



**Parker &
Crowther**
Vets

Your **NEW KITTEN**



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Congratulations, you've got a kitten

Cats and kittens can bring a lot of happiness and love into your life, but in return they rely on you to keep them happy and healthy. In this guide, we will help you to get things right from day one.

Whilst cats are fairly independent creatures, the world is a very daunting place for a tiny kitten and they will need your time, energy and commitment to make sure they are kept both entertained and safe - particularly when they are very young.

The early stages of their development are crucial for them growing up to be a happy, healthy and well socialised adult cat.

We are on hand to help you at all stages of your cat's life. Our teams have a wealth of knowledge and don't worry - when it comes to kittens there is no such thing as a silly question. If you are having any issues please call us for advice.

And remember... dogs have owners but cats have staff!





Getting to know the physical characteristics of your kitten

As with all animals, you need to familiarise yourself with their physical characteristics and behavioural traits so that you can spot if something is amiss at an early stage.

Handling your new kitten is vitally important. There will be times in their life when they need to be examined either by you or a vet, so not only does handling them establish a bond between you, but it also gets them used to being handled. Don't overdo it though. You will soon find the limits of their tolerance - kittens have sharp claws and teeth!

Get to know what their skin and fur feels like, and you will be able to feel any lumps, bumps and swelling or if their fur suddenly feels dull or matted.

When you are cuddling or interacting with your kitten, look into their eyes, ears and mouth to see what normal looks like. If you do this regularly, you will be able to detect any changes such as reddening, sores or discharge, which could be the early signs of a problem.

Check how your kitten moves, sits, lies, walks and jumps.

Everything is either exciting or frightening to a kitten. It is difficult to know what normal behaviour is for them at first, but you will soon get to see their individual traits as they develop.

Handling your kitten

How friendly your kitten is towards humans will be based on two factors - genetics and their exposure and interactions with people.

If a mother is happy being handled, their kittens should be the same. It is also vital that they are handled at an early age. The optimum time to start is from when the kitten is two to eight weeks of age, although they continue to develop through their kittenhood. Regular positive handling as they grow up will have benefits on their emotional and physical development. Ideally, the breeder will have started handling the kittens. It is very beneficial for kittens to be handled alongside their siblings in their litter.

There are three main components to handling your kitten which have been shown to have a positive effect on the ways in which kittens interact with humans.

1. Type of handling

The handling should be gentle and confined to stroking and gentle scratching where they are comfortable - usually their head, face and back. Talking softly to them will also help. Remember to let them set the pace - look out for signs they are getting fed up. Your kitten will also need to get used to being picked up and snuggled, but only when they are ready - watch those claws.

2. Frequency

Studies have shown that the optimum amount of time to handle your kitten during this early development period is between 40 minutes and two hours per day, and this should be broken down into lots of shorter sessions rather than all at once.

3. Number and type of people handling your kitten

Your kitten should be handled by a wide number of people, ideally of all ages and both sexes. This will help them to grow up to be comfortable around strangers. Cats are high number but low intensity interactors, whereas humans are low number high intensity. Minimal handling and restraint is the cornerstone of a good relationship.

It is vital that you get your kitten used to having their ears and mouth examined. This should be incorporated as a small part of a longer period of stroking, when they are totally relaxed.

Kissing

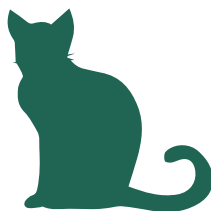
We know that there is a magical bond between owner and pet and that many pet owners like to kiss their animals. All animals carry germs and kissing them is an easy way for you to pick up these germs or swallow the microscopic parasites living on their body. Please don't kiss your pets.

Kitten proofing your home

Kittens are extremely inquisitive, so you need to make sure that their new home is safe for them. To begin with, you will need to keep them inside until they realise that your home is also their home. Make sure that all windows and doors are shut and check where your kitten is before you open a door so that they can't make a dash for freedom. If you have a door with a cat flap, tape it shut!

View your house through a kitten's eyes. Move dangling electric cables, window blind cords and tablecloths that hang down.

Keep doors to washing machines and tumble dryers closed and get into the habit of checking them before putting clothes in and switching them on. Move any objects that could be a choking hazard.



