Caring for Your Kitten

Kittens need lots of rest. Sleep helps them develop into healthy and strong adult cats. Your kitten should be free to choose his own sleeping areas.

When you pick up your kitten, gently place one hand under his chest to support his weight while placing your other hand under his back legs for stability. Do not lift a kitten or cat by the scruff of the neck. Avoid pulling a kitten or cat out of a carrier or box by the front legs. Encourage healthy play with items available from your pet shop. Don't allow your kitten to play with you roughly by biting or scratching. Let him know early what hurts. Learn to clip your kitten's claws regularly to avoid injury.

Care for your kitten with love and patience. If you are rough or uncaring, your kitten will be the same. Do not disturb your kitten when he is eating, drinking, or using the litter box. Wait for your kitten to approach you for cuddling or interaction rather than using force.

Grooming

Cats, especially long-haired breeds, should be combed or brushed frequently. Grooming should be a pleasant bonding experience for you and your cat. Many cats are meticulous self-groomers and the hair ingested can lead to complications serious enough to necessitate veterinarian care. If hairballs are a problem for your cat, ask your veterinarian or pet store about hairball remedies to help reduce digestive system distress.

Spay/Neuter

Spaying female cats or neutering male cats has many benefits for you and your cat. Allowing unchecked mating adds to the numbers of homeless cats in every community. Male cats attract females by spraying urine. They tend to fight with other cats if allowed outside. Neutering inhibits spraying and the desire to wander away from home or to fight. Neutered cats become more mellow and loving.

Female cats usually come into heat regularly unless spayed. Repeated heat cycles can lead to uterus infections. When in heat, she will try to escape at any opportunity and make prolonged, noisy lamentations if she's not let out. Spaying will make life easier for both you and your female cat.

Consult with your veterinarian to decide on the best time to spay/neuter but keep in mind that kittens are often ready to mate as early as 5 or 6 months of age.

This information is designed as a basic guide. There are several books and online resources available which provide in-depth information on kittens and their care.

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Choosing Your Kitten

Adding a new kitten to your life is a delightful experience. Make sure to select a kitten who is playful, alert, lively, and curious. Apathetic behavior could be a sign of ill health. Look for clear, bright eyes and check for ears free of excessive wax. The kitten's coat should be soft and full, and his body robust.

Bringing Your Kitten Home

When you bring your kitten home, there will be an initial adjustment period. To help establish the bond between you and your new pet, confine your kitten to a small safe room for the first several days. During these first days, spend as much time as possible with your new kitten. Establish a routine for feeding, sleep and play. A weekend or vacation is a good time to help your kitten adjust to your home. Many kittens adapt quickly while others take more time. Wait until the kitten shows signs of confidence and is ready for the next step, Gradually allow access to other areas of your home. Meeting other pets should be a process of visual exposure and exchange of scents before any actual encounter. Once fully adjusted, your kitten will be eager to roam freely throughout your home.

Feeding

Cats nibble frequently during the day, as opposed to consuming one or two large meals. Bowls containing canned food should be cleaned after 30-60 minutes so that it doesn't spoil. Dry food lasts longer, but the dish should still be washed frequently and leftover food discarded. There are a variety of commercially prepared foods which will meet your cat's nutritional requirements in dry, canned, or moist varieties.

What Do I Need?

Scratching Posts. Kittens have an innate desire to scratch on rough surfaces. This is a "happiness" communication as well as a way to sharpen front claws. Encourage your kittern to express this natural urge on surfaces you prefer rather than furniture or carpet. Provide items specifically designed for climbing and scratching. Rubbing catnip or a favorite treat on a preferred surface will help your kitten do the right thing.

Litter Box and Litter. Kittens are naturally clean animals. Locate their litter box in a quiet area and show your kitten where it is located. The litter should be changed frequently. If it becomes too soiled, your kitten may start relieving himself on the floor beside the box.

Food and Bowls. Two bowls are necessary for your kitten; one for food and one for water. A quiet feeding spot will be appreciated by the kitten and an easy to clean placemat or tray helps keep things clean

Beds. Your kitten will let you know his favorite sleeping spot, which may be in a quiet area, next to a window or in the midst of household activity. Place a bed or sleeping basket in various chosen spots. The bedding should be washed once a week.

Toys. Kittens love to play. They need "solo" toys to toss about and "interactive" toys that allow you to join in the fun. Variety is important to cats. Put toys away in a drawer or cabinet and bring out different play things every day.

Carrier. Make sleeping and riding in a car in a carrier a comfortable experience well in advance of your kitten's first trip to the veterinarian.

Indoor vs. Outdoor

Letting cats outside can be dangerous. Annual statistics show that more than 50,000 cats are killed each year by cars. If you want your kitten explore the great outdoors, there are ways to safely allow this. Enclose an outdoor run with a fence or screen on all sides, including the top. Make sure there are both sunny and shady areas. Provide shelves for climbing and sitting. Make sure there is free access to your home or limit the time in an outdoor area. Lack of human interaction can be psychologically detrimental to your cat. Many cats will adapt to walking on a leash especially when started early. Cat strollers are another way to expose your cat to the outdoors and nature.

Veterinarian Visits

Your kitten should be vaccinated against distemper at eight weeks of age, and a booster should follow four weeks later. Distemper boosters should be given annually thereafter. Your veterinarian will advise you about additional shots and vaccinations needed, including rabies vaccination, which will be between three and six months of age, followed by annual boosters. Kittens and cats can be stoic when they are sick so be aware of lethargy, lack of appetite or any other signs of possible illness. Have a veterinarian check for problems early to avoid serious complications.