

YOUR NEW KITTEN

Bringing home a new kitten is an exciting time. For some, it's the culmination of months of anticipation, and for all it is hopefully the start of a long, happy life together. To help you start as you mean to go on, we've put together this info sheet to see you through those early days.

How old should the kitten be?

The most desirable age to place a kitten is between 8 and 12 weeks of age. At this age they should be weaned, on solids, hopefully toilet trained and ready to start their new life.



Cat Carrier

Bring your kitten home in a cat carrier for safety, but also to familiarise your kitten with this carrier early on so that future trips are more comfortable.

Always visit the vet with the kitten/cat safely in a carrier.

Kitten-proof Your Home

Like a child, your kitten can get into trouble in the blink of an eye. Keep small items such as string, thread, ribbons and rubber bands out of reach so they can't choke on them. Place small valuable breakable objects out of reach. Also remember many household products and plants may be poisonous to your kitten.

Supplies

Bowls: You will need two bowls, one for food and one for water. Stainless steel is best as it's heavier than plastic and won't harbour bacteria. A self-watering bowl is great for a constant supply of water. Remember to clean it on a regular basis.

Litter tray/Scoop: You will need a litter tray ready to introduce to your new kitten immediately. There are several different types to choose from. Many people like the covered variety as it prevents litter from scattering to the four corners of the room at the first scratch of a paw. Kittens are very sensitive to odours so scooping twice a day will encourage regular use of the litter tray.

Bedding: There is plenty to choose from out there: comfy cat beds or simply a basket or box with a cushion or blanket. Make sure the bedding is washable to counteract fleas.

Collar: Make sure you use a cat collar that has a quick release catch/elastic for your kitten's safety. There are reflective collars available which are great for night visibility. Do not use on very young kittens. Make sure you can slip two fingers underneath.

Consider installing a cat flap: A cat flap gives your cat the choice to go in and out at will. The flap must be lockable to keep your cat in and other cats out at night. There are also micro-chip activated cat flaps available which will allow your cat(s) only to use the cat flap.

Identification: We strongly recommend getting your kitten micro-chipped at your first visit or at the time of de-sexing. Microchipping is a quick and easy procedure which helps us to easily find the owners of lost and injured cats. Your cat's microchip contains a unique number which is registered with an online NZ database with your contact details. A collar and a tag with your cat's name and your phone number engraved on it is also a great idea.

Grooming Tools: Your kitten will require a brush, a comb and nail clippers. Wait until your kitten is settled in and then establish a grooming routine.

Scratch-Tree: A good, sturdy sisal rope or carpet-covered cat tree can be a huge asset to any cat lover's home, as the scratching post will stand up much better to needle-sharp little claws than your sofa or curtains. Make sure to get a scratching post that is at least 60cm tall with a heavy base that won't tip if your kitten gets a little enthusiastic.

Toys: Kittens are a joy to watch as they play naturally. You can encourage this fun with simple toys (be careful that they cannot be swallowed). Catnip toys are often a favourite, along with fake mice, balls and bells. There are also many simple things around your home that you can use to create the perfect toy! Old containers that roll, feathers and tissue paper - even scrunched up newspaper tied to a piece of string!

When Arriving Home

Remember that your kitten is still a baby; it will initially miss its mother and littermates. Your kitten will need time to adjust to its new environment. Place your kitten in a small quiet place with food and a litter box. As it becomes more comfortable allow it access to other rooms in the house. Talk quietly to your kitten and gently pet it. It is important to build a bond with your kitten. Set a room aside for feeding and quiet time for your kitten.



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Feliway

Feliway is a fantastic product which is available through your veterinary clinic. It is available as a spray, or a diffuser that you plug into a wall socket (like a plug in air freshener). It is a synthetic pheromone that mimics the feline facial pheromone. This disperses into the environment or can be sprayed directly onto their bed, blanket, cage etc to help your kitten feel relaxed and happy. We recommend Feliway to help your kitten settle in to his/her new environment. It is also perfect for other cats in the household – to help them adjust to the newcomer!

Litter box toilet training

Most kittens will understand how to use a litter box if they spent the first few weeks with their mother and litter mates, but you may still get the occasional accident. Most kittens will normally go to the toilet soon after a meal so they should be placed in the litter tray after feeding. At other times watch your kitten closely. If it begins nosing or squatting in corners place it in the litter box and gently scratch its paws in the litter. If it has an accident, wipe it up with a paper towel and place the paper towel in the litter box. Then place the kitten in the litter tray and repeat the process of scratching with its front paws. As they get much older you can encourage them to go to the toilet outside by slowly moving the box closer and closer to the outside.

The best advice we can give:

Bring your new kitten in for a health check as soon as possible after you become the owner

Vaccinations

Cat's natural roaming habits often bring them into contact with other animals which increases their exposure to disease. Several diseases can be fatal especially for kittens. Fortunately vaccinations are available to prevent many cat diseases. We highly recommend that cats are vaccinated against Feline Enteritis, the two viruses that cause Feline Respiratory Disease and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV).



Feline Enteritis is highly contagious and causes vomiting, diarrhoea, fever and intense abdominal pain. 75% of kittens who get this virus die within one week.

