gently dry the affected tissues and lightly cover with a clean, dry, non-adhering bandage. A cat who has suffered from frostbite should be protected from exposure to the cold, as frostbitten tissues are more susceptible to repeated freezing.

KITTENS AND GERIATRIC CATS ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE - during harsh winter weather. Please give them extra attention. If you have any concerns about your pet's well-being and health during the cold months or would like general guidelines on appropriate environmental temperature ranges, consult your veterinarian.



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Boarding vs. Home Alone

If you are traveling, you may want to consider boarding your cat. Cats can be safely left at home alone for up to three or four days, provided they are left with enough food and water and have access to a clean litter box. If you decide to leave your cat home alone while you travel, you may want to have a neighbor check in on him/her once or twice. If traveling for more than a few days at a time, consider boarding your cat. Ask your veterinarian to recommend a respected place to board your cat while you are out of town.



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Caring for an Ill Pet

Despite your best efforts to the contrary, there may be times when your cat becomes ill or encounters a medical emergency. The following should keep you prepared for both:

KEEP IMPORTANT INFORMATION HANDY – Saving time is crucial in any emergency. Phone numbers of the veterinarian, nearest poison control center, and closest emergency veterinary care facility should be kept at hand. (You can fill out the emergency preparedness form.)

KEEP A WELL-STOCKED FIRST AID KIT – Stock a first aid kit with sterile gauze, bandages, sterile eyewash, tweezers, cold pack, rectal thermometer, towel and gloves.

CALL AHEAD – Always call ahead to alert the veterinary staff that an emergency is on the way.

SYMPTOMS THAT MAY INDICATE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY – Unfortunately, even with good care, your cat may not always be in the best of health. Signs that indicate your cat may need veterinary attention:

1. Frequent sneezing or coughing spells
2. Severe diarrhea for more than 24 hours or that's accompanied by other signs of illness
3. Vomiting for a day
4. Persistent vomiting or vomiting of blood or greenish-yellow bile
5. Labored breathing or panting
6. Straining to urinate or blood in the urine
7. Excessive thirst and urination
8. Acute swelling or body lumps
9. Lameness or pain
10. Loss of appetite for two days
11. Sudden weight gain or loss
12. Red, watery eyes or nasal discharge
13. Lying or crouching listlessly
14. Failure to groom or use the litter box or other changes in litter box behaviors, including more frequent trips to the litter box
15. Hiding in dark places for a long period of time
16. Resenting or resisting handling
17. Scratching or biting by a normally even-tempered cat



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PROVIDING FIRST AID FOR COMMON EMERGENCIES – In an emergency, try to remain calm and think clearly. Approach your injured cat in a quiet, non-threatening manner and speak in a soothing tone as you call him/her by name. If possible, ask someone for help with emergency measures because an injured cat is usually not a cooperative patient. You may need to restrain the cat by wrapping him/her in a small blanket or towel.

Immediate veterinary care is recommended if your cat encounters any of the following medical emergencies:

1. Auto accident
2. Heat stroke
3. Frostbite
4. Poison
5. Poisonous plants
6. Objects stuck in the mouth
7. Electric shock
8. Wounds
9. Severe falls



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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS WORKSHEET

Prompt veterinary care is crucial in the case of a medical emergency, so fill out the form below and place it in a convenient location such as on your refrigerator or near the phone.

NAME OF VETERINARIAN: _____

ADDRESS OF VETERINARIAN: _____

VETERINARIAN PHONE NUMBER: _____

VETERINARIAN CLINIC HOURS: _____

EMERGENCY CLINIC NUMBER: _____

EMERGENCY CLINIC NUMBER: _____

POISON CONTROL: 888-4ANI-HELP (888-426-4435)



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HOW OLD IS YOUR CAT?

Approximate age comparison of a cat in human years

CAT'S AGE	HUMAN YEARS
1 YEARS	15
2 YEARS	28
3 YEARS	24
4 YEARS	29
5 YEARS	34
6 YEARS	38
7 YEARS	42
8 YEARS	46
9 YEARS	50
10 YEARS	54
11 YEARS	58
12 YEARS	62
13 YEARS	66
14 YEARS	70
15 YEARS	74
16 YEARS	78
17 YEARS	82
18 YEARS	86
19 YEARS	90
20 YEARS	94



pediatric kittens

Nutrition

Kittens have special nutritional needs, so look for a food that's specially formulated with extra protein, vitamins and minerals that kittens need. While your kitten is young, you can moisten his/her food with one part warm water to four parts dry kitten food to encourage him/her to eat.

