

### Kitten Care Guidelines

Congratulations on the newest addition to your family! Your kitten will bring joy and unconditional love to your lives. In return, you will need to provide love and care for him or her. Preventive health care is an important first step which includes vaccines, deworming, a nurturing environment, and a balanced diet.

#### Vaccinations

Many serious feline diseases have vaccines available to protect your pet. The protection your kitten received from its mother's milk gradually decreases over the first few months of life. As the kitten matures, he or she should receive a series of vaccines to stimulate its own immune system to produce the antibodies necessary to prevent disease.

<i>Core Vaccines</i>	<i>Recommended Vaccines</i>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Distemper Combination</u></p> <p>This vaccine combines protection against three important viruses including Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia. These are common upper respiratory diseases that may have fatal complications so it is recommended that all cats be vaccinated with this vaccine. Kittens can begin the series as early as 6 weeks of age and should receive boosters every 3-4 weeks until they are 16 weeks old in order to ensure their immune system is competent. Cats older than 16 weeks old should still receive two injections 3-4 weeks apart to provide the best protection. The vaccine is boosted after 1 year then every 3 years throughout the cat's life.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Rabies</u></p> <p>Rabies is a very serious disease with important public health considerations. Even indoor cats should be vaccinated because of the potential risk of infected wildlife (such as bats) accidentally coming into the home. The City of Menomonie requires that all cats over 5 months of age be vaccinated for rabies; yet, kittens must be older than 12 weeks to receive the vaccine. The initial vaccine is boosted in 1 year then every 3 years. However, local requirements may vary so you should check with city laws if you relocate.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Feline Leukemia</u></p> <p>This disease is caused by a retrovirus that attacks and suppresses the cat's immune system. Cats can get very sick from common infections and can also suffer from bone marrow problems and certain types of cancer. The disease has no cure and is spread by direct contact through birth, bite wounds, or other close contact with saliva (like sharing food bowls). Based on guidelines from the American Association of Feline Practitioners, we recommend testing all new cats and kittens for Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (a similar disease that we do not vaccinate for). Cats who go outdoors and all kittens (over the age of 10 weeks) should receive an initial series of vaccine given 3-4 weeks apart. The vaccine is then given annually as long as your cat goes outside or has contact with other potentially-infected cats. We can discontinue the vaccine when you know your kitten's personality better and know that he or she won't venture outside or accidentally escape from the house.</p> 

## **Intestinal Parasites**

There are a variety of intestinal parasites that can infect cats. Almost all kittens are born with parasites regardless of their upbringing, so we will be sending home a medication for the two most common parasites (roundworms and hookworms). However, we still recommend doing a fecal exam now and again around 6-8 months to be sure your kitten has not been reinfected and does not have other intestinal parasites. This way your kitten gets treatment for the most common worms and we can treat with the proper medication if he or she is infected with other intestinal parasites. Many intestinal parasites are zoonotic meaning that humans can become infected so treating your kitten early on will improve his or her health, reduce your risk, and help keep your home sanitary. For cats who go outside and hunt, we recommend giving them a broad dewormer 3-4 times each year to reduce their parasite burden and promote general health. We have liquid, tablet, or even topical formulations available so please tell us your preference.

## **Fleas and Ticks**

Fleas and ticks can transmit diseases such as skin infections, tapeworms, Mycoplasmosis, and anemia. If your cat goes outside, we recommend monthly topical products such as Frontline Plus (fleas and ticks), Vectra 3D (fleas), or Revolution (fleas, ear mites, and others) to protect your cat against parasites. We usually see the first wave of ticks by mid-March when the snow starts to melt and a second wave in mid-September when it starts to cool off. The second wave will last until the snow stays on the ground, usually in December. Fleas are typically worst during the fall but can be found year-round, especially if a flea infestation has formed on one of your pets. If fleas or flea dirt are found on your cat, at least 3 consecutive months of flea control are needed for all pets in the household (at the same time) to get the infestation under control. Environmental decontamination measures such as weekly vacuuming, sweeping, and washing of bedding are important considerations as well. Insecticides may also be applied throughout the pet's environment to get the infestation under control more quickly. Please ask us for more information if you are currently handling a flea infestation.

## **Spaying and Neutering**

Millions of cats are destroyed every year simply due to lack of homes. Rather than bringing more kittens into the world, help the ones that are already here by spaying or neutering your cat between the ages of 4-6 months. Not only will this decrease overpopulation, it will also decrease the risks of certain types of cancer, territorial fighting, roaming, unwanted behaviors, and generally will help your cat be a better pet.



## **Microchipping**

The microchip is the size of a grain of rice and can be placed under the skin of your cat similar to a vaccination. It can be scanned by veterinary clinics and animal shelters to give a specific ID that is connected with your contact information in order to reunite you with your pet. We recommend microchipping all pets, regardless of their risk of straying, to help you prepare for unplanned emergencies and disasters such as house fires, floods, and tornadoes.