The first few days

When you are bringing your kitten home, make sure you have a cat carrier that fastens securely and ask if you can have a blanket that they have used. This will have familiar smells on it and will help your kitten to be less stressed in the carrier. This can also make the transition into a new home less daunting.

It is a good idea to initially confine your kitten to one room, rather than giving them the freedom of the whole house. This will help them to get familiar with where they eat, drink, sleep and go to the toilet.

The room you choose should be quiet. Cats like high vantage points, so don't be surprised if they run up the curtains and settle there. Make sure the room can be sealed off from other pets and children.

You will need to buy a few items for this safe room.

- A bed: Ideally this will have a roof, or it could be a box with their blanket in which will be warm and cosy but easy to clean. You may want to put a warm hot water bottle under their blanket at first to replace the warmth from their mother. Don't be surprised if, after you have created the perfect, most adorable bed, your kitten decides they would rather sleep elsewhere. This is just one of the delights of kitten ownership - their independent spirit.
- A litter tray and cat litter: Cats are very hygienic so place the litter tray in the opposite corner of the room from their food and water bowls. Cats like to toilet in a secluded, quiet place so keep the litter tray away from busy areas such as doorways. You will need tray liners and a scoop, and make sure you clean the tray out regularly.
- Food and water bowls: Get separate bowls rather than two joined together. Cats may avoid drinking from water bowls if there is a likelihood that they could become contaminated by stray food from their food bowl - keep some distance between the two bowls. Choose shallow bowls that won't catch their whiskers when they eat or drink.
- Scratching post: Kittens want to scratch. This is part of their natural behaviour. This is designed to mark their territory as well as helping to keep their claws in check. If you find that your kitten wants to scratch in other places such as furniture or door frames, there are helpful products on the market which contain a synthetic imitation of the cat scratching pheromone. Apply the liquid to the scratching post, following the manufacturer's instructions, and place the post near to the area your kitten has been scratching to encourage them to use the scratching post instead. Scratch posts are a must for indoor cats that cannot carry out scratching behavior on natural outdoor materials.



When you arrive home with your new kitten, place the carrier in their prepared room. Resist the temptation to make this a family event, as your kitten may be shy and timid. Open the carrier door and let them come out in their own time.

Give them a few hours to explore their new surroundings and get used to the sights, sounds and smells. Don't worry if they go and hide under furniture - this is perfectly normal and they will come out when they're ready.

By the time they have emerged and explored the room you will be desperate to pick your kitten up and play with them, but just sit quietly in the room with them. If you speak to them gently, their inquisitive nature will take over and they will approach you. Be patient and only reach out to touch them when they are relaxed around you.

After all this excitement, they will probably need a rest. Kittens need a lot of sleep so make sure they have lots of opportunity.

When it gets to their usual feeding time, offer them some food. If they are still a little stressed, then they may not eat at first. Once they get used to you and their surroundings, their appetite should return.





How your kitten speaks to you

Humans and cats don't speak the same language, but with a little time and effort you can learn to understand what they're telling you.

Sounds:

Cats are a very vocal species with a wide ranges of noises such as miaowing, purring and yowling. A classic miaow is a call for help or attention. It can convey a huge range of emotions from friendliness to anxiety to anger.

Some kittens will chirrup – this is always a friendly greeting.

Purring is generally seen as a sound a kitten makes when it is happy. It is believed that kittens purr to let their mother know they are comfortable, and of course to get you to stroke them more! Behaviourists also believe that cats may purr when they are stressed to calm themselves down.

Body language:

Cats will try to ward off enemies rather than fight them. One technique they use is to make themselves look bigger by fluffing up their tail, arching their back and standing sideways on. They may do this when you are playing with them, which is fine. If they feel threatened, another technique they use is to cower down and make themselves as small as possible.

Kneading:

If your kitten is kneading it is a sign of contentment. It is thought to have come from feeding from their mother and using the kneading technique to get the mother's milk to flow faster.

Tail movement:

Your cat's tail is one of the tell-tale signs of how they are feeling.

