

# KITTEN CARE AND HEALTH GUIDE

You've just acquired a kitten and with it, a lot of joy and pleasure, but also a set of responsibilities to ensure its health and well-being. Kittens should be active and playful when awake; but, when they sleep they should sleep deeply.

Contact ANIMART's Veterinary Department at 608.242.2140 ext 3, then 6 if your kitten:

- Tires easily during play; decreased activity level.
- Has coughing, sneezing, vomiting, diarrhea or discharge from the eyes or nose; labored breathing.
- Has a "bloated" appearance (a full, tense abdomen)
- Has a poor appetite.



## INTRODUCING YOUR NEW KITTEN

Settling a new kitten into its new home takes time and patience. Introduce them to their new home, family and other pets VERY SLOWLY. Kittens can get overwhelmed very easily. Introducing them too fast could stress their immune systems, allowing them to come down with an illness.

Many cats adopted from rescues have upper respiratory infections either brewing or obvious. If you have other cats in the household, verify that all their vaccinations are current before bringing your new kitten home. Keeping your new kitten completely isolated from your other cats for at least a week will help protect the health of all cats and help introduce the new pet into already "claimed" territory.

Provide your new kitten its own "private room" for the first week with their litter box in one corner and their food/water in the opposite corner, a bed and some toys. This will help ensure successful litter box training and is the quickest way for a kitten to feel secure in its new home. Slowly introduce the new kitten to the rest of your house and other pets with lots of supervision and positive reinforcement.

## KITTEN PROOFING

Cats love to climb and explore and, because they clean themselves, are more likely to be poisoned. Watch to make sure your new kitten doesn't chew on cords, dig or chew on plants, jump on counters (unless you don't mind him/her jumping on counters), or do anything else that kittens should learn not to do! Beware of poisonous houseplants (philodendron, dieffenbachia, poinsettias, & mistletoe), cleaning products, insecticides, rat poison and automotive products. Never give aspirin or Tylenol to your cat.

Do not encourage biting or aggressive play with your hands. When it comes time for grooming and administering medications, your cat must associate your hands with gentleness.

## NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is a key factor to maintaining your cat's health. Kittens should have a constant source of a high quality kitten food until 9-12 months of age. When making a change from kitten to adult food or when changing brands, do so gradually over several days, mixing the two types before changing over completely to the new food, to avoid upsets and diarrhea.

Cats are strict carnivores and require taurine in their diet provided by meat proteins. Cats also need plenty of water in their diets to help prevent common kidney and bladder problems. A cat consuming a predominantly dry-food diet must drink ample water. A Drinkwell fountain can help encourage your cat to drink sufficient water. Canned food – even with extra water mixed in – can also help increase water intake.

Table scraps can lead to allergies, internal problems, diarrhea, obesity and begging. Cow's milk will cause diarrhea in most cats.

## LITTERBOX TRAINING

Your kitten's "private room" is an important first step in successful litter box training. Position the food, bed and litter box in opposite corners, as cats don't like to soil near their food or bed. The kitten will soon become comfortable in its private room and develop good toilet habits. As you gradually let the kitten explore other areas of the house, return it to its room frequently for quiet time and food, water and use of the litter box.



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Keep an eye on the kitten whenever it is allowed outside its room. Every time the kitten looks like it's about to crouch or starts sniffing near a corner (classic signs of oncoming urination or defecation), pick it up and put your kitten in the litter box. Kittens learn extremely quickly.

The most important reason why a cat stops using a litter box is that the litter box may not be clean. Make sure that you clean the litter box every day, and completely change all the litter and wash the box out at least once a week.

Don't punish a cat after it's made the mistake. That will make the cat fearful of you. Scolding and then taking the cat to litter box after she has eliminated will make her to associate litter box with punishment. If the litter box is clean and your feline friend has an accident, it may be a sign of a medical condition - you need to see a veterinarian ASAP!

Most veterinarians recommend two litter boxes for each cat. If you have multiple levels in your house, you should place a litter box on each level.

## **GROOMING**

Though cats constantly groom themselves, there are difficult-to-reach areas where hair mats tend to accumulate. Comb out little tangles before they become big hair mats. Be gentle. Brushing kittens even though they don't need it will get them comfortable with grooming so they actually enjoy it when needed.

