



Caring for
Cats & Kittens

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A Good Home

Best bed

Cats and kittens spend a lot of time sleeping and need a warm, dry comfortable place for snoozing. Beds can be lined with newspaper, which is warm, inexpensive and easily changed. You could however, buy a wicker cat bed or one made from plastic which could be easily cleaned.

Your cat or kitten may well reject the bed you have carefully prepared for one it likes better, that's a cats independent nature taking over!



Toilet Training

House training is the first lesson that every cat or kitten needs to learn. Most cats are instinctively very clean. Your new pet will need a leak-proof litter tray or box (plastic or enamel are best) which should measure 45 x 25 cm (16 x 10in) minimum. Whichever tray you choose, put it in a convenient corner and fill the tray with cat litter.

Litter Trays

The litter tray must be kept clean and emptied at least once a day, otherwise your cat will refuse to use it and use the carpet instead. When house training a new kitten it's a good idea not to empty the tray completely, but to add a little of the old litter to the fresh until the kitten is fully housetrained.

Don't use bleaches and disinfectants containing coal tar and carbolic derivatives to clean the tray – these are poisonous to cats.

If your cat has one or two accidents a spray of plain soda water can help to remove the smell. There are also several proprietary brands of stain remover available which can deal effectively with cat urine.

Feeding Well

You can feed adult cats with either tinned food or a mixture of fresh and prepared food.

Prepared food

Most prepared foods contain all necessary vitamins and minerals to provide a balanced diet. Some contain more moisture than others and some have a greater concentration of meat. This method is probably the simplest way of feeding your cat, but make sure that whatever prepared food you use, you follow manufacturers' instructions accordingly.

Mixture of foods

You may prefer to use a mixture of foods giving fresh fish or rabbit or heart several times a week. You can then fill in with tinned or crunchy dried food which is very good for the teeth. Make sure your cat always has access to lots of fresh clean water.

If you feed your cat fish or chicken make sure it is properly cooked. Raw meats like heart or rabbit should be cut into small squares and fed fresh. This is because uncooked raw meat can carry bacterial infections which could be harmful to your cat. Only give your cat liver – cooked or raw – once every two weeks.

Greens please

All cats and kittens need to be able to eat grass. If your cat is unable to go outside for any length of time put some grass in a pot and keep it inside by the water bowl.

Kitten food

1. *You can use tinned food – giving four or five small meals a day (about one tablespoon of food for each meal) until 12 weeks. Some manufacturers make special kitten food.*
2. *You can make your own using finely ground fresh meat, rabbit or fish. If you do this you may need to give a daily yeast tablet or balanced vitamin supplement as well – ask your vet for advice.*
3. *After about 12 weeks your kitten can go down to four meals a day and by the age of six or seven months two meals are quite sufficient. As it gets older and has fewer meals you will need to increase the quantities given.*



Drink up

Give your cat or kitten lots of fresh water, but don't give them too much milk. It can give kittens diarrhoea and sometimes causes stomach problems in adult cats. Cats and kittens don't need to have milk and some simply don't like it. If you think your cat is not drinking enough it may be because it doesn't like the chemicals which are present in our tap water. Try clean rain water or bottled still water instead. It is even more important that cats, which eat dried crunchy food, drink lots of water otherwise urinary tract infections result.

Be careful

1. *Make sure that all bones are removed from cooked fish, rabbit and chicken as these can easily get caught in your cat's throat, pierce the intestines and cause your pet's death.*
2. *Don't feed a cat dog food – it doesn't have all the vitamins that a cat or kitten needs.*
3. *Don't try and make your cat or kitten a vegetarian. Cats cannot get all of the protein they need from non-meat sources.*
4. *Don't feed your cat from soiled dishes – wash in hot water with detergent, rinse well and allow to dry.*

Care For Coats

Grooming

Long-haired cats cannot groom themselves properly. They need to be combed every day to avoid tangled and matted fur and the skin problems which result from neglected coats.

Short-haired cats also need the occasional grooming session especially at moulting time. Otherwise like long-haired cats they can swallow hairs which ball up in the stomach and can cause serious illness.

To groom your short-haired cat you can use a soft brush. However a damp wash leather is also a useful way of removing loose hair effectively. Just hold it in both hands and draw it over the cat from head to tail.

Fighting fleas

Most cats will get fleas at some point – when this happens take action quickly.

1. *Ask your veterinary surgeon for advice as there are many different anti-flea 'programmes' available. Don't use an aerosol on a young kitten without first consulting your vet. Never spray your pet in the face. Some cats are also terrified by the noise of an aerosol, so be sure to hold your cat firmly as you spray.*
2. *De-flea beds and bedding otherwise your cat will just get re-infested. Your vet can also provide you with a surface flea spray. This is NOT for use on the cat but on surfaces like floors and skirting boards.*

Diseases

Three of the most serious cat illnesses – feline infectious enteritis, feline influenza and feline leukaemia can all be prevented by vaccination.

Feline infectious enteritis

Spreads quickly through a neighbourhood, leaving so many cats dead. Young cats are particularly vulnerable and the disease is at its worst in the summer. The symptoms – a sudden rise in temperature, abdominal pain, vomiting, blood-stained motions and collapse. Death can occur within 24 hours.