- Held up high – happy and confident
- Slowly twitching tip – curious
- Wagging – irritated, not happy
- Fluffed up – scared
- Curled under their body – submissive
- Rapid flicking – agitated
- Thumping – severely agitated

Ear movement:

- Ears standing erect – alert
- Pointing forward – curious
- Pointing back and low – nervous/threatened
- Pointing outwards – submissive
- Rotated back with the insides showing – severely threatened

Meeting the family and visitors

Once your kitten is settled in their room and is interacting happily with you it is time to introduce them to the rest of the family.

Make sure everyone remains calm and quiet. Everyone should sit still on the floor and wait for the kitten to approach them.

This can be quite a challenge for children, but if they get excitable and try to grab it will frighten your kitten. Make sure they are gentle and understand that a kitten is not a toy. Keep the initial interactions with children short and make sure your kitten gets plenty of quiet time and rest.

Children will often try to pat a kitten rather than stroke them. This can be painful for kittens, so you will need to teach children how to gently stroke them instead.

Teach your children never to grab or pull your kitten's tail and avoid touching their tummy, as they can be very sensitive here and lash out - and kittens have very sharp claws and teeth!

You will probably have a long line of family, friends and neighbours desperate to come and say hello. Put them off for a few days until your kitten is comfortable with your family and their environment and again follow the same procedure of sitting quietly and letting your kitten approach your visitors.





Meeting other pets

Your kitten shouldn't make contact with other unvaccinated pets any earlier than two weeks after they have had their initial vaccination course.

You need to take great care when introducing them to an existing cat or a family dog to ensure that they become friends.

When introducing them to each other, patience is the key. Animals use scent as a way of recognising each other, so try to intermingle their scents. Stroke one and then the other so that they get used to each other's scents. You can also try swapping bits of bedding so that they associate the scent with nice things like fussing and snuggling.

Use a gate across the doorway and let the pets approach each other from a distance. Only when they get close without showing any signs of aggression should you take the barrier away. Make sure these early meetings are done under your full supervision.

Remember that cats are hunters so keep your kitten well away from any pet rodents, rabbits and birds.





One cat or two?

Generally cats are solitary animals, which means that they have their own territory that they don't like to share with other cats. Having said that, there are plenty of cats that cohabit quite happily and some that are even best friends. The signs that they do not get on may be subtle, and just because they are not hissing and spitting at each other, it does not mean that they are not stressed.

Cats will bond more readily if they perceive each other to be of the same social group, so if you get two kittens from the same litter at the same time there is more chance of them being friends – but no guarantees, especially once they reach social maturity from 18 months of age. Cats in the same social group will snuggle up to each other and rub and groom each other to share scent.

If you already have a cat and are introducing a new kitten, then you will need to do it very gradually. Adult cats tend to accept kittens more readily than another adult cat, but it can still take months for them to successfully cohabit.

The two cats will seek to establish their own territory and problems will occur when one cat goes into the other's territory whilst going about their daily routine.

Make sure both cats have their own beds, food and water in separate areas so that they are not competing for their essential needs. Remember to make sure that both cats are eating well – a greedy puss may sneak in and steal the other cat's food!

Finally, consider the financial implications of having two cats – double the cost!

Sleep

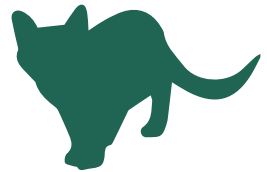
Kittens are great fun to interact with, but young kittens need an incredible amount of sleep - up to 20 hours a day! Make sure you give them plenty of opportunity to sleep.

Don't be tempted to move your kitten's bed into your bedroom at night.

Their bed should be left in their room both during the day and night, so that they are in familiar surroundings and have access to their litter tray.

Just like babies, kittens can wake up in the night and cry for attention.

We know it is hard, but you have to ignore their cries as giving them attention will just continue this behaviour.



Venturing further afield

Once your kitten is at home in their room, you can let them explore the rest of the house.

If they are particularly nervous, speak to your vet - there is a range of pheromone products that can be used around the home to help reduce the stress they are feeling.

Once they are happy and settled, and providing it is at least two weeks since their vaccinations and they are microchipped, they can be allowed outside. There are even more dangers outside, so we would always recommend that your kitten is insured.