Cats seldom need baths (do not bathe a cat more than once every 2 months). If needed, use only shampoo labeled safe for use on kittens/cats and make sure you rinse ALL of the shampoo and conditioner completely out of their coat (if you don't, this may dry out their skin and cause problems). Keep the warm water spray away from their face and most cats will grudgingly accept their bath. Towel dry and keep the cat comfortably warm.

Nail trimming should also be started at a young age so they are conditioned to it. ANIMART charges \$5 to trim nails and we are more than happy to show you and your family how to perform this procedure yourselves.

## **HAIRBALLS**

As cats groom themselves, they accumulate hair in their stomachs and often regurgitate it. Minimize the problem by grooming out loose hair before it can be swallowed and by using a hairball lubricant like Laxatone or Petromalt. There are now many cat foods formulated to help reduce the incidence of hairballs.

## **DENTAL HEALTH**

As they age, nearly all cats have problems with their teeth, including gum disease and cavities, just like people. Simple things can be done in kitten hood which will make a big difference later on. Feeding dry food helps keep the teeth clean and gums healthy. Treat your cat's mouth daily with an enzyme to control plaque. This can be done by daily brushing or giving an enzyme chew treat.

## **PARASITES**

Internal parasites live off of their host, stressing the overall health of your pet. Although a parasite harms a host, it does not usually kill the host or it would eventually run out of a place to live. Often invisible to the naked eye, diagnosis is usually made by fecal or blood tests. Treating and prevention are important as these parasites can be passed on to people.

**Roundworms and Hookworms** Even if she has been wormed, the mother cat can transmit roundworms (ascarids) and hookworms to her kittens. Although these worms can cause diarrhea, vomiting, a bloated abdomen, a poor hair coat or failure to gain weight, most infected kittens appear normal.

**Tapeworms** can be acquired by cats through the ingestion of fleas while grooming. Small, flat ¼" sections can be seen around a pet's tail or in its feces; dried sections look like grains of rice.

**Toxoplasmosis** attacks many parts of the body, causing serious illness and death. It affects cats of any age and is particularly important because this organism is also a human parasite capable of causing birth defects and other problems. Cats get Toxoplasmosis by eating rodents or uncooked meat. Since it takes one or two days for feces to become infectious, it's a good idea to clean the litter box every day.

Pregnant women should let someone else clean the litter box.



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**Coccidiosis and Giardia** are microscopic parasites that attack the lining of the intestine. Both are common and although capable of causing serious disease, they usually don't. If a kitten has persistent diarrhea, a fecal exam should be performed.

**Heartworms** in cats is difficult to diagnose and cure. Transmitted by mosquitoes, the symptoms (coughing, vomiting, wheezing) mimic many other diseases, or there may be no symptoms at all. Heartguard for Cats is a monthly preventive treat.

**Fleas and Ticks** Though usually only an annoyance to healthy adult cats, fleas can cause allergic reactions and life-threatening blood loss in severely infested kittens and already-weakened adult felines. Various shampoos, medicines, and topical applications can eliminate infestations. If your cat has access to the outdoors, check regularly for ticks. **CAUTION:** Cats can become violently ill if exposed to insecticides – Use only products approved for cats/kittens and follow label directions carefully. Monthly preventive topicals are safe and effective.

**Ear Mites** cause black crusty material to accumulate in the ears which then become itchy. The ears need to be cleaned and treated as ear mites can cause discomfort and can be transmitted to other pets in the household.

**Ringworm** is not actually a worm but rather a fungus that can cause crusty skin lesions. Ringworm is spread by contact with fungal spores through contact with an infected animal, or a carrier animal that shows no symptoms, or simply found in the environment.

Not all pets exposed to ringworm develop the disease. Some may become infected but develop no obvious signs of the disease. Some of these animals will become carriers. Ringworm is often what's known as a self-limiting disease. In other words, in many cases it will clear up on its own, but this can take several months. Most animals, unless they are immunosuppressed, will eventually become immune to ring worm. Kittens and stressed animals are more susceptible than healthy adult cats. Topical or oral medication can assist in the healing process, and help stop the spread of the fungus. Ringworm is contagious and can affect other pets and people in the home.



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