Use the recommended feeding guidelines on your kitten food bag as a starting point on how much to feed your kitten. Since kittens are individuals, how much you should feed will depend on your kitten's size, activity level and metabolism. Watch your kitten carefully to make sure it doesn't become overweight. Other tips:

- Feed your kitten at the same time and in the same place each day.
- From 3-to-6 months, feed a measured amount, three or four times a day.
- Kittens tend to be nibblers; don't consider this as unusual or as an aversion to food. It's perfectly normal.
- If you are feeding a nutritionally complete and balanced kitten food, there is no need to add any supplements unless recommended by a veterinarian.
- Bad habits start at this age, so avoid giving your kitten table scraps or excessive treats. You will not only create a finicky eater, but also an overweight kitten.
- A kitten should not be fed dog or puppy food. Kittens have unique nutritional needs that are not met with these foods.
- If milk is being fed, it should only be given as a treat, not as a meal. It should be at room temperature and should not represent a major portion of the diet. Some cats do not digest milk well and may develop diarrhea.
- Always keep fresh water available.
- Once your kitten reaches 12 months, he/she is officially an adult and is ready to make the gradual transition to an adult food. Start by gradually adding the new food while reducing the proportion of the previous food until, by the 10th day, your kitten is only being fed the new food.

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pediatric kittens

cats

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Behavior and Training

The best time to bring your kitten home is after he/she is weaned and before he/she becomes too accustomed to the place of his/her birth. Ten to fourteen weeks is an ideal age because the kitten is old enough to eat solid food but young enough to become bonded to you and his/her new home. It is also a good idea to bring your new kitten home on a long, holiday weekend. This allows you to devote more time and effort strictly for the comfort and care of your new feline companion.

If you are introducing your kitten into a home with an existing cat(s) or dog(s), allow time for the pets to get acquainted and supervise these “visits.” Unless your kitten is in danger of being bitten or worse, try to avoid intervening in these “get-to-know-you” sessions – if you take sides, showing preferences or breaking up fights, you may make matters worse. Just give them plenty of time – the longer the cats are left together the more they will tolerate each other’s presence.

Your kitten will need time to adjust to its new environment, and understanding this is the first step in getting off to a positive start. Place your kitten in a small, quiet place with food and a litter box. As it becomes more comfortable, you can gradually allow it access to other rooms in the house. Talk quietly to your kitten and gently pet it. Set a regular time and place for feeding your kitten.

Try to accustom your kitten to many things at young age, so he/she accepts being handled by people. Regular petting, brushing, and stroking of your kitten’s teeth, mouth and paws are important and will help make home health checks a breeze.

Gradually introduce your kitten to new people and environments, so he/she is well socialized and feels more at ease in the presence of unfamiliar people, places and sounds. Get in the habit of rewarding your kitten with kind words, petting, play or treats when he/she exhibits good behaviors (just remember to keep track of calories when feeding treats).

Play is especially important for kittens because it strengthens muscles and social skills and teaches them life lessons. They learn to inhibit their bites and claws, discover what objects bounce or roll when batted at and realize which creatures run away and which fight back.



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LITTER BOX TRAINING – Kittens instinctively bury their waste after eliminating so housetraining is usually relatively easy. Make sure the sides of the litter box are low enough that the kitten can climb into it, and as soon as you bring your kitten home, show him/her where the litter box is located. You may want to put the litter box in a temporary location until your kitten becomes acclimated to the entire house; you can always move the litter box later provided you show your kitten where it is located. If you have more than one cat, you should provide one box per cat plus one extra box. Remove solid waste and urine saturated litter daily.

MEOWING AND TALKING – Keep in mind that kittens are essentially babies and babies cry. Meows are typically demands to humans for something – feed me, pick me up or play with me. As a youngster, your kitten is still experimenting and learning what prompts desirable results, and what doesn't. You may also be unconsciously “rewarding” the kitten for crying by responding with play, with concern, with a treat or other fun result. So unless your kitten is in trouble, try ignoring him/her when he/she begins excessively meowing. Do this consistently, and lavish attention on your kitten when he/she is quiet.

