

# KITTEN/CAT CARE MANUAL



## ABOUT US:

**Brook-Falls Veterinary Hospital and Exotic Care, Inc**

N48 W14850 Lisbon Rd

Menomonee Falls, WI 53051

Tel: (262) 781-5277

Fax: (262) 781-5278

Email: [dvm@brook-falls.com](mailto:dvm@brook-falls.com)

Website: [www.brook-fallsveterinary.com](http://www.brook-fallsveterinary.com)

Dr Bloss & Dr Follett opened Brook-Falls Veterinary Hospital & Exotic Care Inc. in March, 2007. Since the opening the owners have taken pride in selecting excellent staff and equipping the hospital with the latest technology to enhance patient diagnostics, comfort and care. While we said goodbye to Dr. Follett who retired in 2021 we welcomed in two new owners Dr. Wittenburg & Dr. Kase to the team to carry on the tradition.

## A LETTER TO OUR CLIENTS:

### **ANIMALS ENRICH OUR LIVES**

People who own pets live longer, happier, fuller lives. Our pets remind us of what it is to be wild, to be gentle, to be loyal, to trust, to flourish, to slow with age, to die. They connect us to something fundamental in our beings. We are the caretakers of that connection. For all that our pets teach us, for all the love and joy they bring to our lives, they deserve good care - and they rely on us to give it.

### **WHY LIFETIME VETERINARY CARE MATTERS**

The average lifespan of dogs and cats in the United States is 7.4 years. The POTENTIAL lifespan of the average dog or cat in the United States is 15 years. Comprehensive medical care, good nutrition and proper training allow pets to live up to their potential as long term family members. In other words, the care you give your pet throughout its life will determine how long he or she will remain a happy, healthy member of your family.

Our goal is to maximize the lifespan and the health of your dog or cat through preventative medical care and nutritional and behavioral counseling. We are advocates for your pet - our job is to advise you as to the best care options available for you and your pet.

Working together as a team we hope to help our patients and their families spend many happy years together.

Sincerely,

Dr Jennifer Bloss, Dr April Wittenburg and Dr Molly Kase

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## WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

Please do not hesitate to call us with your questions or concerns. We would rather you call early than have your pet suffer needlessly or worsen overnight. Often, we can advise you on what to do or what medications to give at home to keep your pet comfortable until our office is open. Please **do not give human medications to your pet** without checking with us first. Many human drugs are toxic to pets or are dosed very differently in animals. For instance, Tylenol and Advil are toxic to dogs and cats, and even a small number of aspirin or Tylenol can be fatal for your pet.


**If you have a pet-related medical emergency on a weekend, holiday, or weeknight after 5 p.m. We recommend that you use the services of one of our local emergency clinics:**

<p>Waukesha: 360 Bluemound Rd. Waukesha, WI 53188 Phone: 262-542-3241</p>	 <p><b>WVRC</b> Emergency &amp; Specialty Pet Care</p>	<p>Grafton: 1381 Port Washington Rd. Grafton, WI 53024 Phone: 262-546-0249</p>
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<p>Port Washington: 207 W. Seven Hills Rd. Port Washington, WI 53074 Phone: 262-268-7800</p>	 <p><b>bluepearl</b> specialty + emergency pet hospital</p>	<p>Glendale: 2100 W. Silver Spring Dr. Glendale, WI 53209 Phone: 414-540-6710</p>
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3670 S 108th St.  
Greenfield, WI 53228  
Phone: 414-543-7387



School of  
Veterinary Medicine  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2015 Linden Dr.  
Madison, WI 53706  
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## VACCINATION – IN GENERAL

In the past few years, the national debate surrounding vaccines in humans has reached a boiling point surrounding an outbreak of measles occurred at Disneyland and that has continued to spread throughout the US. Though studies, experts, and organizations like the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have shown there is no link between childhood vaccines and autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**, some parents still avoid vaccinations because they think they're protecting their children.

These same misconceptions are also impacting pets, as pet owners are increasingly questioning and out-right declining to vaccinate their pets, even against serious diseases like rabies. Facts are facts – the core vaccines are the really, really important ones because the diseases that are prevented by these very serious diseases. They can and will cause serious injury or death and in the case of rabies, are transmissible and deadly to humans.

**Vaccines help prevent many diseases/illnesses that affect pets.** Vaccinating your pet has long been known as the easiest way to help him/her to live a long, healthy life. Not only are there different vaccines for different diseases, there are different types and combinations of vaccines. Vaccination is a procedure that has risks and benefits that must be weighed for every pet relative to its age, lifestyle and health. Your veterinarian can help devise a vaccination plan that will provide the safest and best protection for your individual pet.

### Understanding Vaccines

**Vaccines help prepare the body's immune system to fight the invasion of disease –causing organisms.** Vaccines contain antigens, which look like the disease-causing organism to the immune system but do not actually cause the disease. When the vaccine is introduced to the body the immune system is mildly stimulated. If a vaccinated individual is ever exposed the real disease-causing agent, its immune system is now prepared to recognize and either fight it off entirely or at least reduce the severity of the subsequent illness.

**Vaccines are vitally important to managing the health of your pet.** Again, not every pet needs to be vaccinated against every disease. You and your veterinarian together will work to set up a protocol that is right for your pet. Factors that need to be taken into considerations should include the pet's age, adult size, medical history, environment and travel and life style desires of the owner. At minimum most veterinarians will recommend the core vaccines to healthy pets.



## Vaccination – in general - Continued

We understand pet owners can and do have valid concerns about some issues regarding vaccines and vaccination but we also know --- **“The price of vaccination, especially for the core vaccines, is the best value for your veterinary dollar. “**

### **FIRST AND FOREMOST: VACCINATIONS**

Vaccines for cats/kittens are categorized as core and non-core. Vaccines designated as core means that veterinary infectious disease and public health experts recommend all cats receive these vaccines. Rabies vaccine is considered a core vaccine for both dogs and cats. The other core vaccine for cats is DCR or feline viral rhinotracheitis, calici virus, and panleukopenia. The rhinotracheitis virus and calicivirus are the top two causes of feline upper respiratory infections. The panleukopenia virus causes a severe viral diarrhea.

### **CORE DESIGNATION:**

One of the reasons DCR is considered a core vaccine for cats is there are no specific treatments for feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus or distemper/panleukopenia virus. The diseases must run their course and we (veterinarians) can only treat symptoms: fluids for dehydration, antibiotics for secondary bacterial infections, eye ointments for corneal ulcers. It's far better to prevent these diseases with vaccination than to have your cat/kitten suffer from one of these debilitating viral infections.

**D – Panleukopenia** is the medical way to say “a very low white blood cell count.” Closely related to the better-known canine parvovirus, the feline panleukopenia virus infects the rapidly dividing cells of the bone marrow and intestinal tract; in a condition commonly called **distemper**. The resulting impact on the bone marrow is a low white blood cell count which leaves distemper/panleukopenia virus-infected cats open to severe infection. Infection of the gut cells leads to severe diarrhea as well as the potential for septicemia. Once a cat is infected with the distemper/panleukopenia virus, successfully treating this disease becomes very difficult and death is a common outcome. Fortunately, vaccination works well to prevent panleukopenia - distemper!

**C- . Feline Calicivirus** causes clinical signs similar to feline viral rhinotracheitis, but much milder. Cats with an upper respiratory infection due to calicivirus are likely to develop oral ulcers, especially of the tongue. Some cats do develop joint inflammation leading to lameness but the lameness lasts only 1-2 days. Occasionally, a more virulent strain of calicivirus circulates in feline populations resulting in severe systemic disease and is rapidly fatal.

**R- Feline viral rhinotracheitis** is caused by a herpes virus. Similar to herpes virus infections in humans, once a cat is infected with a herpes virus, the virus will lay dormant until a cat is stressed and then clinical signs can flare up. Clinical signs of rhinotracheitis include lethargy, sneezing, conjunctivitis, and ocular and nasal discharge. Severe cases can have corneal ulcers as well as a life-threatening pneumonia. Young kittens are often the most severely affected.

**Rabies - Rabies** is a viral disease that affects the brain and spinal cord of all mammals, including cats, dogs and humans. This preventable disease has been reported in every state except Hawaii, and annually causes the deaths of more than 50,000 humans and millions of animals worldwide. There's good reason that the very word "rabies" evokes fear in people—once symptoms appear, rabies is close to 100% fatal. Rabies is most often transmitted through a bite from an infected animal. Less frequently, it can be passed on when the saliva of an infected animal enters another animal's body through mucous membranes or an open, fresh wound.

The risk for contracting rabies runs highest if your cat is exposed to wild animals. Outbreaks can occur in populations of wild animals (most often raccoons, bats, skunks and foxes in this country) or in areas where there are significant numbers of unvaccinated, free-roaming dogs and cats. In the United States, rabies is reported in cats more than in any domestic species.

## **NON-CORE DESIGNATION: Lifestyle/Geography**

Non-core vaccines, are vaccines which could be considered optional, depending on the animal, the animal's lifestyle, and where the animal lives. Non-core vaccines for cats/kittens include Feline Leukemia (FeLV) and in rare cases Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV).

### **FeLV**

**Feline Leukemia**, is the only non-core vaccine we offer to patients on a routine basis. Not to be confused with leukemia the cancer, feline leukemia virus (FeLV) is one of the most common, viral infections and the second leading cause of death in cats. As many as 40% of cat deaths annually, in the US, are due to Feline Leukemia virus related illnesses.

Around 3% of cats in the United States are infected with FeLV. It is a serious illness that will be fatal for your cat, and is especially deadly for kittens. It is spread directly from cat to cat, and from mother cats to their kittens before or shortly after birth. Even with proper treatment, your cat may only live 2.5 years more once diagnosed with the disease.

FeLV can cause other infections to develop as well as degrade your cat's immune system. Additionally, it is a leading cause of lymphoid cancers in cats. Unfortunately, there is no cure for FeLV, but it can be managed so that the remainder of your cat's life is relatively comfortable.