It is a good idea to put a collar on your kitten - make sure it has a quick release function in case it gets snagged. The collar should not be too tight or too slack - you should be able to get two fingers between your kitten and their collar. Remember that your kitten will need a bigger collar size as they grow.

Choose a dry day and a quiet time and stay with your kitten whilst they explore. Remember that young kittens can be vulnerable, so it is best not to leave them outside unattended for the first few months of their life. It is also important to remember that female kittens can get pregnant from around four months of age, so limit their roaming until they have been neutered.

Once they are allowed out without supervision, it is a good idea to fit a cat flap so that they can come and go as they please. You may need to show them how to use the flap by propping it open and enticing them through with food, until they get used to how it works.

To stop other cats coming in, you can get cat flaps that are electronically synchronised to a transmitter on your cat's collar or microchip, and only open for them.

Toilet training your kitten

Because cats are naturally hygienic animals, they generally learn to use a litter tray fairly quickly with the right training. Depending upon the environment they were born into, they may have already learnt how to use a litter tray from their mother.

The training is best done in the early days when they are confined to one room. Keep the litter tray away from busy areas such as doorways and in a quiet area of the room. Make sure it is well away from food and water bowls, as cats will not toilet near to where they feed.

The tray shouldn't be too deep, so that it is easy for your kitten to get in and out of. The tray should be filled with cat litter, which is available from pet shops and supermarkets. Do not be tempted to use garden soil as this could contain bacteria and diseases from neighbouring cats.

Place the tray on newspaper to catch any litter that is pushed over the side when your kitten is cleaning up after themselves.

In the first few days of having your kitten at home you may need to look out for the signs that they need the toilet and move them into the tray. The signs can include crouching down, sniffing the floor and scratching. It is also wise to take them to the litter tray after they have eaten or when they first wake up. Use praise and positive reinforcement when they have used the tray. If they do have an accident elsewhere do not shout at them or punish them.



The litter tray should be kept clean, but this does not mean emptying the whole of the tray every day. Just remove the soiled litter so that the tray retains a familiar smell that will encourage your kitten to carry on using it. Obviously if your kitten has an upset stomach resulting in diarrhoea you should empty the whole tray and clean it thoroughly.

In normal usage the tray should be fully emptied and cleaned once a week using hot water and a weak detergent. Some disinfectants are toxic to cats - usually the ones that go cloudy in water - so research any products thoroughly!

Once they are familiar with their tray, they should seek it out from wherever they are whenever they need to toilet.

If you are intending to let your kitten toilet outside, you can gradually move the tray towards the door. Once they go outside regularly, it will help if you sprinkle some of the litter onto freshly dug soil to encourage them to dig there.

Once they are regularly toileting outside, you can remove the litter tray. As long as they have free access to the garden, there shouldn't be any accidents inside.

If you want your kitten to consistently use a litter tray, you can invest in a covered tray that provides more privacy, stops litter falling out and reduces the smell.

If your kitten is reluctant to use their tray there could be a number of factors:

- It is too near to the area that they feed in.
- The tray is not big enough. The tray should be big enough for an adult cat to turn around in and to do their business in more than one area.
- The tray is dirty. Although we have said not to completely empty the tray every day, you may have to find a balance as to how often it needs emptying. Always ensure that any dirty litter is removed after use.
- The texture of the litter doesn't suit your kitten. You may have to try several types of litter until you find one that your kitten likes.
- It smells of detergent. Make sure that you thoroughly rinse the tray with hot water after cleaning and maybe dilute the detergent more.



Socialisation

Socialisation is vitally important to give your kitten the skills to grow into a well rounded adult cat.

The first two months are crucial. Introduce your kitten to experiences they will encounter in later adult life, so that they consider them as normal. You need to think about everything they will see, hear and feel.

Get your kitten used to wearing a collar, having their teeth cleaned and being groomed. Take care when grooming the tail and belly as these are very sensitive, and use a soft brush and a wide tooth comb. Familiarise them with a cat carrier and journeys in the car - you don't want them to associate these things just with stressful journeys to the vets. Do this in steps - let your kitten get used to the carrier, then carry them in the carrier. Next, put the carrier in the car, switch on the engine and then drive the car. This process may take several days to complete. Regular car journeys will show the kitten that there is nothing to be frightened of.