Feline Respiratory Diseases also known as the cat flu, are highly contagious and easily spread in the air from cat to cat. They cause sneezing, coughing, discharges from the nose and eyes and ulcers in the mouth. The diseases can be fatal in young kittens and older cats.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. This virus causes a potentially fatal disease which interferes with the immune system of a cat.

How Do Vaccines Work?

Vaccines contain viruses that have been altered so that they don't cause disease. When given a vaccine, your cat's immune system produces a protective immune response. If later exposed to that disease, your cat quickly mounts a response to destroy the disease-causing virus.

Vaccination protects your kitten against serious infectious diseases which may threaten its life

When do I vaccinate my kitten?

A nursing kitten receives antibodies from its mother's milk that provide protection from disease during the first few weeks of life. The vaccination schedule starts at 6-8 weeks of age and booster vaccines are repeated at 10-12 and 14-16 weeks of age. After this, your cat should have a check-up and vaccination once a year to ensure that the immunity is maintained.

Important points to remember:

- It is important not to expose your kitten to infection before the vaccination course has been completed. Your kitten should not be allowed outside as direct contact is not required for kittens to contract some of these diseases.
- The protection given by these vaccinations is only complete if the whole course is given. Allow 10 days after the final injection for full immunity before taking your kitten outside.
- An unwell kitten should not be vaccinated.

Feeding

Kittens need a different kind of diet than adult cats, as their stomachs are small and their nutritional needs somewhat different. Your kitten will need to be fed small meals, several times a day and will have a big appetite! Feed your kitten a specially designed **Kitten Food** which will contain the extra vitamins and minerals they require. If you are feeding a good quality kitten food you should not need any supplements. Usually by four to five months of age you can reduce meals to twice a day. At twelve months of age your kitten moves into the adult stage and can be transitioned onto an adult pet food.

Fleas

Few creatures can inflict more misery, weight for weight, than fleas. These tiny pests are much more than an annoyance, they make life miserable and are the cause of flea allergic dermatitis in many cats.

A few flea facts.....

- A female flea can lay 2,000 eggs in her lifetime.
- Fleas can jump 150 times their own length; this is equivalent to a human jumping 1,000 feet.

In young kittens, a heavy flea burden can suck a large amount of blood and cause a potentially serious anaemia. We stock many flea treatments, some you can use safely from 2 days of age, and many will have a prolonged period of activity of 1 month or more. Currently Revolution*, Advantage* and Frontline* are the most effective and safe flea treatment products available. Ask our vets or our trained nursing staff for a recommendation.

Worming

Worms can present a serious problem to your kitten's health and can interfere with growth if left unchecked. During the first few weeks of age kittens most commonly become infested with roundworms and these will often cause a pot-bellied appearance and poor growth. Other possible worms include hookworms, whipworms and tapeworms. Our vets will recommend the correct wormer for your kitten and usually give the tablet to your kitten during the vaccination consult. We recommend worming every 2 weeks until 12 weeks of age, then every month until 6 months of age, then three monthly for the rest of the cat's life. Worming tablets are not all created equal. Make sure you use a wormer that treats all worms. Ask our trained nursing staff for a recommendation for your kitten. **Remember that children can pick up worms and other parasite problems from their pets.** Encourage children to wash their hands after playing with any animals around the home.

Desexing

As a responsible cat owner you should consider de-sexing your kitten. You should have your kitten spayed (female) or neutered (male) around **5-6 months of age**. It reduces the risk of infection and cancers of the reproductive tract, and will make for a more acceptable pet. The females will no longer howl during the seasonal heats, and you will not have to deal with unwanted pregnancies and kittens. Neutering the males will help reduce roaming and getting into fights, and eliminate the disagreeable habit of urine spraying. The cost of spaying and neutering is less than the cost of raising a litter of kittens or visiting the vets for bite wounds. The procedure is relatively simple and performed under anaesthesia. The cats go home the same day with ongoing pain relief and by the next morning they are eating and playing as normal.

Grooming

It is important to make your kitten feel comfortable about grooming from an early age. Check the eyes, ears, nose and mouth regularly. Look at its paws to prepare it for claw trimming later. Kittens should be brushed frequently to minimize the shedding and promote healthy skin. Cats don't need to be bathed as they wash themselves.

Pet Insurance

We often take our pet's health for granted, but their health can be unpredictable. Pet insurance is available through our clinic and is highly recommended. It is not possible to protect your pet from unforeseen circumstances. Pet insurance removes the worry of cost becoming a factor if your pet is injured or develops a serious illness. See our receptionist for information.

Introducing your kitten to other pets

In most cases, you should keep your kitten confined to one room of the house for a few days, giving your other pet(s) a chance to grow accustomed to the new addition. Make the first introduction short and sweet, removing the kitten after a few minutes. Most will work things out their own way after about a week. If your pets are having more difficulty adjusting, supervise their time together and be patient. Offer both pets a place to go when they want to be alone. Introducing a new kitten to an older animal can be stressful for the older animal. Lavish most of your attention on the older animal, ensuring the old-timer doesn't feel threatened.

The team at Veterinary Care wish you many happy and healthy years with your new family member!

Feel free to phone us for any help or further information you may need

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