## FeLV - Continued

There is a vaccine for FeLV; while it is not 100% effective, it greatly reduces the chance of your cat developing the disease. We recommend all kittens be tested for the leukemia virus at an early age (8-9 weeks of age) as well as all new cats BEFORE entering a home with existing cat(s). If the test is negative, two initial vaccinations, 3-4 weeks apart will be administered. Your pet will receive a booster at about one year of age, and then every 2 years thereafter if your cat goes outside, is boarded, or has contact with other cats.

We will also recommend a test for the **FIV virus**, a related viral illness for kittens obtained at 6 months of age or older. However, while there is a vaccine, we do not recommend its use in most cats as once administered, we cannot tell if a cat has been vaccinated or is actually infected.

## Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

Many people confuse FIV with FeLV. Although these diseases are in the same retrovirus family and cause many similar secondary conditions FeLV and FIV are different diseases.

Cats infected with the Immunodeficiency virus (FIV) may not show symptoms until years after the initial infection occurred. Although the virus is slow-acting, a cat's immune system is severely weakened once the disease takes hold. This makes the cat susceptible to various secondary infections. Infected cats that receive supportive medical care and are kept in a stress-free, indoor environment can live relatively comfortable lives for months to years before the disease reaches its chronic end-stages.

## VACCINATION SCHEDULE

During the initial day of nursing, kittens receive **antibodies**, proteins, against certain diseases from their mother's milk. These protecting antibodies are gradually lost between 6 and 16 weeks of age. A series of vaccinations are given during this period to stimulate your kitten's immune system to produce its own antibodies. This "passive" immunity protects the kitten during its first few weeks of life, while its immune system is maturing, but, at some point, this immunity fails and the kitten must produce its own, longer-lasting "active" immunity. Vaccinations are used for this purpose. As long as the mother's antibodies are present, they will cause interference and prevent the immune system from responding completely to the vaccines. Even if your cat never goes outside, many viruses are quite hardy, and can be carried to your cat on your hands, shoes or clothing. Make sure your pet is protected!

We recommend a vaccination schedule that protects against feline distemper, two upper respiratory infections, feline leukemia and rabies as follows:

## Vaccination Schedule - Continued

### **6-8 weeks**

Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia (DCR #1)

### **9-12 weeks**

DCR #2, Feline Leukemia (FeLV) Test & FeLV #1

### **12-16 weeks**

DCR # 3, FeLV #2

### **3-4 months**

Rabies

As kittens grow, they discover all their fighting tools, including [their nails](#). They also discover how much fun it is to climb furniture and [bat at toys](#). But what they really need to discover is how to accept you [cutting their nails](#) so you can help protect them from the pain of overgrown nails and prevent damage to your [furniture](#) and flesh.

Kittens normally have their claws retracted so they have some control over whether they are scratching. But don't count on training your kitten to keep his claws retracted — you'll have better luck [clipping his nails](#) every few weeks.

Accustom your kitten to lying on his back in your lap facing you or in another position that is comfortable and calming for him. You can start when he's [sleepy](#) and give him some treats for remaining still for increasingly longer periods. Practice holding each paw in your hand, rewarding him for being cooperative. Then gently press on the tops of each toe until the claw is exposed. Again, give him treats for being good.

Finally, after several days (at least) of such practice, [it's time to clip](#) his first nail. For a kitten, you can use human fingernail clippers or small nail trimmers made for pets. Just make sure they're sharp, as dull clippers can crush the nail, which may be painful. For now, just cut off the very tip of each nail. Avoid the pinkish quick you can see within the nail. The quick contains both blood and nerve supplies to the nail, so be prepared for a bit of bleeding and protesting if you cut it. But don't panic. Stop the bleeding with some styptic powder, and if you don't have that, you can use flour or cornstarch. Make sure to apologize with treats and promises not to slip up again!

Give a treat after each nail and don't feel you have to cut them all this first time. It's better to stop before your kitten starts struggling than to push things to that point. Instead, give him a break and do a few more nails later. Just remember which ones you've already done! [Cats](#) have five toes (and five claws) per front foot and four toes (and four claws) per back foot — although polydactyl [cats](#) can have many more. One of the nails on each front paw is actually up on the wrist, so don't overlook it.

## Vaccination Schedule - Continued

When your kitten learns early that nail trimming can be a positive and rewarding experience, he'll be more likely to cooperate with it later on in life. It's also important to provide your kitten with scratching posts or platforms so that he learns to sharpen his nails there, rather than on your furniture

## **BOOSTER SCHEDULE - IN GENERAL**

Currently, **subsequent DCR vaccinations will be good for three years.**

**RABIES vaccines are given as an annual booster.**

Young adult cats will also get a booster on their **Feline Leukemia vaccine and every 2 years** thereafter, if deemed appropriate.

In recent years, with new vaccine technologies and ongoing research into vaccine duration, vaccination protocols have begun to change. Chances are good that vaccine recommendations will change again over the next ten years. As your cat comes in for annual wellness/physical examinations we will inform you of any new vaccines and vaccination schedules.

## ADVERSE REACTIONS TO VACCINATIONS

**Any type of medical treatment has associated risks, but the risk should be weighed against the benefits of protecting your pet, your family and your community from potentially fatal diseases. The majority of pets respond well to vaccines.**

## Booster Schedule in General - Continued

The most common adverse responses to vaccination are mild and short-term. Serious reactions are rare. An uncommon but serious adverse reaction that can occur in cats is tumor growth (sarcomas), which can develop weeks, months, or even years after a vaccination.

Improvements in vaccination technology and techniques have greatly reduced the occurrence of adverse reactions.

Development of a fibrosarcoma and anaphylaxis are the most serious reactions to vaccines. These and some of the more common (but still rare) risks are discussed below.

### **Vaccine-associated sarcoma**

Fibrosarcoma is a tumor of the connective tissue. These tumors tend to invade deeply into the underlying tissues. The frequency of these tumors is increasing in cats and has led researchers to believe some of the tumors may be caused by a local reaction to a vaccine. **Although these tumors are seen more frequently, they are still rare.** Current estimates on the incidence of these tumors are about one tumor per 10,000 to 30,000 cats vaccinated. These tumors were initially thought most commonly associated with the feline leukemia vaccine but research into these tumors has shown almost any injectable can be suspect in a particular cat.

The national, Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force composed of veterinarians, researchers, and vaccine manufacturers are working to determine the exact cause of these tumors and how they can be prevented and treated. Possible explanations for the tumors include abnormal reactions to the adjuvant in vaccines, genetic predisposition, and infections with another virus.

The possible risk of vaccine-associated fibrosarcomas has led to a re-evaluation of vaccination protocols. This is why it is recommended that adult cats without potential exposure to FeLV may not need vaccination against that disease.

**In cats with potential exposure, the risk of FeLV infection is greater than the risk of developing a sarcoma, so vaccination is advised.**

Occasionally, a small, painless swelling can develop at the site of a recent vaccination. These swellings should be examined by a veterinarian when discovered. They should disappear in a few weeks. If a swelling persists, however, it could mean it is developing into a sarcoma and the cat should be re-checked immediately. The Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force advises the warning signs for a vaccine-related fibrosarcoma are:

- A lump persists for more than three months after vaccination.
- It is larger than two centimeters in diameter (2.5 centimeters = 1 inch).
- One month after vaccination it is still increasing in size.

- Vaccination Associated Sarcoma - Continued

**If you have any concern regarding a lump at a vaccination site, do not hesitate to contact your veterinarian.**

If a vaccine-associated fibrosarcoma develops, surgical removal is attempted, but generally, this tumor is so invasive it is difficult to remove it all. Radiation or *chemotherapy* are often recommended in combination with surgery.

All vaccines in cats are given in specific areas of the body. Generally, the FeLV vaccine is now given in the distal left rear leg. If a tumor would develop, knowing which vaccine was given where will help us determine with which vaccine the tumor is associated. Also, if a tumor would develop, amputation of the leg would, in many cases, be curative. While it sounds drastic cats do incredibly well on three legs, and many owners prefer this to having their cat succumb to an aggressive tumor.

## **Anaphylaxis**

Anaphylaxis is a rare, life-threatening, immediate allergic reaction to something ingested or injected. If untreated, it results in shock, *respiratory* and cardiac failure, and death. An anaphylactic reaction can occur as a result of vaccination. The reaction usually occurs within minutes to hours (less than 24) of the vaccination. Dr. Ronald Schultz of the University of Wisconsin College of Veterinary Medicine estimates that about one case of anaphylaxis occurs for every 15,000 doses of vaccine administered.

The most common symptoms of anaphylaxis are the sudden onset of diarrhea, vomiting, shock, seizures, *coma*, and death. The animals' gums will be very pale, and the limbs will feel cold. The heart rate is generally very fast, but the pulse is weak. There can be facial swelling and hives.

**Anaphylaxis is an extreme emergency.** If you think your cat is having an anaphylactic reaction, seek emergency veterinary assistance immediately. Epinephrine should be given as soon as possible - we are talking within a few minutes. IV fluids, oxygen, and other medications are given as needed.

Anaphylactic reactions are more commonly associated with the use of *killed vaccines* such as rabies. Killed vaccines have more *virus* or bacterial particles per dose and have added chemicals (adjuvants) to improve the cat's immune response. These characteristics also increase the risk of an allergic reaction to the vaccine.

If your cat has ever had a reaction to a vaccine, subsequent vaccinations should be given by your veterinarian. In some cases, certain vaccines may be excluded from your dog's vaccination regimen, a different type of vaccine will be used, or certain drugs, including

## Anaphylaxis - Continued

antihistamines, may be given prior to vaccination. The veterinarian may place a catheter in the cat's vein so that if a reaction does occur, medications and fluids can be given

immediately. Depending on the situation, your cat may need to remain in the veterinarian's office for a period of 30 minutes to several hours. Once home, the cat should be kept under observation for several additional hours. Even with these precautions, life-threatening reactions could still occur.

### **Discomfort and swelling at the injection site**

Pain, swelling, redness, and irritation can occur at the injection site. These effects generally occur within 30 minutes to 1 week of the vaccination. If the signs persist, or are severe, contact your veterinarian.