Introduce new experiences gradually and use positive reinforcement with praise and treats. If your kitten is showing signs of stress remove them from the situation to a place where they feel safe.

Your kitten needs to get used to being handled by humans. Most kittens will enjoy this close bond, but all cats like this contact on their terms!

When kittens play, they use the tools that were developed for hunting - their teeth and claws - so get them appropriate toys to focus on, chase and chew.

Set aside some time each day to play with your kitten. This will not only strengthen the bond between you, but will also give them exercise and get their blood pumping. Don't overdo it though. Choose suitable toys that let your kitten use their hunting skills - dangling mice on string (so that their teeth and claws are well out of your way) and toys you can throw for them to chase.

Never encourage a kitten to play with your hands or feet. Although it may seem funny and harmless when they are young, you don't want them growing into a large adult cat that attacks people.

Scratching posts and activity towers are fantastic for keeping kittens amused and reduce the chances of them destroying your furniture.

If you have a multi-pet household you may find that your kitten will pester their housemates to play. Make sure this is done under supervision. If their playmate doesn't want to get involved, distract your kitten's attention with a toy and they will soon learn that playing with you is more fun. Your other pets will thank you too!



Microchipping

It is a great shame that microchipping is not compulsory for cats because many cats that stray or get stolen are never reunited with their loving family.

A microchip is a small device, approximately the size of a grain of rice, which is inserted under your kitten's skin, usually on the back of the neck. The microchip contains a unique number which is then registered to your kitten on a national database.

Microchip scanners are used to read the microchip. Vets, the police and some rescue organisations use microchip scanners to identify cats and reunite them with owners.

Remember, if you move to a new house you will need to update your contact details on the database.

There is a movement that is trying to make it compulsory for councils to routinely scan any cats found dead at the roadside and notify owners. Whilst no-one would want to hear this news, at least people are not left forever wondering what happened to their pet.



Vaccinations

Kittens require an initial vaccination course of two vaccinations, given three to four weeks apart.

The vaccinations offer protection against the following diseases:

- Feline panleukopaenia virus (also called feline infectious enteritis).
The virus causes a severe gastroenteritis causing haemorrhagic vomiting and diarrhoea, damage to the lining of the intestine and attacks the bone marrow and lymph glands which more often than not leads to death.
- Feline herpesvirus and feline calicivirus, which together are described as cat flu. These viruses cause a lot of distress to cats, giving them symptoms akin to human flu. In kittens this condition can be fatal.
- Feline leukaemia. Not all vets vaccinate against feline leukaemia as part of the initial vaccination course. The virus leads to tumours developing in about a third of affected cats and can lead to many other problems to all those infected.

Your kitten should not go outside or come into contact with other cats until two weeks after they have had their second vaccination.

Your cat will need an annual booster injection to keep the immunity topped up. As the immunity provided is different for each disease, your cat will not necessarily get the same booster every year.



Neutering

As a pet owner, the decision of whether to neuter your kitten is one of the most responsible decisions you can make.

Neutering obviously prevents unwanted pregnancies, but there are also sound clinical and behavioural reasons to neuter. Kittens reach sexual maturity at around four months of age, and at this time they can be neutered.

Neutering male kittens will stop them from the smelly behaviour of spraying to mark their territory. They will also be less likely to fight with other male cats and thus reduce the risk of them catching the cat equivalent of HIV which is spread by cat bites. It has been found that neutered male cats stay nearer to home, so are less likely to wander off or get run over.

The operation is called castration and involves removing the testes. The procedure is carried out under a general anaesthetic and your kitten will be back home the same day, but will need to be kept inside for a few days.

Unneutered female cats come into season every three weeks during the sexually active times of the year, and this will attract the attentions of unneutered males who will fight, spray and vocalise.

Neutering a female cat is called spaying and involves the removal of the ovaries and uterus through an incision in the belly or on their side. The operation is done under anaesthetic and usually your kitten will be home the same day. They will have a shaved area of fur and stitches which will need removing between seven and ten days later, although many practices now use dissolvable stitches under the skin.

