

BASIC KITTEN CARE

First and Foremost: VACCINATIONS

Many common diseases, including Distemper, are deadly to your cat. During the initial day of nursing, kittens receive antibodies against certain diseases from their mother's milk. These protecting antibodies are gradually lost between 6 and 16 weeks of age. A series of vaccinations are given during this period to stimulate your kitten's immune system to produce its own antibodies. Even if your cat never goes outside, many viruses are quite hardy and can be carried to your cat on your hands, shoes or clothing. Make sure your pet is protected!

We recommend a vaccination schedule for these diseases as follows:

6-8 weeks

PRC (Feline Panleukopenia, Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus)

12-14 weeks

PRC

Feline Leukemia (FeLV) – boosted again in 3-4 weeks

Rabies

Feline Leukemia is a deadly disease that is spread directly from cat to cat, and from mother cats to their kittens before or shortly after birth. As many as 40% of cat deaths annually are due to feline leukemia and related viruses.

A simple blood test will determine if your cat or kitten already harbors the disease. If the test is negative, two initial vaccinations, 3-4 weeks apart, and then yearly boosters, will prevent Feline Leukemia in your cat.

Vaccine protocols have changed in recent years as new diseases have appeared and spread. Chances are good that our vaccine recommendations will change again over the next ten years. As your cat comes in for annual physical exams, we will inform you of new vaccines and vaccination schedules.

We now see many, many cats who live to be 18 or more years old. Regular veterinary care is the reason why!

Your pet's age In human years

6 months = 12 years
1 year = 15 years
2 years = 24 years
3 years = 28 years
4 years = 32 years
5 years = 36 years
6 years = 40 years
7 years = 44 years
8 years = 48 years
9 years = 52 years
10 years = 56 years
11 years = 60 years
12 years = 64 years
13 years = 68 years
14 years = 72 years
15 years = 76 years
16 years = 80 years
17 years = 84 years
18 years = 88 years
19 years = 92 years
20 years = 96 years
21 years = 100 years

KITTEN WELLNESS CHECK LIST

1. Vaccinate with a series of boosters to give your kitten immunity against contagious diseases.
2. Sound nutrition is the foundation on which your kitten's health is built. Please feed the highest quality food available to you.
3. Protect your kitten against internal parasites. Follow CDC recommendations by worming as a kitten, then repeated monthly for life. We can prescribe a **Custom Parasite Protection** for your cat. Have a stool exam at least once a year, more often if parasites have been a problem.
4. Protect against external parasites as well. **Apply Frontline Plus** from, at minimum, early spring until November at 1 month intervals.
5. Provide your pet with the following items:
 - Food and water bowls
 - Litter box
 - Bed
 - Toys
 - Cat carrier
 - Collar and I.D. Tag
 - Brush
 - Nail clippers
6. Spend time while your kitten is young, getting him accustomed to different people and experiences:
 - Car rides
 - Cat carrier
 - Interaction with children and strangers
 - Handle his feet, ears, mouth daily
 - Grooming & brushing



How to Choose Toys and Treats For Your Cat or Kitten

Most people who have pets enjoy playing with them and giving them toys. Unfortunately, unlike with children's toys, there are no regulations to ensure that toys made for dogs and cats are safe. Many that are available in pet stores and supermarkets are unsafe. Many of the treats on the market are also unhealthy.

Check any toy you purchase for parts or pieces that could come off and be inhaled or swallowed. Googly eyes, little bells, small pieces of glued on felt, feathers and strings are some things to watch out for. Never purchase any toy that looks like it could come apart.

Whatever toys you choose, it's a good idea to rotate them. Putting a toy away and getting out a different one every few days can help avoid having the cat or kitten get bored with the same old thing. Keeping a cat occupied with a different toy each week may also prevent him from finding excitement knocking over wastebaskets or scratching the furniture. Popular toys include little plastic balls with bells inside, the balls that can be batted around inside a large, donut-shaped plastic tube, the long piece of fabric on a stick, and assorted catnip filled animals. Be sure to throw away any toy that is getting frayed or broken, before threads or pieces are swallowed by the cat.

A very popular toy in recent years is the glitter ball, a soft ball with gold or silver "hair". The 2-inch larger size is pretty safe, but the 1" ball may be swallowed, necessitating surgical removal. Be extra careful if you have a dog as well as a cat. Toys large enough that a cat can't choke on or swallow, may be unsafe for a dog that gets a hold of it instead.