Occasionally, abscesses can form at the injection site. These abscesses are generally not caused by infection, but by the body's over-reaction to the vaccine.

### **Mild fever, decreased appetite and activity**

Mild fever, decreased appetite, and depression may be observed for 1-2 days following vaccination, most commonly when modified live vaccines are used. Generally, no treatment is warranted. **Remember cats are not small dogs or infants/children.** They are very sensitive to anti-inflammatory medications and even a single dose of some medications commonly used to reduce fever can cause death in a cat. Before giving any medication to your cat/kitten, not prescribed by a veterinarian, please call the hospital and discuss its use.

Severe reactions can also occur, if any of a vaccine made for injection accidentally enters an animal's eyes, nose, or mouth.

### **Lameness**

Rarely, lameness can result from several different vaccinations. Kittens vaccinated with a modified live calicivirus vaccine may develop lameness within 3 weeks of the vaccination. Some kittens may also develop a fever and lose their appetite. These symptoms generally last 3-4 days, and depending on severity, may be treated with fluids, antibiotics, and pain medication.



## Birth defects

The vaccination of pregnant animals with a modified live vaccine can result in birth defects or abortions. It is recommended that modified live vaccines NEVER be given to pregnant animals. In addition, vaccinating kittens and puppies less than 4-5 weeks of age, can actually result in them becoming infected and developing disease from modified live vaccines.

## Summary

As with any medical procedure, there are always risks of adverse reactions or side effects. These risks must be compared to the benefits of the procedure. Many of the diseases against which we vaccinate can be serious and even lethal. In almost all cases, the risks associated with vaccination are very small compared to the risk of developing disease. As new vaccines and methods of administration become available, the adverse risks of vaccination should be reduced even more.

**Don't let the fear of what "could be" and in most cases is a minor issue put your pet a risk of what we know can and will be serious and possibly even deadly, if your pet goes unprotected.**

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# PARASITES

## INTESTINAL PARASITES

**You should bring a fresh sample of fecal material** (also called stool sample or bowel movement) **from your pet, each time they visit the veterinarian** to check for the presence of intestinal parasites. This includes adult cats that never go outside! (See Discussion below.)

**We get it – collecting and bringing in a fecal sample is not fun. But here's why it's important**

**Intestinal parasitic infections are very common in kittens and cats.**

The digestive tract of cats can, and do, host a number of parasites. **Virtually all kittens (95%) are born with intestinal worms!** These parasites can cause vomiting, diarrhea, weight loss, anemia, stunted growth and even death.

## Intestinal Parasites - Continued

Aside from the risk these parasites pose for our pets, unfortunately, **some of these are also zoonotic. This means that they are transmissible to humans;** especially people who are immune compromised. This includes the elderly, the young, and those with immune-mediated illnesses or who are on chemotherapy. **Annually in the United States, there are approximately 10,000 cases of animal parasites causing disease in children, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC).** In the case of roundworms and humans, the larva of these parasites can travel through the body and cause serious illness, including blindness.

Internal parasites are diagnosed by having a fresh stool sample examined under a microscope by a Certified Veterinary Technician here at the veterinary hospital. This is important because nearly all intestinal parasites are invisible to the naked eye. This should be done as part of a wellness health exam when you obtain a new kitten or cat, and on a yearly basis as part of your cat's annual health exam.

Try to collect the freshest sample you can and keep it refrigerated until you can bring it in to the veterinary hospital. Stool samples will keep up to 24 hours if kept cool (NOT FROZEN). Presence of litter will not affect testing.

**When a kitten/cat has been identified as having intestinal parasites;** successful treatment generally requires multiple doses of a de-wormer be administered. This is because many deworming medications only clear parasites that are at a certain point in their lifecycle; within the intestinal tract. Other stages of worm can exist in the pet, that are not cleared and those need to be removed with another dose of de-wormer when they reach the stage that is affected by deworming. Because of this, follow-up fecal exams will need to be done to confirm that the infestation has been cleared.

**All kittens need a series of professionally prescribed deworming treatments, even if their fecal sample results are negative.** This is because there are not always parasite eggs present in each and every bit of stool material. Kittens are so commonly affected by parasites that they should be given general deworming medications even if the stool check does not identify them.

**Even if fecal testing does not detect intestinal parasites, because intestinal parasites are common in young kitten and puppies and there is the potential for human consequences, the Center for Disease Control recommends deworming of all puppies and kittens at least two times.**

## Why Fecal Testing of Strictly Indoor Cats?

Strictly indoor cats can still have intestinal parasites for a number of reasons:

- They can have activation of encysted larva, of these parasites, that have remained dormant in their tissues from when they were young and had active infection i.e. from kittenhood. This activation can occur with advanced age, pregnancy, periods of stress such as a new baby, move, construction, remodeling and the like.
- Cats that catch mice, rats and even flies will acquire intestinal parasites.
- Potting soil is frequently contaminated with eggs and serves as a big source of intestinal parasites in indoor cats.
- You can also bring eggs in on shoes and clothing – taking children/grandchildren to parks/playgrounds, waling in dog parks or puttering in your garden.

**It is important to know about these parasites and the risks they may pose to your cat and your family and how you can protect your pets and family.** So that you may better understand the problems internal parasites can cause and what signs to look for, we have included a short description of the five most common types of internal parasites.

### **ROUNDWORMS**, also called *Ascarids* . . .

these are very common parasites of cats, especially kittens. They primarily live in the small intestine. Larval worms also cause damage the liver and lungs while migrating through these organs on their way to adulthood in the small intestine. Roundworms are transmitted via fecal material of infected pets, or through the uterus of the mother cat to her unborn young. These parasites are can also be contracted by walking through eggs in the soil and grooming them off their fur or skin, or eating a rodent or insect that is infected by roundworms.

Kittens infested with roundworms usually look normal, but they may have stunted growth and a poor hair coat. In young cats, heavy infestation with roundworms can lead to a tender abdomen, poor appetite, weakness, and diarrhea. Entire adult worms can sometimes be seen in the stools or vomitus of infested animals; these parasites are approximately 2-3 inches long and resemble strands of angel-hair pasta. A very heavy worm burden may even cause intestinal blockage in a small kitten.

They pose the most significant risk to human health. People can become infected with feline roundworms by ingesting eggs that are in the soil. The eggs hatch into larvae that migrate through body tissues and can lead to severe organ problems or blindness. Known as **visceral larva migrans**, this occurs most often in children, who may play in sand or dirt, then put their hands in their mouths or eat something without washing first.

Sand boxes are a prime culprit for children becoming infected by *roundworms* because they are attractive places for cats to defecate, leaving roundworm eggs behind.

## Roundworms - Continued

Three important ways to help your child avoid being infected by feline roundworms are:

- Having your child wash her hands after playing and before putting her hands in her mouth or eating anything.
- Ensuring that any sand boxes your child plays in are covered at night to keep outdoor cats from using them as large litter boxes.
- Making sure that any cats that live with you are routinely dewormed, have fecal samples checked as often as your veterinarian recommends, and that you keep litter boxes secured out of reach of your child.

### **HOOKWORMS . . .**

are small, fine worms which attach to the walls of the small intestine and live by sucking blood from the kitten/cat. Infestation can lead to severe anemia, diarrhea, and inflammation of the small intestine this is especially harmful in young or debilitated kittens. Transmission occurs most often in kittens across the placenta in the uterus or mother's milk; in older cats either through skin penetration by larvae or by a cat eating an infected rodent or cockroach. When skin penetration occurs, it can leave skin irritation and sores.

Common clinical signs in cats infected with hookworms include diarrhea, which may be dark or tarry in appearance, decreased appetite, and general un-thriftiness. The diagnosis of hookworms is based on history, physical examination, and a fecal flotation test.

Hookworms are also zoonotic, and can infect humans when people come into contact with infected fecal material the larvae penetrate their skin, resulting in a condition called **cutaneous larval migrans**. It causes severely itchy skin lesions. People may rarely develop a gastrointestinal hookworm infection if they ingest soil contaminated with hookworm eggs, usually by eating poorly-washed vegetables.

### **TAPEWORMS**, also called **Cestodes . . .**

are common in the United States. The two most common types of tapeworm of cats are *Taenia* and *Dipylidium*. Each species has a different route of transmission—through ingestion of raw meat i.e. eating infected rodents/birds, and ingesting infected fleas respectively. Adult worms also live in the small intestine, where the head attaches to the intestinal wall and produces a chain of segments. Mature segments containing eggs are passed with the stool, or may be seen around the rectum. They resemble small grains of rice.

## Tapeworms - Continued

Definitive diagnosis is made by observing adult segments or through microscopic identification of eggs in the feces. Tapeworm infestations in cats can be particularly difficult to diagnose. Tapeworms are rarely detected by standard fecal testing; segments contain the eggs and do not float well. Additionally, often, the only sign of a tapeworm infestation is the presence of these rice-like segments in/on fecal material or in the fur at the "back end" of a pet; but cats being such meticulous groomers often remove them before discovery.

Some pets may be seen frequently grooming this under-tail area or may be seen "scooting" their bottoms along the ground due to irritation of the rectum. On rare occasions, segments may be found crawling across the floor or dried up on surfaces.

In addition to deworming to remove adult tapeworms, one must prevent ingestion of raw meat, i.e. mouse-hunting and flea control is essential in order to avoid tapeworm infestations.

### **COCCIDIA . . .**

are one-celled protozoal parasites; more like bacteria rather than "worms." Kittens can pick these up from their mother and they can also be acquired by eating rabbit or other wildlife droppings. They are treated with antibiotics.

### **GIARDIA . . .**

are also protozoans. They are very difficult to pick up on a regular stool check. Antibiotics or special wormers kill them but they are difficult to eradicate completely and often flare-up with stress or other intestinal problems. They are contagious to humans and cause vomiting and diarrhea in both people and pets.