Spaying a cat greatly reduces the chance of them getting a life threatening womb infection called pyometra and also reduces the chance of mammary tumours.

Neutering causes changes in a cat's hormonal secretions and may change their energy requirements, so you should monitor their diet to make sure they are not putting on weight after the procedure. Your vet will be able to give you advice and recommendations.

Parasites

When it comes to parasites, prevention is better than cure. Start as you mean to go on with a treatment regime. Many vets offer health plans that not only give owners a discount on veterinary supplied parasite treatments but send reminders to apply the product too.

Fleas

Fleas are small brown insects that feed on the blood of your pet. They are picked up by contact with other animals or from visiting an environment where fleas are present. Whilst only the adult flea is found on a kitten, the eggs, larvae and pupae can be found in areas such as a kitten's bed, carpet and furniture. If adult fleas are found on your cat, it is important to break the life cycle of the flea to prevent a re-infestation.

There are a number of products available - some just treat adult fleas whilst others interrupt the life cycle. Your vet will be able to advise you on the most effective products.

Many owners think that fleas are just a summer problem because fleas like warmth. However, as we all now have central heating in our houses, fleas have become a year-round problem, so it is essential to maintain your flea protection throughout the year.

Fleas feeding on the blood of a kitten can result in the kitten becoming anaemic and in extreme cases can result in death.

Fleas can also cause irritation to the skin causing your kitten to scratch and chew at the affected area, leading to sores which could become infected.

Fleas are a host for tapeworms and it is very easy for kittens to ingest fleas containing tiny tapeworms during their grooming, which will lead to them developing fully grown adult tapeworms.

Humans can be bitten by fleas which are lurking in the furniture, causing itchy, raised bumps.

Ticks

Ticks are oval shaped insects which attach themselves to a host animal to feed. They look like grey/brown warts. They are usually picked up by your cat when they are moving through undergrowth.

When feeding, the tick will hook its mouth parts onto your pet, so never just pull a tick off as you may leave its head under the skin which can then become infected. Use a tick removal tool which, when used correctly, ensures that all the tick is removed, then remember to kill the tick so that it cannot run off and attach itself to someone else's pet.



Worms

When you get your kitten it could already be infected by worms passed down from the mother cat. As your kitten grows up and begins to explore the outside world they can also pick up worm eggs and larvae from the soil and prey. As natural hunters they have a high exposure to worms.

There are many different types of worm that can affect your cat. Small numbers may not cause an issue, but if left to multiply they can cause suffering and even death. Regular worm control is essential, as by the time symptoms appear the damage to your cat's health is already done. Worms are so prevalent that it is extremely difficult to prevent your kitten from getting worms, so it is important that you use a regular worming treatment.

There are a bewildering choice of worming products available, and some work on some species of worm but not others. Some products are given in tablet form and some as spot on treatments given through the skin. It is usually very difficult to give a tablet to a cat so many owners prefer the convenience of spot on treatments.

Speak to your vet for advice on which products would be best for your kitten.

Ear mites

Ear mites are common in kittens. They are tiny parasites that get inside the ear, either via transmission from another cat or from the environment. They can cause intense itching, which can lead to swellings, ear infections, pain and wax production.

If your kitten's ears appear dirty, itchy or full of a dark brown substance you should consult your vet. The vet can prescribe either a tablet or spot on treatment to kill the mites. They may also prescribe some drops to deal with the inflammation within the ear canal.



Grooming

Cats have an inbuilt grooming tool - their tongue, which is rough and acts as a comb when they groom themselves removing dead hair and distributing oils to keep their fur healthy. Unfortunately, sometimes this is not enough and owners need to step in to help.

Grooming your kitten will also help to establish a bond between kitten and human. Generally, kittens love being groomed, and starting when they are younger makes this much easier to do.

Shorter coats may only need a weekly once-over, whereas longer coats may need attention more frequently. You may even need to take them to a professional groomer occasionally.

With your kitten on your lap, let them sniff the brush and start stroking them from the back of their head down their back. Swap the stroking for combing and use reassuring words and tones to make them feel at ease. Move onto their sides and again alternate stroking and combing. Get them used to this by extending the time you spend grooming over a few days.