Cats have small barbs on their tongues. The barbs point backwards. The function of these, aside from making the cat's tongue feel like sandpaper when he licks you, is to make grooming more effective. These little barbs also make it very difficult for a cat to remove string or fabric from its mouth. If a cat is playing with, or chewing on, one of these materials, and it gets too far back in the mouth, it will catch on these little barbs. The cat is not able to pull it back out again and will reflexively start to swallow the string. Little by little, he will be forced to swallow the whole thing.

The cat may choke on the string, or it may lodge in the intestinal tract and need to be surgically removed. In the worst cases, the string or thread becomes caught in the mouth, either by wrapping around the base of the tongue or a tooth, or because there is a needle on the end of the thread that punctures the mouth or throat and lodges there. With one end of the string caught, when the intestines try to move the string along, it actually saws through the intestine. This causes multiple holes in the intestine, which need to be sutured, and leads to massive infection in the abdominal cavity (peritonitis). Without emergency surgery, the cat will soon die.



Dragging or waving around a string is a favorite way to amuse a cat. There is no reason to stop this game forever. You do need to use caution, though. Don't let your cat play with these items unsupervised, and put them away when you are done. Don't leave sewing, fishing or wrapping supplies out where cats can get into them. Be cautious of lace, rubber bands, yarn, shoelaces, dental floss, fishing line, ponytail scrunchies, ribbons, etc. Even though the kitten and the ball of yarn is a favorite image, yarn and cats are not a good combination.

We get a lot of questions about the safety of catnip for cats. We have never read a report of a major problem with catnip, but no controlled studies have ever been done on its safety. Some cats get too wound up or aggressive after playing with catnip, and it should not be given to those cats. We usually advise giving catnip as an occasional treat and not on a daily basis, in case it can cause problems with frequent or long-term use.

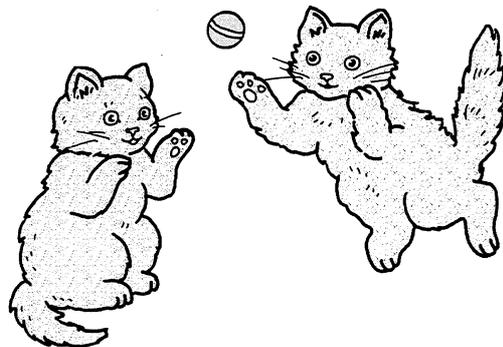
Cats are seldom as interested in treats as dogs are, but some cats do enjoy a snack here and there. Unfortunately, most cat treats are not very healthy. They tend to be loaded with salt, artificial flavors and artificial colors. They are also a long way from being complete and balanced nutrition.

Because cats are so small, usually around ten pounds in weight, it doesn't take very many Pounce treats to overdo it. The rule of thumb is not to give a cat more than 2 of these sorts of treats per day, and we would rather young kittens don't get any at all. Like potato chips or ice cream in people, a small amount occasionally is fine, but if those food items are a major portion of your diet, you probably aren't getting very good nutrition. Most cats only need 1/4 to 1/3 of a cup of food once or twice daily. It doesn't take many treats before they are getting too much junk food.

Children love to give treats to their pets and are often the guilty parties when pets get too many of them. Encourage your kids to play with their pets instead. It's much healthier to get more exercise and less snacks!

Check treat labels in the stores carefully, and try to avoid the ones with the most salt, fat and artificial ingredients. (The same is true for any dry cat food – if the nuggets come in different colors, it's because they've been sprayed with food coloring. Avoid these foods. Your cat doesn't need food coloring – cats are color blind!)

As always, please call us if you have any questions or problems in regard to toys and treats for your pet. Choose carefully and hopefully you will have many years of playtime together!



ELECTIVE SURGERIES

DECLAWING

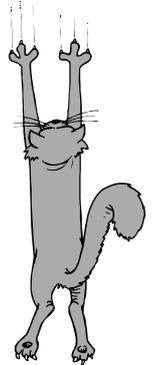
Many people who keep their cats indoors prefer to have their front paws declawed. This surgery is done under anesthesia and requires one day of hospitalization.

Declawing your kitten can be done as early as two months of age, but is often done at the same time as spaying or neutering. Occasionally, we will declaw all four feet, but this is hard on the cat and is seldom necessary.

The older the cat, the more painful declawing is, so please decide early if you want your cat declawed. If you start trimming your kitten's nails every 4-6 weeks (we can show you how), and train it to use a scratching post, you may not need to declaw at all.