When you first bring your kitten home, he/she may cry a lot until he/she is comfortable. Your kitten may also be lonely and it will take time for him/her to understand that you will return. There are a couple of ways you can help you're your kitten's distress when you aren't home. Scent a hand towel or baby blanket by rubbing it over yourself, and leave that as a sort of kitty pacifier for your baby's bed.



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Veterinary Care Guidelines for Kittens

Kittens must visit the veterinarian two to three times in their first year for immunizations and routine health care. As soon as you bring your new kitten home, you should take him/her to the veterinarian for an initial exam. The following wellness checklist for kittens outlines some of the important health care your kitten needs during the first year. This should only be used as a guide -- it is important that you work together with your veterinarian to ensure your kitten is receiving the appropriate health care, which may differ based on your cat's age and background or the part of the country where you live.

10-14 WEEKS

At the Vet -

1. A baseline physical examination, including:
 - Fecal examination and heartworm test
(if possible, bring along a recent stool sample in a plastic bag)
2. Veterinarian visit for core vaccinations:
 - 1st vaccinations for Feline Viral. Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus (FVR-CP)
 - FELV and FIV test
3. Ask your veterinarian if the following non-core vaccinations are necessary:
 - Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)
 - Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)

Things to Consider - Important for first visit:

- Be prepared to give your kitten's history (birth date, any vaccinations already received)
- Discuss core and non-core vaccinations with your veterinarian and establish vaccination schedule:
 - Core vaccinations are those vaccinations required by law
 - Non-Core vaccinations are optional depending on your veterinarian's recommendation and your pet's lifestyle
- Find out if there are any special care instructions you need to be aware of after your kitten has been vaccinated
- Discuss spay/neuter procedure with veterinarian and schedule if possible
- If you are considering declawing, discuss options with your veterinarian (nail covers, tendonectomy; etc.)
- Have your veterinarian show you how to clip your cat's nails



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- Find out the clinic's hours, emergency pet clinic number; etc.
- Drive by the emergency clinic to become familiar with its
- Now is a great time to kitten-proof your home, including:
 - Securely screen all windows
 - Securely store poisonous materials
 - Keep doors, drawers, cabinets and toilet lids closed

14 -16 WEEKS

Things to Consider -

Now is a great time to introduce weekly grooming sessions.

Some basics:

- Start with short sessions
- Softly handle the paws so your kitten becomes comfortable when you clip his/her nails
- Stroke around his/her cheeks and mouth and rub his/her gums to get your kitten used to dental care and check-ups
- Gently brush your kitten's entire body, including the underside
- Reassure and praise your kitten as you groom (to make the experience a pleasant one)

16 WEEKS (4 MONTHS)

At the Vet - Veterinarian visit for vaccinations:

1. 2nd vaccinations for Feline Viral, Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus
2. Possible non-core boosters for:
 - 2nd Feline Leukemia Virus Vaccination (FeLV)
3. Ask your veterinarian if the following vaccinations would be beneficial to your cat:
 - Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)
 - Rabies
4. Discuss schedule for spaying/neutering



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Things to Consider - Now is a great time to establish an exercise routine with your pet:

- Make a consistent exercise and playtime schedule that keeps your cat active
- Play games using your cat's toys or play hide 'n seek
- Now is a great time to begin cleaning your kitten's teeth on a regular basis. Ask your veterinarian to recommend the proper dental tools and techniques:
 - Gently rub a soft cloth with baking soda and water along the teeth and gums
 - Pet supply stores also sell cat toothbrushes and specially formulated pet toothpastes. Never use toothpaste formulated for humans
- Schedule spaying or neutering

24 WEEKS (6 MONTHS)

At the Vet - Veterinarian visit including:

1. Physical exam for overall development and body condition
2. Fecal examination
3. Examination of cat's teeth and gums
4. Spaying/neutering surgery, if not already completed

Things to Consider - Recommended questions for the veterinarian:

- Is my cat's weight in a healthy range? A kitten's energy needs decrease after spaying or neutering, so be sure to adjust the amount of food fed to maintain an ideal body condition.
- How do I perform a Rib Check? How often should I do one?
- Mention any concerns you have with kitten's health and development
- Discuss training issues you are having and your veterinarian's recommendations



adult cats

Nutrition

Your cat is considered an adult after 12 months. The high-calorie requirements he/she had as a growing kitten have diminished, and he's/she's ready to make the transition to an adult food. To encourage acceptance of the new diet, gradually mix the new food with the previous food over the course of 7-to-10 days.