If a stool sample is positive for parasites, your veterinarian will prescribe an effective dewormer and set up an appropriate deworming schedule for you to follow to ensure eradication of all parasites. We usually recommend deworming twice, two weeks apart, however, this will vary with the type of parasite found. A fecal sample should be checked again 4 to 8 weeks later, and again possibly 3 months later to ensure that your pet is not being re-infested by its environment. Clean the litter box daily as well.

This is, by no means, an exhaustive list of intestinal parasites that can affect cats; other parasites are possible including; stomach worms, lungworm, toxoplasmosis, cryptosporidium, etc. can affect cats.

**The important things to remember are:**

- That intestinal parasites are common in kittens/cats.
- There are a number of parasites can affect cats and their owners.
- For owners to accurately diagnose their pets at home is only rarely possible; if you see tapeworm segments or roundworms this usually indicates the presence of a very heavy worm burden.
- Annual fecal testing and periodic deworming are the only way to ensure pets are free of intestinal parasites. So, while it not the most pleasant of tasks to collect and bring in that fecal sample; it is very important to the health of your pets and your family.

## HEARTWORMS IN CATS

Heartworms are being found more frequently in cats. **Heartworm disease in cats is very different from heartworm disease in dogs.** The cat is an atypical host for heartworms, and most worms in cats do not survive to the adult stage. Cats with adult heartworms typically have very few worms (often just one to three worms), and many cats affected by heartworms have no adult worms. This means heartworm disease often goes undiagnosed in cats, it's important to understand that even immature worms cause real damage in the form of a condition known as **heartworm associated respiratory disease (HARD)**. Heartworm disease in cats is often acutely fatal in cats.

Signs of heartworm disease in cats include chronic coughing, wheezing or vomiting to sudden collapse and/or death. Diagnosis is made based on clinical exam, laboratory, findings and x-rays. **There is still no treatment for cats that have heartworm disease, so prevention is key!**

Outdoor cats are most at risk, but interestingly enough a recent study investigating the prevalence of feline heartworm disease in Texas and South Carolina showed that 36% of infected cats were kept strictly indoors! Since it takes so few of the heartworm parasites to cause disease in cats, even the rare/occasional mosquito finding its way into the home can carry more than enough heartworm larvae to be fatal to your beloved pet.

Luckily, cats can now be put on preventative medications, just like dogs. Though effective preventative medications have been available for dogs for years, it is estimated by the American Heartworm Society that more 1/3 of dogs in our area are not being protected. Additionally, wild-life sources of infection i.e. coyotes are prevalent in our area. These unprotected animals can, and do harbor the heartworm parasite. Mosquitoes feeding off these animals then carry the disease from infected dogs/wildlife vectors to other pets (including cats), and occasionally to people as well.

### Heartworms - Continued



The risk of kittens getting heartworm disease is equal to that of adult cats. The American Heartworm Society recommends that kittens be started on a heartworm preventive as early as the product label allows, and no later than 8 weeks of age.

The dosage of a heartworm medication is based on body weight, not age. Kittens grow rapidly in their first months of life, and the rate of growth varies widely from one breed to another. That means a young animal can gain enough weight to bump it from one dosage range to the next within a matter of weeks. Thus it is important that you make sure to bring your pet in for every scheduled well-kitten exam, so that you stay on top of all health issues, including accurate dosing of heartworm prevention.

Please follow your veterinarian's recommendations for the best option to protect your feline friend against heartworm disease.

## PREVENTING FLEAS AND TICKS

### FLEAS



Fleas are among the most common health problems of dogs and cats. In the long run, it is much easier and more cost-effective to prevent fleas on your pets than to have to treat a major infestation of fleas in your house. Regular use of flea products will take care of the occasional flea your pets may encounter in the yard and should prevent you from having to spend large sums of money on foggers and exterminators. Treating a bad flea infestation in your house can run upwards of \$350.

Fleas will bite your pets, causing an itchy allergic reaction, which can become quite severe. They carry viral and bacterial diseases. In small animals, especially kittens, the anemia they cause from feeding on the animal's blood can be fatal. They also carry tapeworms. Tapeworm segments appear on the stool or around the rectal area and look like small grains of rice. If your cat has fleas, chances are good it will have tapeworms - and vice versa. Therefore, if your cat has fleas, we will deworm your cat for tapeworms along with beginning flea control measures.

## Fleas - Continued

Wildlife, as well as other cats and dogs, bring fleas into your yard. Pets and people can then bring the fleas into the house. Birds nesting in the attic or mice seeking shelter can also bring fleas into your home. Fleas also travel on-their-own as much as a mile an hour. They will hop inside through an open door or window and are often small enough to come through a window screen. Once inside your home there is no place a flea cannot get to. Adult fleas spend most of their time on your pet, but the remainder of the time they are roaming your house and laying eggs – thousands of them!

If you've never been lucky enough to see a flea, they are about 1/8 -inch long, reddish brown and shaped like a sesame seed with legs. They are usually found on your pet's head, belly or lower back. If you comb the fur/hair backwards and look at the skin they can be seen scurrying through the base of the hair coat. It is often difficult to find fleas on pets until they are infested heavily. This is especially true with cats who are meticulous groomers. It is more common to see the droppings they leave behind after feeding. They look like grains of pepper. If you place some of these on white paper toweling, wet it and mush it around it will turn the toweling red. This is because flea droppings contain digested blood. Plain dirt stays black or gray when wet.

## Flea Prevention

Fleas can be prevented by treating all pets that go outdoors so they don't bring reproducing fleas into the house. If you had fleas in previous years, it is wise to use control measures in the house as well, especially on the ground floor near doors and windows. This will help eliminate the occasional flea that hops in on its own.

Many flea products sold in grocery and discount stores are wasting your time and money. Some are even harmful to pets. Most compounds strong enough to be effective are sold only through licensed veterinarians and exterminators, who are properly trained in their use, and are regulated by the state and the EPA. Insecticides should be used only according to label directions. Care is needed to ensure that toxicity does not develop due to the concurrent use

## Flea Prevention - Continued

of other drugs, pesticides or chemicals, or because the compound

used was not safe for a particular age or type of animal. Some flea products used for dogs are deadly to cats. **READ LABELS CAREFULLY!!!**

Most of our clients choose a long-lasting topical flea control product i.e. Bravecto® or Revolution Plus® to use on their pet to control fleas and ticks. These products are applied to a small area of skin and spread over the whole pet within 24 hours of application. These contain modern polymers enabling them to be effective for as long as 90 days. If your cat or any other pet in the house goes outdoors, we recommend they be used year-round.

Many insecticidal flea collars available in stores are not very effective and often result in a painful irritation to the skin on the pet's neck. Flea shampoos and soaps are great for cleaning your cat with fleas but they have no residual effect. They only kill fleas present on the pet at the time the bath is given. As soon as the animal dries off, fleas will hop right back on. For long-term control you need a product that safely stays in or on the body for days or weeks at a time.

## Ticks

Ticks are equally opportunity pests; they attach to hosts because they need to ingest animal blood to survive and develop from larvae to adults. If the tick also happens to be carrying an infectious agent, it will be transmitted to the host animal, enter the circulatory system, and begin to rapidly reproduce.

The good news is that most ticks don't carry disease and most cats live their entire lives never acquiring a tick-related illness. Partly this is true because most cats are indoor, and cats are meticulous groomers and as such are very aware of even the tiniest pests on their bodies; they will often notice and remove a tick before it has a chance to attach. That being said, if other pets go outside there is the chance, they will bring ticks inside. This allows the possibility for infected ticks to attach to animals that do not go outside; particularly at risk are the very young, very old or animals or those pets with illness that may prevent them from normal grooming activities, etc. Sadly, the possible tick-acquired infections that can affect cats are often deadly.

**Below is a discussion of the 5 – tick borne diseases of cats.**

## Cytauxzoonosis

There are a few diseases transmitted by ticks that can make your cat very sick – even to the point of death. One of the worst is feline cytauxzoonosis, also known as **bobcat fever**.

Cytauxzoonosis results from a blood parasite called *Cytauxzoon felis* that infects both the blood and tissues of cats. Over an approximately three-week course, the infection causes much damage; the infected cat will ultimately hemorrhage and die.

In the US, the natural host of *Cytauxzoon felis* is the bobcat; the parasite does not cause the disease in bobcats. Lone Star ticks feed on the blood of bobcats, then drop off, molt to their next life stage, and attach to their next host. If the next host happens to be a domestic cat, a cytauxzoonosis infection can be the result. We currently do not have Lone Star ticks in the Midwest but they are moving northward (currently being found as far north as Southern Illinois) and with our mobile society it is important to think tick control if you travel with your cat.

Cases of cytauxzoonosis have been reported in Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Cats that spend time outdoors in the southeast and midwestern states are at greatest risk.

Cytauxzoonosis symptoms include depression, severe anemia, high fevers, loss of appetite, dehydration, pale gums, lethargy, breathing difficulties, and jaundice, which is yellowing of the skin.

Sadly, the disease is almost always fatal, but if a treatment protocol is implemented early enough, some cats do pull through. Unfortunately, cats who recover from cytauxzoonosis may still carry the parasite and can suffer a recurrence of the infection.

## Tularemia

Another potentially deadly tick-borne disease in cats is tularemia, also known as rabbit fever. Tularemia is caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*, which is carried by four species of North American ticks: Rocky Mountain wood tick, American Dog tick, Pacific Coast tick, and Lone Star tick.

Infected ticks become can transmit the bacteria to another animal during feeding but cats can also get tularemia when they prey on infected rabbits or rodents.

Signs of a tularemia infection in cats can range from no symptoms to mild illness with swollen lymph nodes and fever, to severe overwhelming infection and death. Symptoms can include abscesses at the site of the tick bite, mouth ulcers, GI ulcers, high fever, loss of appetite, lethargy, enlarged lymph nodes, eye and nose discharge, rash, and internal abscesses involving the spleen or liver.

## Tularemia - Continued

Tularemia can be diagnosed with a blood test, providing the infection has been present long enough for the cat's body to make antibodies. Diagnosis can also be made by culturing the bacteria from discharges or tissue samples from an affected animal in a laboratory.