Once they are completely comfortable with grooming you can move onto more sensitive areas such as their belly, ears and tail. Start with short sessions and gradually increase the length of session.

Cats generally do not like or need bathing. Bathing a cat can remove some of the natural oils they need to keep their skin and fur healthy. However, a vet may recommend a specific shampoo to treat a particular condition if necessary.







Food

It is important to find out what your kitten has been fed before you adopted them. Initially, keep them on the same food, as a sudden change in diet combined with the stress of a new environment could cause stomach upsets and diarrhoea.

Once they have settled in you can change their diet, but do it gradually by mixing the new diet in with the old over a few days, slowly increasing the ratio of new to old.

Kittens need a balanced diet to ensure that they get the right mix of protein, carbohydrates, minerals, fats, trace elements and vitamins. Felines have a very high requirement for protein that must include a number of specific amino acids, particularly taurine which is found in animal tissue in nature. Cats are unable to synthesise taurine from other amino acids and if they don't get sufficient quantities can suffer from reproductive problems, blindness and heart disease.

Kittens have different nutritional needs to adult cats so you should be looking for a premium food specially formulated for kittens. Whilst humans like a varied diet, this does not suit a cat's digestion.

Cats also eat differently - they have small stomachs and tend to eat smaller portions throughout the day and night.

Kittens grow most rapidly between the age of four and five months old. At this stage they can gain around 100g every week. It is a good habit to weigh your kitten weekly and to keep a weight diary so that you can check their progress. Weigh them at the same time of the day.

Male kittens will tend to grow bigger than females and their growth period is longer.

Get into good habits from the start and do not give your cat human food or treats from the table. This can fill them up without giving them the right balance of nutrients.

Specially formulated dry food is recommended, as the food can be left in the bowl for longer which is perfectly suited to the way cats like to feed. Make sure they have access to clean fresh water at all times. The water bowl should be located away from the food bowl so that it doesn't get contaminated.

Rather than making a special journey to go to their water bowl, cats are opportunistic drinkers so it may be worth having several water bowls spread around the house. The bowls should be shallow and well filled so that your kitten doesn't have to put their head down into the bowl. Try bowls made from different materials as some cats don't like water from plastic bowls.

Do not give your kitten milk to drink as cats are intolerant to dairy products.



Toxins & Poisons

There are many toxic hazards around your home and garden, including foods, medicines, cleaning products, pesticides and plants. Kittens can be exposed to these products in a number of ways, including ingestion, contact with the skin and inhalation.

If you think your kitten has been poisoned, you will need to seek veterinary attention immediately. It will help your vet if you can provide the following information:

- What product you think your kitten has been exposed to (including the brand name and list of ingredients if possible - or take along the product or packaging if it is safe to do so)
- How much they have been exposed to
- When it happened
- If you have seen any changes in your kitten since the incident occurred

COMMON TOXINS/POISONS



HUMAN FOODS

- Alcohol
- Chocolate
- Caffeine
- Dairy products
- Fat trimmings
- Raw meat, eggs and fish
- Onions and garlic

HUMAN MEDICINES

- Antidepressants
- Cancer medicines
- Medicines for colds and flu
- Diet pills
- Pain relief and headache products
- Vitamins

PLANTS

- Aloe
- Avocado plant
- Azalea
- Castor oil plant
- Clematis
- Cyclomen
- Daffodil
- Foxglove
- Geranium

- Hyacinth
- Ivy
- Lily
- Mistletoe
- Poinsettia
- Rhododendron
- Rubber plant
- Tulip

IN THE HOUSE

- Copper coins
- Mothballs
- Pot pourri oils
- Fabric softener sheets and liquid
- Dishwashing tablets and liquid
- Home-made play dough
- Cleaning agents

IN THE SHED/GARAGE

- Lead based paint
- Caulking compounds
- Fertilisers
- Herbicides and pesticides
- Rat and mouse bait
- Antifreeze

THIS LIST IS NOT EXHAUSTIVE



Indoor cats

Cats, especially young ones, have lots of energy and need lots of stimulation.