Feeding Adult Cats

An adult cat with normal activity requires a good-quality commercial cat food that is complete and balanced for maintenance or for all life stages. Cats should be fed as individuals, and the factors that influence the amount of food a typical adult cat requires to maintain good body condition include activity level, temperature, and body metabolism. However, here are some general guidelines:

- The average seven- to nine - pound cat requires about two-to-three ounces (one-half to one 8 oz. measuring cup) of dry food or semi-moist food, or 5 to 8 ounces of canned food per day. The amount of food needed will vary according to the nutrient density of the food and the individual cat. Even when all factors are the same, two cats of similar size, age, and activity may need different amounts of food simply because they have different metabolic rates.
- Because cats tend to be nibblers or "occasional eaters," they should have access to their food for several hours each day.
- A cat's appetite and total food consumption will vary from day to day.
- Loss of appetite or reluctance to eat are not problems in adult cats unless they persist for several days or your cat shows symptoms of illness. If this happens, your cat should be examined by a veterinarian.
- If you choose to feed canned or semi-moist food, try to use dental treats unless you can commit to regularly cleaning your cat's teeth.
- It's very important for the health of your cat that fresh drinking water in a clean bowl is available at all times.
- Cats require a higher level of dietary protein and a different nutrient balance than dogs, so avoid feeding your cat any food formulated for a dog.

3. Adulthood 101:

The Basics of Caring for an Adult Cat

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Behavior and Training

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adult cats

cats

3. Adulthood 101:
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Behavior and Training

Your cat may exhibit certain behaviors during his/her adult years that you wish to correct. In general, the earlier your cat is trained, the better. Some other guidelines:

TERRITORIAL ISSUES – Some cats become more territorial as they mature and may exhibit aggression (hissing, biting; etc.) when they feel their territory is threatened. Make sure your cat has his/her own safe retreat, a room to call his/her own. Stock it with your cat's food and water, litter box, scratching post, and favorite toys. If your cat becomes territorial when guests arrive, do the following:

- Ten to fifteen minutes before they arrive, play a favorite game with your cat, and give him/her lots of one-on-one attention. When the guests arrive, offer your cat his/her favorite treat and put him/her in his/her room. Give your cat another treat before you leave the room.

LEASH AND HALTER TRAINING – The great outdoors poses many dangers to your cat. If you want your cat to enjoy the benefits of being outside without the risks, you may want to train him/her to walk on a leash. First, you'll need a harness (a figure-8 harness fits best and protects against escape). Cats like things that are familiar to them so before you put the harness and leash on your cat, leave it out in the opening (near his/her bed or on the living room floor) for a week. After that time, put the harness on your cat for just a few minutes at a time several times a day in the house. Always reward your cat for wearing it. If you keep up this routine, your cat will eventually accept his/her harness, and once this happens, put the leash on and follow him/her around the house (let your cat lead you, not the other way around). Do this a couple of times a day until you feel your cat can be outside with it on. Just remember to accompany your cat outdoors as well.



cats

adult cats

Preventative Health Care

Although diseases, parasites and other sicknesses are more common in outdoor cats, indoor cats are not immune. It's important to continue regular veterinary check-ups when your cat is an adult as serious, life-threatening conditions can develop. Refer to the veterinary care guidelines on the next page.

3. Adulthood 101:

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adult cats

cats

3. Adulthood 101:

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► **Veterinary Care Guidelines**

Veterinary Care Guidelines for Adults

Regular health care is essential throughout your cat's adult life. In general, healthy adult cats should visit the veterinarian once a year. Use this checklist to help guide you through your cat's adult years and ensure you're on top of all your cat's physical health needs. However, it is important that you work with your veterinarian to establish the appropriate health plan for your adult cat. As an easy reminder to keep on track with annual veterinarian exams, you may want to schedule the annual check-up around your cat's birthday.