Feline influenza

The symptoms of cat flu are runny eyes and nose, sneezing, excessive salivation and later congestion of the lungs. The cat should be kept quiet and warm and veterinary help should be sought at once. Cats can die of this disease, so rapid treatment is essential.

Cats of all ages can get cat flu but it is most likely to occur when animals are crowded together. Once a cat has had cat flu it will carry the virus which lies in the lining of its nose for the rest of its life. Occasionally the virus will reactivate without symptoms making the cat a cat flu carrier.



Feline leukaemia

The most common infectious cause of death in cats. It is caused by a virus and is mainly spread by saliva, urine and faeces. This slow acting virus attacks the cat's natural defences and allows other serious diseases to develop. These include severe anaemia tumours of lymph nodes, severe gum infection, kidney failure. The infection can be fatal. A vaccine is now available.

Vaccinate

Fortunately vaccinations can now protect animals against these diseases. Cat flu and enteritis injections may be started in a young kitten from eight, ten or 12 weeks – depending on the make and then booster shots given regularly on the vet's advice. The boosters are usually given annually or every two years. Your vet will advise on the feline leukaemia vaccine.

The USPCA believes that all cats and kittens should be vaccinated against these highly contagious and potentially fatal diseases.

Other Diseases And Complaints

Chlamydial disease

Severely inflamed and discharging eyes. The infection is contagious and needs prolonged antibiotic treatment. There is a vaccine available – your vet can advise.

Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)

Inflammation of the lining of the abdomen has a variety of causes. A serious condition with no known cure.

Feline immuno-deficiency virus

The virus is nearly always spread by the saliva through bite wounds. Affected cats are chronically ill and debilitated and often there is inflammation of the gums. There is no known cure and veterinary advice should be sought.

Digestive complaints

Cats will try to make themselves better by eating grass. So town or indoor cats should be given their own patch or pot of grass. Constipation can be helped by giving your cat a tablespoon of medicinal paraffin which can be repeated twice daily for two days. More serious digestive upsets like persistent vomiting and diarrhoea require rapid veterinary attention.

Ear problems

A number of irritants can cause cats to scratch persistently at their ears. It could be ear mites, for which your vet can supply drops, a small seed which has worked its way into the ear or an abscessed wound inflicted by another cat. Cats ears are very delicate and vulnerable so seek help from the vet rather than attempting to solve the problem yourself.

Eye problems

If you think that your cat has any sort of eye problem or injury you must take it to your vet immediately.

Hair balls

Long-haired cats, if not groomed well will suffer from hair balls from time to time. By ingesting their own hair in the course of grooming themselves a clot of matted hair will form in the gut. Usually a cat will solve the problem by chewing grass, but severe cases may even need an operation.

Skin diseases

Skin problems could be a sign of mange, ringworm, allergies to fleas, lice or perhaps due to an internal complaint like kidney disease. Because there are so many different causes for similar looking conditions veterinary help should always be sought. Medication – ointment – should never be applied without veterinary advice because the cat could be poisoned when it tries to lick it off.



Stings

Cats often play with bees and wasps until they get their first sting. This usually teaches them to keep away from buzzing insects in future. A single sting is painful, but not dangerous unless it is inside the mouth or in the throat. Remove the sting if present and apply a cold water compress or ice pack if possible. If the swelling does not go down in a few hours, consult your veterinary surgeon.

Teeth

Some cats are more prone than others to the build up of tartar around the base of their teeth. Left unchecked this can lead to gum disease and the premature loss of teeth. Bad breath and difficulty eating are warning signs. Giving your cat biscuity cat treats will help to prevent a build up occurring.

Worms

If your cat starts 'staring' with wide eyes and its coat becomes coarse and harsh and it is licking its anal area more than usual then it may well have worms. Cats can be infected by two sorts of worms – round and flat. Kittens should be treated against roundworm from the age of two weeks.

Tapeworms are long strips made up of flat segments filled with eggs which break off from the worm in the body. Segments can come out one at a time so you could miss them. The most common sign is small dried egg sacs like rice grains in the hair around the anus. Segments can also twitch and move. To keep your cat in good health it should be wormed regularly. Your vet will be able to give you advice on the correct treatment.

Ringworm

Ringworm is a fungus infection which may cause characteristic lesions on the skin. Cats with ringworm should be taken for veterinary examination and be treated immediately because it is readily transmissible to man. Children should not be allowed any contact with cats with ringworm because children are most at risk from cross infection.

A Kind End

Well cared for cats can live to a good age – sometimes 20 years or more. But if a cat is beginning to show signs of painful disability, has an incurable illness or severe injury, it should be gently put to sleep. This can be a very difficult decision to make, but it is one of the kindest things that an owner can do for a suffering animal.

Try not to blame yourself for your pet's health. If you gave it care and attention throughout its life and took it to your veterinary surgeon when it was ill, then you did all you could. No untrained person should ever try to put a cat to sleep and it is an offence to kill an animal by improper means.





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