Unfortunately, most often tularemia isn't diagnosed until after a cat is deceased. It's important to understand that tularemia is a zoonotic disease that can be transmitted to humans through a bite or scratch from an infected cat. Cases of tularemia have been reported throughout the US, but most have been in the midwestern states.

## Haemobartonellosis

Another potentially deadly tick-borne disease in cats is haemobartonellosis, also known as feline infectious anemia or feline hemotropic mycoplasmosis. This illness is more common than either cytauxzoonosis or tularemia; it attacks the red blood cells that carry oxygen throughout a cat's body.

Haemobartonellosis in cats is usually caused by *Mycoplasma haemofelis* that live inside red blood cells, formerly known as *Haemobartonella felis*. The organism is carried between animals by ticks, but fleas can also be carriers. Additionally, the mycoplasma can also be passed from an infected to a non-infected animal by a blood transfusion, queens (mother cats) can infect their offspring through the placenta or it can be acquired from cat bites.

Hemobartonellosis in cats can range from very mild and asymptomatic, due to only a slight anemia, to severe life-threatening disease. Symptoms can include depression, loss of appetite, and dehydration. If the anemia is profound, it can cause pale mucous membranes (white gums), weakness, weight loss, accelerated heart and respiration rates, jaundice, and death, which is unfortunately a common sudden symptom.

Cats/kittens with Feline Leukemia (FeLV) are more likely to have a severe form of haemobartonella infection. Cats with suspected or known hemobartonella infections should be tested (re-tested) for FeLV.

Antibiotics are typically given for several weeks to cats dealing with this infection. In cats with severe anemia or a rapidly progressing form of the disease, hospitalization as well as a blood transfusion(s) will be required in order to attempt to save the pet's life.

When left untreated, some cats will die from a haemobartonella infection; others recover, but can become carriers of the organism. Continuing to potentially spread the infection to other cats but the recovered cat can and often will suffer recurrence of the disease should they become stressed or acquire another illness.

\*\* One should not confuse haemobartonellosis with **feline bartonellosis** also known as "cat scratch fever"; they are completely different infections. It can be confusing because they sound very similar.

## Babesiosis

Babesiosis is another tick-borne disease in cats, caused by the *Babesia felis* parasite. Infections in cat are thought to occur primarily through tick bites, but other routes of transmission including transfer of blood from a dog or cat bite, blood transfusions, and across the placenta of a pregnant female cat are also possible sources of infection.

Signs of the infection will generally begin approximately two weeks after exposure, but in many cases, symptoms remain mild and the disease isn't diagnosed for months or even years. Babesiosis can cause destruction of the red blood cells both directly and through the immune system, called immune-mediated hemolytic anemia (IMHA).

Symptoms of infection can include lack of energy, loss of appetite, weight loss, pale mucous membranes and jaundice. Blood tests show lack of red blood cells, anemia. Traditional treatment for babesiosis in cats involves use of an anti-malarial drug often coupled with an antibiotic and appropriate supportive care. In the case of IMHA steroidal medications will also be required. Hospitalization and blood transfusions may be required if the anemia is severe.

## Ehrlichiosis

Ehrlichiosis is an uncommon tick-borne disease in cats that is caused primarily by a rickettsial organism; *Ehrlichia canis* or *Ehrlichia risticii*.

The rickettsia organisms enter the cells of the body and act like parasites, eventually killing the cells. Ehrlichiosis has been reported in cats in the US, as well as in Europe, South America, Africa, and the Far East.

Symptoms of the disease can include lethargy, depression, loss of appetite, weight loss, vomiting and diarrhea, fever, pale mucous membranes, anemia, breathing difficulties, enlarged lymph nodes, swollen and inflamed joints, and discharge from the eyes.

Depending on the severity of clinical signs, treatment options may include outpatient care or in some cases, hospitalization. Antibiotic therapy is the mainstay of treatment for ehrlichiosis in cats. In severely ill patients, intravenous (IV) fluid therapy, blood transfusions, and other forms of supportive care may be indicated.

**Since all tick-borne diseases have the potential to be fatal, we strongly recommend not exposing your cat to ticks to the best of your ability.** This can be accomplished by keeping your cat(s) strictly inside and in the case, you have other pets going outside, using a form of flea/tick prevention with your cat(s) regularly.

**If you discover a tick attached to your cat,** you need to remove it with tweezers or a specially designed tick removal tool. It's important that you remove the entire tick, including the head/mouth parts. This is best done by applying steady pressure as you pull it out. Make sure to disinfect the area after you remove the tick.



## Ehrlichiosis - Continued

The safest way to dispose of ticks is by dropping them into a bottle of alcohol and tightly sealing it before disposing of it. It is also recommended that you wear gloves to prevent touching the tick, or any secretions from the tick, directly and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.

If you have any questions or concerns on your pet's risk or what prevention products to use, ask your veterinarian.

## TICK PREVENTATIVE PRODUCTS:

**Revolution Plus®:** Is a **Topical** applied to the skin of cats and kittens. It effectively kills **fleas, flea eggs and ticks** as well as control and prevent roundworms, hookworms and heartworms. Also treats and control ear mites. It is safe for cats and kittens **8 weeks of age and older** and those pets weighing at least 2.8 lb. **Used once monthly.**

**BRAVECTO®:** Is a **Topical** applied to the skin of cats and kittens. It effectively **kills adult fleas** and is indicated for the treatment and prevention of flea infestations as well as the treatment and control of the **deer tick (Ixodes scularis)**. It is safe for cats and kittens **6 months of age and older** and weighing at least 2.6 lb. **It is used every 12 weeks – 3 months.** It is effective against the **American dog tick (Dermacenter varabilis) when used every 8 weeks.**

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## ANESTHESIA AND YOUR PET

Many pet owners worry unnecessarily about anesthesia in their pets. Although anesthesia can never be completely free of risk, today's modern anesthetics make that risk very small.

The same anesthetics that allow complicated surgeries such as heart and kidney transplants to be performed on humans are being used in pets as well. Even very frail animals can usually be anesthetized safely. **In general, the risks from NOT performing a needed procedure, such as dental cleaning or tumor removal, are much higher than the risk from the anesthesia.**

## Anesthesia and Your Pet - Continued

We use pre-operative blood tests and other tests such as radiographs (X-rays) to help us determine whether a procedure will be safe for your pet before it is performed. We require pre-operative blood screening for all pets before anesthesia is administered. Even young and apparently healthy animals can have serious organ dysfunctions that are not evident without such testing. For young patients the blood work can be done the day of the procedure. For patients seven years of age or older a more extensive blood panel is performed. We like this done at least a few days prior to the procedure to better tailor an anesthetic protocol that pet. Chest X-rays will be taken if there is any suspicion of heart or lung disease, or a malignant cancer.

During anesthesia your pet will have its blood pressure, temperature, blood oxygen levels, carbon dioxide levels, heart rate and rhythm monitored throughout the procedure. The anesthetic drugs used are always double checked for accuracy and are always administered by certified (licensed) veterinary technicians or doctors to ensure safety and proper dosing. IV fluids are routinely given, as well as supplemental heat, to aid your pet's full recovery.

With proper care and monitoring, your pet should go home after anesthesia just as healthy as when it arrived at the hospital, whether it is 16 months or 16 years of age.

**If you have further concerns about anesthesia in your pet, we would be happy to discuss these further with you. Please let us know!**

## **BEFORE YOUR CAT'S UPCOMING SURGERY**

### **Cat's Upcoming Surgery**

Many people have questions about various aspects of their pet's surgery and we hope this discussion will help. It also explains the decisions you will need to make before your pet's upcoming surgery.

#### **Feeding Prior to Surgery?**

It is important that surgery be done on an empty stomach, to reduce the risk of vomiting during and after the anesthesia. You will need to withhold food for at least 8 hours before surgery. We generally, recommend you remove access to all food between 10 PM and midnight the night prior to anesthesia. Water can be left out until the morning of the procedure.

### **What about Medications my Pet is Taking?**

In general, we recommend that you continue to give any current medications your pet may be getting as previously directed the morning of anesthesia; even if a small amount of food is needed to accomplish this. Additionally, new medications may be started for some pets a few days prior to anesthesia and then continuing for several days after or you may be instructed to reduce dose/dosing or eliminate others entirely. If you have any specific questions, please address these with a veterinarian.

### **Is Anesthesia Safe?**

Today's modern anesthetics and anesthetic monitors have made surgery much safer than in the past. We do a thorough physical exam on your pet before administering anesthetics to ensure that a fever or other illness won't be a problem. We also adjust the amount and type of anesthetic used depending on the health of your pet. Additionally, rest assured, your pet will be monitored throughout the procedure by a doctor and a certified (licensed) veterinary technician (CVT).

### **Pre-anesthetic blood testing**

is vitally important in reducing the risks associated with anesthesia! Every pet needs blood testing before surgery to ensure that their liver and kidneys are functioning normally and can handle the elimination of the anesthetic agents given. Additionally, that the patient has a normal blood sugar to ensure normal metabolism by the brain, that the pet is hydrated and has enough red blood cells to carry oxygen to their tissues. That protein and electrolytes are within normal ranges. We also want to know they have enough white cells to fight infection and platelets to clot their blood.

Even apparently healthy animals can have serious organ system problems that cannot be detected without blood testing. If serious problems are detected, it is much better to find it before it may result in anesthetic or surgical complications! In animals that have minor dysfunctions, anesthesia may be able to be performed by simply by altering amounts and the type of anesthetic used or by the administration of IV fluids before, during and after the procedure. If serious problems are detected, the procedure will be postponed until the problem is fully characterized and/or corrected. We include pre-anesthetic blood testing with every routine procedure, i.e. spay/neuter surgery; the cost is included in the price of the surgery.

### **Will My Cat Have Stitches?**

Not usually. For most surgeries we use absorbable sutures underneath the skin; in the case of feline neuters the incisions are left open. Those sutures placed under the skin will dissolve on-their-own. You will, however, need to keep an eye on the incision(s) for any potential swelling, redness and/or discharge. You will also need to limit/restrict your pet's activity level for a time and no baths are allowed for the first 10 days after surgery.