## Nutrition

A smorgasbord of brands and marketing claims have made it difficult for owners to decide what type of cat food to purchase nowadays. And it's an important decision since buying a high-quality food from a reputable company will give your kitten a complete and balanced diet while also providing you with less waste to pickup as premium foods with less fillers are more digestible. The AAFCO statement is the first place you should look when buying a bag of pet food since all foods are required to be AAFCO certified. The second place you should look is whether or not the food's nutritional standards have been met through feeding trials or formulation tests. We typically prefer foods that have had feeding trials versus formulations because they have been proven to be digestible and nutritionally available to the animal. The third place to look on the bag is to ensure that the food is labeled for "growth" or "all life stages" so that your kitten won't suffer from nutrient deficiencies. In addition, dry food and canned food both have their benefits for your pet's health. Dry food has a longer shelf life which is more convenient and cheaper for you to feed. It also provides some dental care by gently abrading the plaque away from your cat's teeth as it chews. On the other hand, canned food is higher in moisture to promote urinary tract health and higher in protein which may satisfy your cat's appetite better. Cats can be finicky eaters so you should help them broaden their palate by introducing them to a variety of food types and flavors when they are young kittens. With any combination of food you choose for your cat, please keep their overall daily calories, metabolism, and activity level in mind to prevent obesity.



Food should be provided at specified meal times 2-3 times a day for regularity of nutrients and monitoring of their overall health. We recommend feeding your kitten a high-quality kitten food until he or she reaches about 85% of their adult size (typically 9-12 months old) before transitioning over to adult food. More importantly, though, is to avoid feeding excessive calories to your kitten, particularly after getting spayed or neutered, to prevent obesity and other health concerns. We are more than happy to teach you how to score your kitten's body condition in order to maintain an ideal weight throughout its life. Remember that treats and table scraps can unbalance a high quality diet; therefore, we suggest using their regular food as treats or giving them only a few treats (less than 10% of total daily calories) each day. To avoid possible toxic side effects of common table scraps, please avoid giving your pets certain foods such as grapes, raisins, onions, coffee, chocolate, and xylitol (a common gum ingredient). Also, make sure you keep any potentially poisonous plants (such as lilies, daffodils, and poinsettias) out of reach from your cats.

## Oral Care

Your kitten's baby teeth are typically replaced by adult teeth between the ages of 3-6 months. This means that chewing and biting behaviors are a completely normal process of development for your kitten for quite a long time. Please provide your kitten with an assortment of cat-friendly chew toys with different textures to soothe their mouth and provide them with a distraction. As a kitten, it is important to get them used to handling their mouth so that as an adult you can more easily brush their teeth and provide adequate oral preventive care. Teeth are a very important organ for your pet to eat and play and can be a source of pain and infection when diseased, so getting a head-start with preventive care allows your cat to live a long and healthy life. We have many different flavors of pet toothpaste and different options of toothbrushes and would gladly show you how best to brush your cat's teeth once their permanent teeth are in.

## **Declawing and Alternatives**

Scratching is a natural behavior that cats do to exercise, stretch, sharpen their claws, and mark their territory. Cats need environmental enrichment in the form of scratching posts in order to perform their natural behaviors and keep them out of trouble while in your home. To train your cat to use a scratching post, ensure that the post is stable and large enough for the cat to put its full weight against it without the post moving. Also, make sure that it has a texture that your cat likes and that it is located in a prominent place in the house so that your cat will enjoy being around it. Some cats prefer horizontal scratching surfaces while others prefer vertical or slanted surfaces so try a few different types and textures to learn your cat's preference. Maintaining short claws by trimming them on a regular basis (usually every 1-2 months) will also prevent furniture damage as well as in-grown nails. We would be happy to demonstrate nail trimming to you or you can schedule an appointment for our technicians to trim the nails for you. For cats that are still damaging your furniture, we can show you how to apply a product called Soft Paws. These are acrylic nail covers that are glued onto the existing claw and prevent damage from scratching activity. Lastly, we can surgically remove the last bone of the toe and its nail extension through a procedure called declawing. It is usually only performed on the front claws and your cat must be over 3 months of age (or over 3 pounds if you are unsure of age) and current on vaccinations for the surgery. If you choose to declaw your cat, we strongly recommend our laser option for the surgery in order to seal the nerves and blood vessels and help your cat have a smoother surgery and recovery.

## **Behavior**

Cats are independent and nocturnal creatures who love structure in their social setting and daily routine. They are also vulnerable and rely on us to provide a safe and secure environment with physical and mental stimulation as well as dependable resources for food, water, and a clean litter box. With a physical examination, we will help you ensure that your kitten is healthy and free of disease so that you can continue to nourish your kitten at home with these other important aspects. You can first gain trust from your kitten by feeding him on a consistent schedule, providing fresh water at all times, and cleaning the litter box on a daily basis. Also, make sure your kitten feels secure by allowing him an easy escape route to these resources whenever needed. Some cats feel safer in vertical territory such as cat trees and shelves while others prefer hiding under beds. Give them time to adjust to their surroundings as some cats may take weeks or even months to feel comfortable and show you their true personality. Climbing, scratching, and hunting are all natural behaviors so build on these traits when picking toys for your kitten. Avoid letting them bite and play with your hands or other body parts to teach them appropriate play behavior. Never physically punish your cat, instead you can either ignore them or distract them with a different toy to help them learn. Teaching your kitten tricks through positive reinforcement like praise and treats can also improve their confidence and your bond with one another. If you are having issues with a new pet introduction, litter box training, appropriate play behavior, abnormal fear responses, or anything else please give us a call or visit our website for other resources.



### **Recommended Websites**

Our Clinic: [www.brakkenveterinaryclinic.com](http://www.brakkenveterinaryclinic.com)  
General Health Information: [www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com)  
Parasite Information: [www.capcvet.org](http://www.capcvet.org)  
Behavioral Information: <http://indoorpet.osu.edu/>  
Poison and Pet Care Information: [www.aspca.org](http://www.aspca.org)