

CARING FOR YOUR KITTEN

We would like to welcome you to the team here at Heathmont Animal Hospital. To help ensure your kitten grows to enjoy a long and healthy life we would like to offer you some guidelines.

We promote responsible cat ownership, which not only means looking after your kitten's needs but also being responsible for your kitten's activities. Keeping your kitten confined at night greatly reduces your kitten's chances of being in cat fights and being hit by a car. It also helps protect our nocturnal native wildlife. We recommend you read the brochures titled "Keeping your cat happy and safe" and "Protect your cat, protect your wildlife". These brochures are enclosed in this kitten pack and are also available from the local council.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR KITTEN'S NEEDS

FEEDING

What to feed:

Many cats are very fussy eaters and it can be a challenge to feed a balanced diet. Cats have quite specific nutritional requirements and so it is important to feed some high quality commercial food.

The feeding options available are:

Dry food - economical and easy to feed. Some cats on supermarket brands can develop cystitis and urinary blockages so a high quality dry food such as Eukanuba, IAMS or Advance Whiskas is recommended.

Canned food - convenient and many varieties are available. Supermarket brands result in high volume, very smelly stools (an important issue for indoor cats).

Cooked loaf - beware of Chubb which is poor quality and can lead to nutritional disease if fed exclusively.

Raw meat - should be fed as large chunks as it helps keep cats teeth clean. It is nutritionally unbalanced so make sure you do not feed it exclusively. Liver is good as an occasional treat but again, should not be fed exclusively.

Our recommendation is to feed a variety of foods from the above groups to try and avoid your cat becoming addicted to one thing. Table scraps can also be fed as an occasional treat.

Bones

Raw bones are essential for maintaining healthy gums and teeth. Raw chicken necks and wings (never cooked) are ideal for cats. Large cooked bones such as from a leg of lamb are also good for keeping cats teeth clean. Bones or large chunks of meat should be fed at least three times a week.

Milk

Even though it is not a necessary part of their diet, many cats enjoy drinking milk. However it can cause diarrhoea in some cats due to an inability to digest lactose. This can be overcome by giving commercial pets milk.

Amount to feed

Until the age of four months, kittens should be fed three times a day. Kittens seldom overeat so you can usually feed your kitten as much as it wishes to consume. At about four months, reduce the number of meals to two per day. By eight months your kitten will be approaching adulthood and the amount of food should be reduced so that it maintains its weight.

VACCINATIONS

Your kitten should be vaccinated to build her immunity against certain diseases. There are two major cat diseases caused by viruses in Australia:

Feline Panleucopaenia or Feline Infectious Enteritis

Feline Respiratory Disease or Cat flu

Feline Enteritis - This is the more serious of the two diseases. Young cats and kittens are most seriously affected and death rates can be as high as 85%. Clinical signs include fever, loss of appetite, depression, rapid weight loss, vomiting and/or diarrhoea and sudden death in young cats. In pregnant cats it causes abortions and birth defects. The virus is very tough and survives in the environment for long periods.

Feline Respiratory Disease (Cat flu) - FRD is rarely fatal but can cause a lot of discomfort and suffering which can last for several weeks. At least 90% of cases are due to one or both of two viruses: Feline Herpesvirus and Feline Calicivirus. Chlamydia can also cause cat flu and is now included in the vaccination schedule.

Clinical signs of cat flu can include sneezing, coughing, discharges from the eyes and nose, often followed by ulcers on the tongue and in the mouth. Severe cases lead to loss of appetite. Siamese and Burmese seem to suffer the disease more severely than other cats.

A typical vaccination schedule is the first at 6 - 8 weeks, the second at 12 -14 weeks, and the third and final at 16 -18 weeks. Annual boosters are then required to maintain immunity.

Feline AIDS (FIV) is a potentially fatal disease, which like its counterpart in humans (HIV) weakens the immune system making the cat susceptible to a variety of infections. FIV is spread by bite wounds so cats that get into fights are at risk. A vaccine is now available which requires 2 injections a fortnight apart then an annual booster.

Feline Leukaemia is a virus that causes a fatal cancer. It is spread by direct prolonged contact and so is an issue in breeding catteries and multicat households. A vaccine is available to help in prevention.

WORMING

Almost all kittens are infected with worms from birth, and as these may be a health hazard to both cats and humans, regular treatment of kittens and disposal of their droppings is important. It is worth knowing that:

For your pet: roundworms can cause vomiting, coughing, blockages in the intestines and a pot belly. The common tapeworm is carried by fleas and can cause an itchy bottom. Tapeworm segments,

which look a bit like moving rice grains are usually the only worms you will see. The rest live quite happily inside your cat. When you worm your kitten, you may see roundworms passed in its droppings the next day.

For you: roundworm larvae can infect children and migrate through the body, occasionally ending up in the eye. The worms that children get are not caught from cats but from other children.

The best worming schedule is: every 2 weeks between 2 and 12 weeks of age, once a month to 6 months of age and then every 3 months.

Toxoplasmosis is caused by a single-celled parasite that can live in the intestines of cats. It can affect pregnant women causing birth defects in unborn children. As a precaution, pregnant women should have a blood test done to determine their own immune status. They should avoid handling litter trays and always wash their hands thoroughly after gardening or handling raw meat.

DESEXING

It is important to have both male and female cats desexed unless you wish to become a registered cat breeder. Desexing will reduce the likelihood of cat fights, wandering, and spraying as well as reducing the risk of being hit by a car or contracting Feline AIDS. It will not make your kitten fat or alter their personality. Six months is the recommended age for desexing. At six months of age your kitten is required to be registered with the local council. A discount applies for desexed cats.

GROOMING

Long haired cats should be groomed every day. Short haired cats also require occasional brushing, especially in Spring. Use a comb to tease out mats of hair, and then brush. Pay particular attention to the cat's underline, tail and behind the ears.

FLEA CONTROL

It is important to establish a flea control program early, before fleas get established in your environment. A separate handout on flea control is available at the clinic, or ask one of our team to recommend a flea product that best suits your cat.

TRAINING

Cats are naturally clean animals so toilet training is relatively simple. Begin training your kitten as soon as you get home. After your kitten has been fed, after play, and after sleeping, place them in a tray containing cat litter. When your kitten does use the litter tray, immediately praise them by telling them that it has done a most wonderful and glorious thing. In less than a week, most kittens will have learnt what to do. If your kitten makes a mistake, don't rub their nose in it, but quickly place your kitten in the litter tray. Replace litter regularly.

Scratching is a basic instinct and indoor cats should be provided with a scratching post. We can show you how to trim your cat's nails if it will always be indoors. If your cat scratches at furniture, say "no" sharply and take it to its scratching post. Never punish your cat physically.

If your cat is showing signs of being aggressive such as biting and scratching people, please contact the clinic so we can discuss the problem in more detail and help you develop some behaviour modification programs to overcome the problem.

MICROCHIPPING

Microchipping your kitten provides an extra piece of identification in case s/he gets lost or injured. A microchip (about the size of a grain of rice) is placed under the skin at the level of the shoulder blades. This microchip contains a special number that is unique to your kitten. If your kitten is taken to an animal shelter or vet clinic, an electronic scanner can be used to read their number that can then be matched with your details on a central computer, enabling a quick return of your pet.