### **Will My Cat Be In-Pain?**

Anything that causes pain in people can be expected to cause pain in animals. Cat's may not show the same symptoms of pain as people do - they don't usually whine or cry - but you can be sure they feel it. We take pain control for our patients very seriously. **No pet should be in pain!** It is a well-known medical fact that when pain is controlled pets recover faster. Prior to surgery, your pet will receive pain medications, as well as during and immediately after the procedure. During recovery, each pet is monitored and given additional medications as needed. Pain medications will be dispensed for your pet and should be continued for two to five days after the surgery.

### **What Other Decisions Do I Need To Make?**

While your pet is under anesthesia this is the ideal time to perform other minor procedures, which are more easily accomplished when your pet is sleeping. Routinely, your cat's nails will be trimmed at no charge. You may request that one or more of the following additional procedures be performed.

- \* Ear cleaning
- \* Removal of any retained baby teeth
- \* SANOS® Application (See Dental section to follow)
- \* Implantation of Home Again microchip for identification

### What Other decisions Do I need to Make? - Continued

Charges for these services will be included in a treatment plan/estimate given at time of scheduling the procedure. They can be decided upon prior to scheduling, when you schedule your pet's surgery, or at the time of drop-off.

The morning of surgery, you will need to have your pet here between 7:30 AM – 7:50 AM. It will take about 5-10 minutes of time to complete admission and consent paperwork and then you will meet briefly with the doctor to discuss any further concerns you have. We will need a phone number of a contact person that you can be reached during that day. We will also set up a tentative discharge time for your pet. You will be contacted with any updates during the procedure and when your pet is in recovery. When you pick up your pet after surgery you should also plan to spend about 10 minutes with the Certified Veterinary Technician to go over your cat's home care needs and set up any needed re-check appointments.

We will call you a day or two before your scheduled surgery appointment to confirm the time you will be dropping your pet off and to answer any questions you might have. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to call us with any questions about your pet's health or upcoming surgery!

## ELECTIVE SURGERIES

### NEUTERING / SPAYING

Among the most common surgical procedures in small animal practice are those for sterilization (spaying and neutering). The goal of these procedures is both to prevent reproduction and to provide a net health benefit for the patient that include avoiding the risks of reproduction, reducing the incidence of those disease that are more common in intact animals, and reducing behaviors associated with intact status that can lead to relinquishment.

#### **What is meant by Spaying /Ovariohysterectomy or Neutering/Castration?**

**Spaying** is the common term used to describe the surgical procedure known as an **ovariohysterectomy (OVH)**. In this procedure, the ovaries and uterus are removed completely in order to sterilize a female cat. Recently, the option to perform an **ovariectomy (OVE)** where only the ovaries are removed is becoming more common.

**Neutering** (also known as **castration**) is the common term used to describe the surgical procedure during which both testicles are removed in order to sterilize (make infertile) a male cat; stopping its ability to reproduce.

The average lifespan of a neutered / spayed pet is 40% longer than that of an un-neutered / un-spayed one. Un-spayed females can develop breast cancer or severe uterine infections by the time they are 8-10 years of age. Un-spayed female cats also are "in heat" frequently, about every 3 weeks during which time they are able to be breed/impregnated and are noisy and troublesome to live with. Worst of all, millions of unwanted kittens are euthanized in this country every year because there aren't enough homes for them all.

Un-neutered male cats over the age of 9 months have very strong-smelling urine, which they like to spray in the house to mark their territory. They are also prone to wander in search of female cats and are also very territorial. These traits lead to high rates of death from being hit by cars, fight wounds and exposure to deadly contagious viral infections. Male cats are also, of course, equally responsible for pet overpopulation.

We recommend spaying and neutering for all pets that will not be used for purebred breeding. This should be done when your animal reaches 5 months of age. (Male cats can be neutered earlier while they are being declawed as young as 2 months of age.)

Your cat will be a healthier, happier pet, and you will have done your part to reduce the pet overpopulation problem.



**See Feline Spay/Neuter Handouts** -- these are found at the end of the manual and further discuss the procedures, associated risks/benefits as well as possible complications.

While your pet is anesthetized, we can also remove any retained baby teeth and implant a microchip ID. Microchipping is recommended for all pets and is an invaluable aid to identify your pet should it become lost or stolen. At the time of this surgery, we can also apply a dental sealant called SANOS that can reduce the build-up of tartar and plaque on newly erupted adult teeth.

## DECLAWING

**Many people who keep their cats indoors prefer to have their front paws declawed.**

Occasionally, we will declaw all four feet, but this is seldom necessary. There are four options that you should consider: frequent nail clipping, nail shields, surgical declawing, and tendonectomy.

The nails may be clipped regularly (we can show you how). However, your cat's nails will re-grow and become sharp again within a few days. Therefore, to protect yourself and your property, it will be necessary to clip them one to two times per week. You must provide scratching posts or your cat will use the furniture.

There are some commercially available products that are nail caps. These are generally made of smooth plastic and attach to the end of the nail with special glue. The nails are still present, but the caps prevent them from causing destruction. After two to four weeks the nails will grow enough that the caps will be shed. At that time, you should be prepared to replace them.

Surgical declawing is the removal of the nail at its base. This is done under general anesthesia and requires an overnight hospitalization. There is very little post-surgical discomfort, especially when it is performed on a kitten.

Contrary to the belief of some, this surgery does not cause lameness or psychological damage. Actually, a declawed cat will not realize the claws are gone and will continue to "sharpen" the claws as normal without inflicting damage to your furniture. This surgery can be done as soon as your kitten has started his or her vaccination series, has been tested for internal parasites, and weighs at least two pounds or anytime thereafter. **Please decide early if you want your cat declawed. The earlier the better!** It can also be done the same time as spaying or neutering. Once declawed, your cat should always live indoors since the ability to defend itself is compromised.

**Tendonectomy, is an alternative “de-claw” surgery;** it involves the surgical removal of a small portion of the tendon on the underside of each toe/digit. This tendon is needed to allow the nail to extend. The cat retains its nails, but it cannot extend them for sharpening and scratching. There are two disadvantages to this procedure. One is that the nails continue to grow. Therefore, the nails should be clipped every seven to fourteen days; if not, the nails may grow into the pads of the foot. Additionally, there is some loss of structure to the toes. The toes may splay, causing abnormal stress on the joints of the toes. Subsequent arthritis is of concern. It is generally recommended as an option in older cats.

## **MICROCHIPPING**

the latest in pet identification and retrieval is microchipping. This tiny device is implanted with a needle so the process is much like getting an injection. Veterinary hospitals, humane societies and animal shelters across the country have microchip scanners used to detect the presence of a microchip and your cat's unique identification. A national registry assists in the return of microchipped pets throughout the United States and Canada. We strongly recommend that all pets be microchipped.

## **DENTISTRY & Dental Care FOR YOUR PET**

**All of us know about the benefits of routine dental care for ourselves.** Daily brushing and flossing, and regular visits to the dentist, keep our teeth and gums healthy and comfortable. Unfortunately, routine dental care is still an often-neglected item of dog and cat general health care. **Your pets deserve regular dental care just like you!**

After your pet reaches a few years of age, plaque begins to build up at the junction of the gums and teeth. With time this plaque hardens into tartar. If this tartar is not removed, it increases causing inflammation to the adjacent gum or gingivitis that can result in loss of gum tissue. This allows bacteria to come into contact with the underlying tissues and eventual destruction of bone. We call this process periodontal disease. If this situation is not soon remedied, severe gum infections, abscessed teeth and cheek ulcers and eventually loss of the tooth will occur. You may become aware of this problem by noting that your dog has a bad odor to his or her breath, is not eating food as well as previously, or is experiencing weight loss.

**Chronic infections of the teeth and gums can (and do) result in problems elsewhere in the body.**

Bacteria enter the bloodstream from infected gum tissue and can cause infection in organs such as the liver, the kidneys, the heart and the joints. It is estimated that good dental care

lengthens pets' lives an average of 10 - 20% through the prevention of these secondary problems.

Certain breeds of cats exhibit dental problems more frequently and much earlier in life than do the other breeds. As a result of mouth pain cats may stop eating and show weight loss and nutritional disturbances.

## **You can help prevent dental problems in your pets by:**

- Feeding a dry cat food.
  - Alternatively, there are several foods scientifically designed and shown to reduce tartar build up i.e. **Hill's Prescription Diet t/d®** - clinically proven balanced nutrition that also reduces plaque, dental staining & tartar buildup. It has been awarded the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC) Seal of Acceptance for helping reduce both plaque and tartar accumulation\*.
- Daily (or at least several times weekly) brushing of your cat's teeth with a tooth paste made for pets; this is the best way to help prevent tartar buildup.
  - We recommend **Pet Smile Tooth Paste**. Pet Smile toothpaste is a VOHC accepted\* toothpaste that contains Calprox. Calprox, is clinically proven to stop plaque and tartar buildup by gently dissolving plaque. This leaves your pet's teeth cleaner and whiter and improves gum health: giving "kissable" fresh breath.
- Choosing treats that are proven to help reduce tartar build up.
  - **Tartar Shield Cat Treats®** are specifically made for cats that can help reduce dental tartar. Tartar Shield Cat Treats are also VOHC accepted\* to reduce tartar build-up. Cats love the shape and crunchy texture of these treats. These treats help remove plaque and tartar build-up thus keeping teeth clean and healthy. Each tasty morsel is not only nutritious; they are formulated from wholesome ingredients and are coated with a flavor enhancing agent, malic acid a naturally occurring ingredient found in citrus fruits and veggies but they are also low in calories. **Each tasty treat is only 5 calories.**
- Use of water/food additives that are proven to reduce tartar build up.
  - **Tartar Shield DentaTabs®** are an easy way to help maintain better oral health. Simply dissolve DentaTabs® in your pet's drinking water for a **calorie free** addition to your pet's dental care routine. DentaTabs® contain malic acid, a naturally occurring ingredient found in citrus fruits and some veggies, cetyl pyridinium chloride (cpc), an anti-microbial agent commonly used in mouthwash. This patented, clinically tested combination has been proven to prevent tartar and improve pet breath; they are VOHC accepted\* product. Independent research conducted at Indiana University School of Dentistry showed that the malic acid and cpc present in DentaTabs® prevent tartar by as much as 50%.
  - **Tartar Shield Tartar Control Sprinkles®** are another simple way to support dental health in your pet. They are VOHC accepted\* product to reduce tartar. Nothing is easier than adding a delectable food topper to your pet's current diet, so these simple sprinkles offer the easiest

solution to keeping your pet's teeth and mouth healthy. This formulation combines sodium tripolyphosphate and cetylpyridinium chloride, two clinically proven ingredients. Tartar Shield Tartar Control Sprinkles® are also rich in the omega fatty acids provided by flaxseed and provide support to your pet's skin and coat health as well. Pet's love the hearty beef flavor!