Outdoor cats can get a lot of this from playing and hunting outside. You will need to provide substitutes for this if your kitten is going to remain inside.

Offer lots of toys and rotate them to keep your kitten interested. They will also need things to climb on and things to hide in.

Set aside time to play with your kitten every day.

Because indoor cats are subjected to a near constant temperature, they will moult all year round and therefore moult more. You will need to help them with regular grooming to avoid hairballs.

Indoor cats also get less exercise so you will need to ensure they are getting the right amount of food and monitor what you are feeding them. Speak to your vets about the right food for your cat's lifestyle and bear in mind that their diet may need to change as they grow.

Whether indoor cats need vaccination and parasite control is a topic of much debate and we recommend that the owner does their own risk assessment. There is always a risk that an indoor cat will come into contact with another cat, either by escaping or another animal coming into the house, or that the cat can come into contact with vermin such as mice. We would generally recommend that indoor cats are vaccinated and that a parasite protection regime is in place.

Make sure they are microchipped. If they do escape, the world outside will be really scary for them and they are more likely to get lost.

If your kitten could actually speak, what would they tell you?

1. My claws are essential to my physical and emotional wellbeing. If I am scratching your furniture you need to get me a scratching post. Please love me more than you love your furniture.
2. I NEED meat in my food. I don't mind if you are a vegetarian but I'm not built that way and I need meat to stay healthy.
3. If you are not breeding from me, I need to be neutered – it is better for my health and my behaviour.
4. Please make sure I have regular flea and worm treatment. I don't want these parasites feeding off me and I don't want to bring them into your house.
5. I need you to know that I am very good at hiding illness and pain. When I'm not well my behaviour will change, maybe subtly, so please keep an eye out for any changes and get me help when I need it.
6. Play with me every single day – let's have our time. It's good for me and it's good for you too.
7. I need high places to climb to. From up there I will feel safe and can have a nap and when I wake up I can survey my territory and check that everything is alright.
8. I also need places to hide sometimes. Don't ask me why but sometimes I get a bit scared and a hiding place will help me to cope.
9. Please get me microchipped. I may wander off and get lost and if I have a microchip someone can bring me back home.
10. I know that right now I am sooooo cute! Remember I won't always be this cute. I will hopefully live for quite a long time and I want you to love me and care for me all through my life – promise?





Insurance

Cats and kittens can be very expensive. Modern day veterinary medicine is a highly sophisticated and technological branch of science and this comes at a cost. Recent advances mean that MRI scans and CT scans are increasingly being used for diagnosis and this comes with a high price tag. Vets regularly see cases that cost well into the thousands!

At some point during their lifetime your cat will get ill or have an accident. If you are unlucky, your cat may have a lifelong issue which requires regular ongoing treatment.

One of the most distressing situations arises when a pet's illness is curable, or an accident fixable, but unfortunately the owner cannot afford to pay for the treatment, resulting in their pet being put to sleep. We always advise owners to have sufficient insurance in place to cover these unforeseeable events.

There are many, many pet insurance providers and it can be a minefield checking through the small print to check that you have adequate cover.

Some policies limit the amount that can be claimed in a set period of time. Some policies will exclude a previously claimed condition on the annual renewal and all policies will have an excess that the owner will need to pay.

Don't automatically assume that all veterinary practices will claim the money back from the insurance company, not - known as a direct claim. Some may not do direct claims at all whilst others may be selective about which insurance providers they will do direct claims with. If they don't, you will have to pay the full bill straight after treatment and then claim it back from your insurance company. Always speak to your vets to find out their policy in advance of treatment.

Please note that veterinary surgeries are not licenced credit brokers so it is illegal for them to set up a credit agreement payment plan to cover treatment.

When choosing a policy you need to consider the following:

- Check the amount of veterinary fee cover is adequate. A single condition can end up costing thousands of pounds over time.
- Check that there is no time limit on how long you can claim. Chronic conditions can go on for the lifetime of your pet.
- Check that your cat will be covered in later years.
- Check the small print- some policies insist on dental care being carried out within three months if recommended by a veterinary surgeon. Failure to comply can invalidate the insurance policy.

Insurance will not cover you for routine vaccinations and parasite protection.



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