At the Vet - Annual Check-up to include:

1. Annual:

- Physical examination
- Weight analysis and Body Condition Score
- Nutrition counseling as necessary

2. As recommended by veterinarian:

- Blood drawn for CBC
- Blood chemistry profile
- Thyroid profile
- Fecal examination
- Heartworm test

3. Core Vaccinations Boosters For:

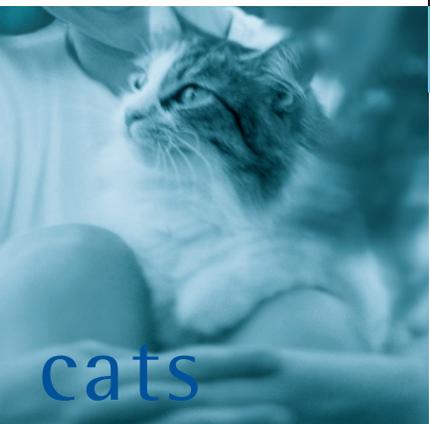
- Feline Distemper, Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus (FVR-CP)

4. Non-Core vaccinations may include:

- Rabies Vaccination (each year according to local law by your veterinarian)
- Chlamydia (Pneumonitis)(where chlamydia is a concern)
- Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)
- Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)

Things to Consider - Recommended questions for the veterinarian:

- How is my cat's general health?
- What should I be watching for to maintain optimum health?
- Is my cat's weight in a healthy range? If not, what should I do?
- Which vaccines does my cat need?
- Discuss your cat's activity level: is he/she getting enough exercise? What activities does the veterinarian recommend?
- Discuss any training issues you may be having and solicit your veterinarian's recommendations



senior cats

For many pet owners, an aging pet is an old friend in need of a little special care. Taking time to re-evaluate your senior cat's changing nutritional needs is a small kindness you can do for him/her that can have a big impact on your cat's quality of life.

Proper Nutrition

Your cat is considered a senior citizen after the age of ten and many cats live well past 14 years of age, so much of their adult lives may be spent as a "senior." As cats age, their dietary needs change and their energy requirements decrease. A lower calorie, higher protein diet is appropriate to maintain lean body mass and promote a healthy immune system. Dietary antioxidants, including vitamins A and E, have an important role in helping support healthy immune function. A lack of these and other essential nutrients in the diet could result in damage to the wall or membrane of cells throughout the body. Also, some senior cats may develop health conditions that may benefit from special, veterinary-dispensed diets.

If switching foods, gradually mix the new food with the previous food over the course of 7-to-10 days. Some guidelines for feeding your cat during his/her mature years:

- Your cat should be fed a food appropriate for older cats.
- Older pets are often more finicky about what they'll eat and may prefer to eat smaller portions at a sitting. Some have fewer and more sensitive teeth than in their younger days and find it harder to eat food that requires a lot of chewing.
- You should measure the amount of food you give your cat so that you know how much you should increase or decrease the portions if your cat starts losing or gaining weight. This also allows you to monitor food intake, as changes in appetite may indicate a health problem that should be investigated by a veterinarian.

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senior cats

Behavior

It's important to pay close attention to your elder cat's behavior as many neurological changes are taking place during this time that can affect his/her normal behaviors. If you notice any of these signs, you should consult a veterinarian.

cats

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WHAT YOU MAY SEE

- Eats more food than usual but is not gaining weight
- Drinks more water than usual or drinks more frequently (especially if muscles are weak)
- Chewing is difficult; eats less; unable to hold food in mouth while eating; bleeding gums; bad breath; loose teeth
- Constipation
- Frequent colds, infections, and generalized illness

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

- Hyperthyroidism (overproduction of hormones by the thyroid gland); early diabetes; parasites
- Diabetes; kidney disease; hyperthyroidism
- Gum disease; a mouth tumor; broken or diseased teeth
- Colon problems; poor diet; hairballs
- Impaired immune system



cats

- 4. Seniorhood 101:
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senior cats

Preventative Health Care

You can help ensure that your senior cat lives an active, pain-free life by providing proper preventative care. Just six months for a senior cat is the equivalent of about five years for a human. Given this rapid “aging” process, your cat should have more frequent health exams – at home and with the veterinarian. Visit the veterinarian every six months, so any illnesses during this life stage are caught early, including cancer, cardiac, renal and thyroid problems.