\*For explanation of VOHC accepted - see section to follow.

**All of these products are available for purchase in our in-hospital store, as well as through our convenient on-line store, where you can get at-home delivery.**

## **BRUSHING YOUR CAT'S TEETH:**

The most effective way to reduce plaque and tartar is to brush the teeth. A number of toothbrushes are specially designed for a pet's mouth. Because pets have a "scissors" bite and by the action of their tongues, the inner surface of the teeth remain relatively free of tartar accumulation. As such, in brushing your pet's teeth; all the efforts should be made to clean the outer surfaces.

We would recommend you check out our you tube video on pet dental care;  
<https://youtu.be/FXgkiUTnrG0>.

**Brushing is a big commitment; to be effective it takes patience but the work will be well worth the reward!**

1. Purchase a toothbrush for young children or one specifically designed for pets/cats. Alternatively, you can use a Q-tip, gauze square or terry infant toothbrush.
2. Like dogs, cats will do best if you find a calm, quiet location in your home for brushing sessions.
3. Choose a time when you and, your cat is calm/relaxed, like after exercise or a play session. Avoid startling or waking them prior to brushing.
4. Slowly introduce the toothbrush and toothpaste. Allow your cat to become comfortable with them, leaving the brush out with a small dab of paste on it for them to smell. If they show no interest try adding a drop or two of tuna juice.
5. Apply toothpaste to your finger, and let them lick it. If they don't want to taste again you can try adding a drop of tuna juice. Reward once they have licked the toothpaste, creating a positive association. Repeat this process for about a week.
6. Help your cat get used to you putting your hands in and around their mouth. Slowly lift the lips to look at the teeth, rewarding often.

7. Once they are comfortable, apply a small amount of toothpaste to your finger and put it on the teeth. If you feel uncomfortable doing this try using a “finger toothbrush” instead. Following again, with a reward for calm accepting behavior.
8. After several days, put the toothpaste on the desired toothbrush, and encourage the pet to lick it off. Continue to reward for calm accepting behavior.
9. Once the pet is accustomed to everything you’ve introduced (this will likely take weeks), you can begin to actually brush the teeth. Start along the sides of the mouth, working your way toward the front and back along the outer surfaces of the teeth. Reward with treats once complete.
10. If your pet reacts negatively during any step, stop what you are doing immediately. The next day, go back to a previous step and do that again for a few days until they are comfortable and accepting again.

If you have a **kitten**, we **recommend you wait to start brushing your pet’s teeth till approximately 6 months of age**; when all of their adult teeth are present. But you can begin acclimating yourself and them to the tooth brushing process by setting aside time in your schedule to gently begin to handle them around their mouths and by letting them get used to a toothbrush and the taste of the toothpaste. If you do this tooth brushing on a daily basis won’t be nearly the challenge.

With **adult pets**, be aware that if your pet **already has dental disease**; it is best to schedule your pet to have a dental prophylaxis to treat this painful condition as well as remove existing tartar from the teeth. Starting to brush their teeth, when their mouths are painful already is bound to result in failure; you will get frustrated and stop but more importantly your pet is likely to be resentful and suspicious of any future attempts at toothbrushing. Remember too, that **tooth brushing will not remove tartar** – only plaque. Once a dental prophylaxis has been performed, you will have a much more willing pet with a pain-free healthy mouth to begin the brushing process.

**With gentleness, patience, and perseverance it is possible to brush your pet’s teeth and provide the oral care needed to prevent dental disease!**

## DENTAL EXAMINATION AND CLEANING -- PROPHYLAXIS

Just as with people your cat will still require regular dental exams and cleanings (**prophylaxis**). During a dental prophylaxis, performed under general anesthesia, the entire mouth and all teeth are examined for disease. Each tooth is then individually evaluated and probed for crown abnormalities, gum loss or any periodontal pockets. Dental radiographs of individual teeth covering the entire mouth will be taken to further assess subgingival tooth structure and assess for any/the degree of any periodontal disease present. The teeth are then cleaned of all plaque and tartar by use of an ultrasonic dental scaler (uses water and rapid sound waves) much like the one your own dentist uses, and then the teeth are polished. Polishing smooths the surface of the teeth to help discourage future tartar formation. Your pet will also receive an antibacterial rinse.

We strongly recommend application of SANOS® as well. See the following discussion.

During a dental prophylaxis your veterinarian can (and will) perform a number of other procedures should they be deemed necessary for your pet such as tumor removals/biopsy, simple tooth extractions, removal of retained roots, more advanced surgical extractions up to and including full-mouth extractions as well as some crown restoration procedures.

Other more advanced procedures such as large tumor resections, root canal work and even braces are also available should your cat ever need them by Board Certified Veterinary Dentists. We are fortunate to have very qualified boarded veterinary dentists in our immediate area should this need arise.

We encourage you to be concerned about your pet's oral health, and to keep in mind the availability of effective treatments for dental problems in your cat.

**Make dentistry apart of your pet's total health care plan, for a longer and happier life!**

### SANOS® APPLICATION – What is it?

At the time of your pet's dental prophylaxis we recommend that **SANOS®** be applied to the cleaned teeth. SANOS® is a bio-active polymer, for dogs and cats that acts as a **dental sealant** to keep the gingiva and subgingival gum line clean. SANOS® is NOT applied to the cosmetic crown of the tooth. Because SANOS® can be applied in those difficult/hard to reach areas in the back of the mouth, it is an **invaluable aid to preventing plaque and subsequent periodontal disease that can lead to tooth loss**. For the best results, SANOS® should be applied every 6 months at the time of a dental prophylaxis.

For puppies and kittens, we recommend that you begin SANOS® applications at the time your pet is spayed or neutered. If your pet has been "fixed" already, i.e. from a shelter or rescue, then beginning at 6 months of age when teething is complete.



SANOS has been awarded a **Seal of Acceptance** by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (**VOHC**) for proven help in reducing tartar accumulation.

### **Who/What is the VOHC?**

The VOHC is a group of nine boarded veterinary dentists and dental scientists who have experience with scientific protocols and study design. **They review dental and oral health care products for efficacy.**

### **What does a VOHC Seal mean?**

The VOHC will award a seal of acceptance that certifies the effectiveness of a product at retarding plaque and tartar and/or that it will be a useful oral hygiene aid to help keep the pet's mouth and teeth healthy.

**Regular use of products carrying the VOHC seal WILL reduce the severity of periodontal disease in your pets!**

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## **PET HEALTH INSURANCE**

### **WHAT IS PET INSURANCE?**

Pet insurance, also known as pet health insurance, is the pet equivalent to human medical insurance. **It is NOT however, a Wellness program.** In general, it helps cover the cost of veterinary care should something unexpected or bad occur and your pet becomes ill or injured. Some pet insurance companies do offer plans including wellness services, however this is an additional fee, and they usually are not cost effective.

### **WHAT DOES PET INSURANCE COVER?**

Up front, you should know that having pet insurance for your pet does not provide an inexhaustible source of payment or cover every possible veterinary expenditure. The aim of pet health insurance is to provide for the unexpected expenses resulting from an illness or trauma and those associated with debilitating conditions related to advanced age.

## What Does Pet Insurance Cover?? - Continued

Virtually all pet insurance companies offer coverage for pets related to accidents and illness; as stated previously a few offer coverages for wellness services, if desired. Accident coverage can include services relate to torn ligaments, broken bones, bite wounds and other serious health needs. Illness coverage can cover things like cancer, arthritis, UTI's, allergies and more.

Pet insurance companies usually cover x-rays, blood tests, ultrasounds, CT scans, MRIs, rehabilitation, specialized exams, surgery, hospitalization, emergency care, specialty care, hydrotherapy, chronic conditions, cancer, diagnostic treatment, alternative/holistic therapy and even euthanasia. Be sure to ask the carrier what is covered and what needs additional riders.

**None of the pet insurance providers will cover pre-existing conditions, however,** different companies may have different criteria and waiting periods for what they consider a pre-existing condition. If you're unsure, ask. It's better to know upfront. Many pet insurance companies also set limitations to their illness coverage based on the age of the pet.

**Therefore, it's important to get insurance while your pet is young to reduce pre-existing condition exemptions and your monthly cost, as well as maximize your illness coverage.**

## Why Would I Do I Need Pet Insurance?

People buy insurance of any kind to help them pay for large, unexpected or unplanned expenses for which they would have trouble paying for out-of-pocket

### **You'll Never Have to Decide Between Your Wallet & Your Pet!**

Choosing whether or to pursue expensive diagnostic testing /treatments or have emergency surgery performed on your pet is one of the hardest decisions you'll ever have to make as a pet owner. With pet insurance, you can remove the financial aspect out of your consideration and base your medical decisions purely on what's best for your pet.

### **Accidents Happen**

It doesn't matter how well you take care of your pet; accidents happen. Whether it's a toenail on your cat that got caught in the couch cushion or a torn cruciate ligament when your dog jumped off the bed, your pet could have an accident that leads to unexpected (and often untimely!) veterinary bills. A pet's accident or illness can result in costly bills, but having a good pet insurance plan ensures that you're able to recoup a vast percentage of those costs.