Laser surgery: We are pleased to offer laser surgery as the new standard for declawing. Using a laser means:

- ❖ **Less pain**
- ❖ **Less bleeding**
- ❖ **Less swelling**
- ❖ **Quicker recovery**



Use of the laser is the most humane method of declawing a cat.

NEUTERING

The average lifespan of a neutered pet is 40% longer than that of an unneutered one. Unspayed females will often develop breast cancer or severe uterine infections by the time they are 8-10 years of age. Unspayed females also are in heat frequently, during which time they are noisy and troublesome to live with. Worst of all, millions of unwanted kittens are put to death in this country every year because there aren't enough homes for them all.

Unneutered male cats have very strong smelling urine, which they like to spray in the house to mark their territory. They are also prone to wander in search of female cats and are also very territorial. These traits lead to high rates of death from being run over by cars, fight wounds and contagious illnesses. Male cats are also, of course, equally responsible for pet overpopulation.

We recommend spaying (surgical removal of the ovaries and uterus) of female cats, and castration (surgical removal of the testicles) of males, for all pets that will not be used for purebred breeding. This should be done when your cat reaches 5-7 months of age. Your cat will be a healthier, happier pet, and you will have done your part to reduce the pet overpopulation problem.

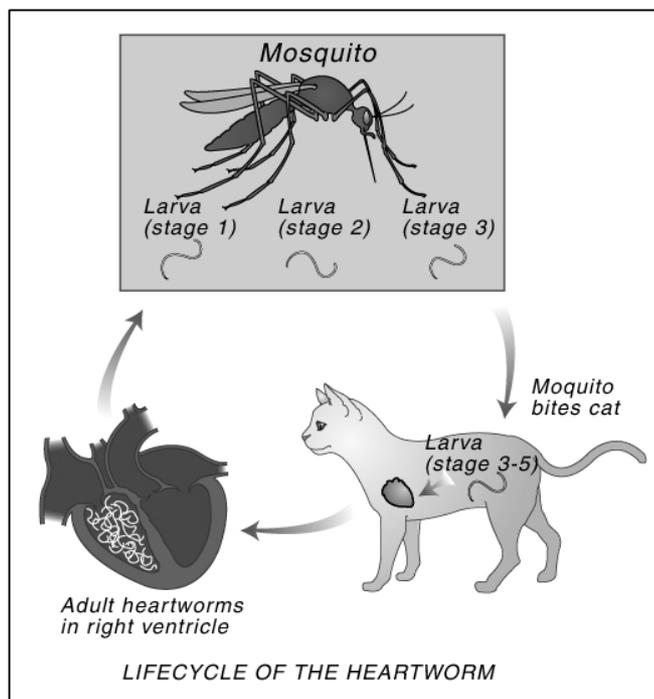
While your pet is anesthetized, we can also remove any retained baby teeth, if required, and implant a microchip ID.

Heartworms are being found more frequently in cats

Heartworms are less common in cats than in dogs, but cats can get them too. Affected cats usually have only a few of these worms in their heart, but because the cat's heart is very small, and the worms are quite large, even 1 or 2 worms can be fatal. Signs of heartworm disease in cats include chronic coughing, wheezing or vomiting and sudden collapse or death. The disease has usually been diagnosed after death with a necropsy (animal autopsy) because there was not a blood test for heartworm disease in cats. There is still no effective treatment for cats that have heartworm disease, but there is now a blood test to detect these parasites in cats, although less reliable than the test in dogs, and a new once a month preventative medication.

Outdoor cats are most at risk, but interestingly enough, a new study of feline heartworm disease in Texas and South Carolina showed that 36% of infected cats were kept totally indoors. Since it takes so few of the heartworm parasites to cause disease in cats, even the occasional mosquito finding its way into the home can carry more than enough heartworm larvae to be fatal.

Luckily, cats can now be put on the once a month preventative medication during the mosquito season, just like dogs. Though effective preventative medications have been available for dogs for years, more than 1/3 of dogs in our area are not being protected. Many of them are harboring the heartworm parasite. Mosquitoes then carry the disease from infected dogs to other pets, and occasionally to people as well.



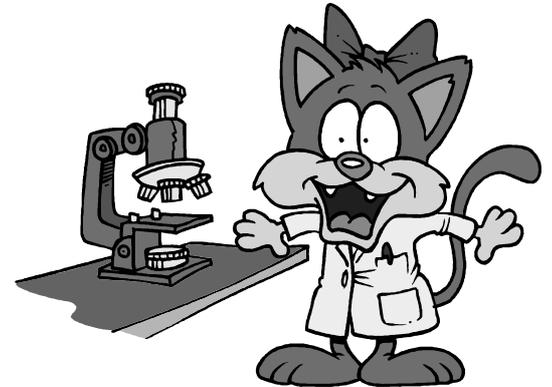
Custom Parasite Prevention for cats is a chewable tablet your cat can take once monthly to prevent heartworm. The price is quite reasonable, and the medication also helps prevent roundworm, hookworm, tapeworm, and fleas as well.