EXERCISE – Because their metabolism has slowed down with age, older cats may be prone to gaining weight. Excess weight can contribute to or exacerbate certain age-related health problems such as diabetes. So make it a point to provide your senior cat with some form of physical activity for at least a few minutes a day. You should consult your veterinarian for recommendations on appropriate activities for your cat’s age and health condition.



senior cats

cats

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Veterinarian Care Guidelines for Senior Cats

Regular health care is essential throughout your cat's adult life, particularly as your cat gets older. In general, healthy senior cats should visit the veterinarian every six months. Use this checklist to help guide you through your cat's senior years and ensure you're on top of all your cat's physical health needs, but work closely with your veterinarian to establish the appropriate health plan for your cat. As an easy reminder to keep on track with the bi-annual veterinarian exams, you may want to schedule the six-month check-up six months into the year.

AGES 7 AND ABOVE

At the Vet - Regular health checks are advisable every 6 months.

Visits may include:

1. Physical examination
2. Weight analysis and Body Condition Score
3. Nutrition counseling as necessary

As recommended by veterinarian:

4. Blood drawn for CBC
5. Blood chemistry profile
6. Thyroid profile
7. Fecal examination
8. Heartworm test
9. Annual Core Vaccinations Boosters For:
 - Feline Distemper
 - Rhinotracheitis
 - Calicivirus (FVR-CP)
10. Non-Core vaccinations may include:
 - Rabies Vaccination (each year according to local law by your veterinarian)
 - Chlamydia (Pneumonitis)(where chlamydia is a concern)
 - Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)
 - Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)

IMPORTANT: As your cat gets older, give it a thorough home health check every week to catch any signs of ill health.

Conduct a Rib Check and assess your cat's body condition on a monthly basis, as senior cats are prone to gaining weight.



senior cats

cats

4. Seniorhood 101:

The Basics of Caring for a Senior Cat

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End of Life Options

Things to Consider - Things to discuss with your veterinarian:

- Any changes in behavior, activity level or appearance
- **WEIGHT** - Is your cat a healthy weight? If not, how can you tell?
- **EXERCISE** - Is your cat getting any? What type and how often?

Is the activity still appropriate for your cat's age and health condition?

A FEW THINGS YOU CAN DO AT HOME:

- Check your cat's eyes for discharge. Has your cat shown any sign of decreasing vision like bumping into things?
- Check the ear for a bad smell, which could indicate an ear infection.
- Check the fur and scalp for any black specks of flea dirt. Increased dandruff can be a sign of poor diet, fleas or underlying liver problems
- Look for matted fur: if mats occur in a shorthaired cat, painful gums could be preventing your cat from its usual grooming routine.
- Check your cat's anus: a small white rice grain may indicate your cat has a tapeworm.



senior cats

End of Life Options

SAYING GOOD-BYE - Even if your cat isn't extremely old, you may have reason to consider the emotion-laden option of euthanasia - also called putting a cat to sleep.

It may be time to end your pet's life if his/her condition is irreversible and in spite of medical care, his/her quality of life is inadequate. But even knowing that these situations hold true for your cat doesn't mean it's easy to consider euthanasia. Many experts advise that the whole family should decide as a group whether to have their cat euthanized. Parents with younger children may choose to make the decision and then give the children a chance to say good-bye to their pet.

Though it's a commonly used phrase, be careful about using the phrase "put to sleep" when explaining the decision to children, who then may be afraid to sleep themselves or may expect the cat to wake up in the future. Tell them that your cat isn't going to get better and that ending his/her life is a loving way to end your cat's pain. Answer your children's questions as honestly as possible, and let them cry and grieve. Some veterinarians let the pet owners be present when the cat is euthanized, but check with your veterinarian ahead of time if you would like to be there.

In addition to euthanasia, ask your veterinarian about other diagnostic tools/treatments available for your cat. Fortunately there are also counseling services available for pet owners as well as groups and hotlines for support through these difficult times.

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