Cats are exposed to lots of other diseases, so you need to decide on a total health care package for any cat, especially one that goes outside. We recommend vaccination for Distemper, the upper respiratory diseases and rabies for all cats, indoors or out. Feline Leukemia vaccination is also recommended. Cats going outdoors should also be protected against fleas and intestinal parasites as part of a regular health care program. If you have a cat who is special to you, you may want to start him or her on the new once a month preventative medication as well. It could save a life!

WHAT'S NEXT???

Congratulations! Your kitten has completed his or her vaccination series and well-kitten exams. We hope that your pet is well on its way to a long and happy life as a member of your family. To keep your kitten healthy for a lifetime will require on-going care. The following list should help you to understand what health care needs your pet will have in the years to come.

1. The vaccines your kitten has received will provide immunity against disease for about one to three years, depending on the disease. Periodic boosters are needed to keep his level of immunity high enough to protect him from illness. You will receive reminders in the mail when his next vaccinations are due.
2. Your cat will also receive an annual physical examination with his yearly booster vaccinations. By the time we see your cat again next year, he will have grown through the equivalent of his teenage years and will be a young adult. Because a cat's lifespan is compressed into a shorter amount of time than that of a human, many changes can occur in your cat's body in the course of a year. The annual physical exam is very important to detect physical problems before they become serious. After five years of age, twice yearly examinations are recommended as problems associated with aging become more frequent.



For early detection of disease, we recommend periodic blood screening. A routine blood screen is a window into the body that determines internal organ function that cannot be determined by physical examinations alone. For cats older than seven years, annual testing is recommended.

3. We will also be asking you to bring in a sample of your cat's stool each year, to test for intestinal parasites which may have been picked up over the course of the year. Even if your cat doesn't go outside, it is wise to have a sample checked. Some intestinal parasites are picked up by eating rodents (such as a mouse caught in your basement). Others can be dormant in your cat's system and show up later on, even though your pet hasn't been exposed to them recently. A fresh sample will keep about 24 hours if refrigerated. We need about a teaspoon or so. Litter is not a problem if some is stuck on the sample.

4. Your kitten should be fed a kitten food until he or she is one year old. Then switch gradually to an adult food by mixing the old and new foods together for about two weeks. This helps avoid intestinal upset from changing foods.

Your cat will have a longer, healthier life on a good quality diet, such as Science Diet, Iams or Purina One. Dry food is better for the prevention of dental disease. Too many treats and snacks lead to fussy eating habits, obesity and digestive upsets. Give your cat praise and affection for rewards, not food! He'll love you just as much.

5. Spay or neuter your cat at 5-7 months of age. Altered cats live longer, are healthier in their old age, have fewer behavior problems and don't contribute to the pet overpopulation program.

Declawing your kitten can be done as early as two months of age, but is often done at the same time as spaying or neutering.

6. Your kitten will soon have a full set of adult teeth. Good dental care is essential to your pet's well being. Regular brushing will slow plaque and tartar build-up as your cat gets older. By the time he is two to five years old, however, he will probably have enough tartar build-up to begin needing annual dental cleanings here at the veterinary clinic. A cat that gets good dental care throughout its life will live an average of 20% longer than one that doesn't. He will also have fresher breath, less pain from periodontal (gum) disease and be healthier and more energetic.

7. Please call us with any questions or problems with your cat. Most medical problems are less costly to your cat's well being and to your pocketbook if they are dealt with early.

8. The same is true of behavioral problems. The earlier you contact us regarding a problem behavior, the sooner you can solve it. Behaviors such as urine spraying, biting, scratching or clawing the furniture can almost always be changed, but you have to ask for help.

9. Pet health insurance is available to help you in the event your pet incurs a serious illness or injury. It is heartbreaking to put a pet to sleep simply because the treatment was unaffordable. Veterinary Pet Insurance Co. has affordable policies that can be used at any veterinary facility in the country. Several policy choices are available including a wellness plan. Please ask us for a brochure.

10. Enjoy! Your kitten's boundless joy, love, and energy are a precious thing to have.