## How does it work?

Like our own health insurance plans, it offers different levels of coverage for different premiums. Generally speaking, it is more cost effective to start insuring your pet when it is young and healthy than when older and more prone to illness. Premiums can be paid monthly, quarterly or annually; many companies offer discounts for direct deposits or multiple pets. Many policies have the premium rate linked to the age when first insured. Premiums and the deductible tend to increase as the pet gets older.

Unlike human health insurance, most pet health insurance plans reimburse you for the cost of veterinary care. After paying the initial price of your pet's vet visit, you'll request a duplicate itemized receipt which you then send to your pet's insurance company along with a completed claim form. You'll typically receive a reimbursement check within a week to a month.

Some companies guarantee a specific payout turnaround time as an added benefit. Your reimbursement amount generally, depends on your insurance policy details and exclusions, the type and cost of each procedure, your policy's allowance per procedure and your plan's deductible. Make sure to check if your plan has limits per procedure or illness, vs paying a percentage of all costs incurred. The latter tends to be the better option.

A few insurance companies are starting to offer direct payment to certain partnering veterinary hospitals, as such claims can be approved and paid "on-the-spot", thus eliminating owners having to pay out of pocket, submit paper claims as there is no waiting for approval and then reimbursement.

## What are the Cons of Pet Insurance?

As stated above, pet insurance is designed to protect you and your pet against an unexpected expensive event such as an accident or illness. But like anything, it has its downside/cons. Here are the big minuses of pet insurance:

- **Choosing a company and policy can be confusing.** When choosing a policy, make sure the features that are most important to you are part of the plan. For example, some policies exclude coverage for hereditary conditions such as hip dysplasia which can affect your breed of dog, but may not show up until later in life.
- Before you purchase your dog's insurance plan, be sure to familiarize yourself with what each plan offers. Compare the coverage provided under each plan with individual health concerns for your pet and its breed.

### Choosing a Company and Policy can be Confusing: - Continued

- Currently, there are a number of companies offering pet insurance for dogs and cats but not for exotics. Narrow down your choices to just a few providers that meet your needs.
- Contact those companies and obtain quotes based on information you provide about your pet's breed, age, health and needs.
- **Your policy may never pay for itself.** Remember, it's a safety net, not an investment. You can't expect to get your money back, and you could spend more in premiums over your pet's life than you ever would if you just went to the veterinarian. That said, you don't know what's going to happen in your pet's lifetime and it's often best to be prepared. You can't put a price tag on peace of mind so that alone may be worth the premium for you.
- Weigh the cost of monthly premiums against the types of coverage offered: accident, illness and wellness, as well as any add-ons.
- Review plan deductibles and payout percentages that may impact your real out-of-pocket costs.
- The sooner you sign your pet up for health insurance, the lower the premiums.
- You should expect annual increases on your premiums from any pet insurance company. These rates and increases will vary based on your location, changes in veterinary costs, etc.

## WHAT PET INSURANCE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

The best pet insurance offers coverage that's broad enough for whatever care your pet needs and with enough options to get the perfect coverage for you and your pet.

Lastly, the most common question pet owners ask about pet insurance is ---- "**Is pet insurance worth it?**"

**You never know when the unexpected will strike!** It is estimated that a full 1/3 of all household pets in the US, **WILL** visit a veterinarian due to illness or injury each year and nearly 100% will need such veterinary care over their lifetime, at least once.

Today, there are a whole host of diagnostic and medical options along with surgical procedures, not to mention veterinary specialists available/being offered to pet owners regularly as they seek to provide **the best care** to their beloved animal companions. Many of these were unheard of in the field of veterinary medicine only

## What pet Insurance is right for you - Continued

a few years ago. Unfortunately, few pet owners are truly aware of the costs associated with these options. All too frequently we, veterinarians, see pet owners struggle and have to choose the level of care they can provide their animal companions solely based on the costs involved and not what is considered “best”. **When an owner has pet health insurance, these types of concerns become a thing of the past.**

***Pet insurance is important for any pet owner to consider when deciding on their pet's health and well-being and the level of care they wish to provide should something unexpected happen.** Having adequate health and medical insurance for your pet also **means that you have less stress** when you have to visit the veterinarian to address and treat a health problem with your pet.*

**It just makes sense!**

## TIPS FOR CHOOSING A PET INSURANCE COMPANY:

### 1. Compare Pet Insurance Providers

Before you decide to enroll your pet in a pet insurance policy, compare pet insurance providers. A side-by-side comparison will show the difference in plans, premiums, deductibles, co-pays, sample reimbursements and plan details, including exclusions and additional features.

There are web-based Pet Health Insurance comparison tools on-line such as <https://www.consumersadvocate.org/Pet-Insurance/Reviews>.

### 2. Investigate the Insurer's Track Record

Look at the pet insurance provider's track record for dependability. The key to choosing a pet health insurance provider you can count on is to go with the company that has proven stability, experience and recommendations.

How long has the provider been in business? Are they a trusted financial service? How many in-force policies do they have? Do they have veterinarians on staff that know pets' needs and help develop policies?

### **3. Research What's Covered — and What Might Affect Coverage**

Some pet health insurance plans may have exclusions for conditions that are pre-existing, hereditary, congenital, or related to breeding, and may apply restrictions on your coverage when you file a claim.

Before you enroll, make sure you know and understand what factors may affect coverage, such as your pet's breed and any pre-existing conditions. Find out how often, and why, your premium will increase. Ask if the amount of claims you submit will affect your premium. If you are unsure about the policy language, call the pet insurance provider and ask them to explain in a way that is easily understandable by you.

### **4. Choose Coverage that Suits You and Your Pets Needs**

Do you want coverage for known routine wellness (vaccinations, flea and heartworm prevention, wellness exams and tests), unknown medical care (chronic conditions, surgeries and hospitalization, prescriptions, exams, lab tests, illnesses, injuries) or complete care with coverage that includes hereditary conditions and wellness?

Discuss your pet's health with your veterinarian, get an idea what common health conditions your pet could face that may be breed related, or if there's a history of health issues in your pet's family tree.

### **5. Pick the Type of Insurance Reimbursement That Works for You**

There are two ways pet insurance providers calculate reimbursement: they use either a percentage of each invoice or an annual benefit schedule of allowances.

An invoice is the itemized bill your veterinarian hands you after treating your pet. If you choose to enroll your pet in a percentage of invoice plan, you'll be reimbursed a percentage of what you paid your vet. A benefit schedule of allowances lists everything that is covered under your plan with a set amount for reimbursement. The reimbursement amounts renew annually.

Additionally, your reimbursement amount can be affected by whether you've chosen a per-incident deductible or an annual deductible.



## 6. Review Cost and Value

There's no point in buying a pet insurance policy just because it's cheap if it doesn't cover what your pet needs. Your monthly premium and reimbursement amount will vary based on the type of coverage and deductible you choose.

Deductibles are worth taking into consideration: A per-incident deductible is applied to every incident and can reduce your monthly premium. A low annual deductible will result in a higher premium while a higher deductible will result in a lower premium. However, don't base your purchase on cost alone. While a lower premium may sound great; you don't want to limit the amount of benefits you'll receive when you really need them.

## ON-LINE PRESCRIPTIONS:

Our veterinarians work diligently with you to keep your pets safe and healthy. We provide a fully stocked pharmacy for your convenience, and offer our hospital's on-line store for the ability to have your medications shipped to you. We regularly will fax prescriptions to local human pharmacies and to The Pet Apothecary (Glendale, WI) for needed compounded medications; and will continue to do so.

In the past, for your convenience, we have always also faxed prescription requests to various on-line pharmacies. However, of late, we have become very concerned about the ethics and inconsistency of some on-line pharmacies. We have experienced the wrong medications being mailed to clients, medications with incorrect directions as well as fraudulent/counterfeit manufactured medications being substituted for prescribed drugs. Medications have also been delivered to client's homes either very hot or frozen without protective packaging, which may decrease their efficacy. Additionally, it is often very difficult for you the owner as well as for our veterinarians to reach on-line pharmacists, by phone to discuss prescriptions or issues.

For further information on on-line pharmacies we recommend you visit:

<https://www.fda.gov/.../besaferx-know-your-online-pharmacy>. FDA BeSafeRx is a national

### On-Line Prescriptions - Continued

campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of buying prescription medicines from fake online pharmacies; this campaign provides the resources to help consumers know the risks of on-line pharmacies.

In light of this, if you still opt to purchase a medication or prescription food from an alternate on-line pharmacy, please call the hospital or let your veterinarian know; we will sign a written prescription for you, free of charge. We will either mail this written script to your home, or you can pick it up at our hospital. You are then free to choose the pharmacy of your choice and mail in your prescription.

## CARE TO SHARE PROGRAM

At Brook-Falls Veterinary Hospital & Exotic Animal Care, we strive to exceed your expectations with each and every interaction we have with you and your pet. If we've succeeded in doing so, we hope you'll consider letting your family and friends know about our practice. Our best clients come from your referrals, because your friends love their pets as much as you do!

For those of you who are kind enough to spread the word about our practice, we want to show our appreciation by offering our special "Care to Share" program.

### How It Works:

Any time a friend or family member that you referred to us brings in their pet for an examination and becomes a new client, you will both receive a \$25 credit toward your next visit! It's that simple.

The staff at Brook-Falls wants to extend our sincerest gratitude for your loyalty and continued support.

As always, we look forward to seeing you and your pet at your next appointment, and to meeting your friend's pets soon as well!

# Care To Share



**Refer a friend or family member today!**

Share the love and both of you receive a \$25 credit towards any visit...

**PLUS** a big dose of love from all of us too!

Download the **Care to Share Card**, from our website, pop your signature on the back...then hand your card out to any pet parent you fell would be a fit. If they love their furry little fellas like crazy...they'll fit in 'purrfectly' around here! When your friend or family member becomes a new client, each of you will receive a \$25.00 CARE TO SHARE Credit towards anything at all – food, treats, meds...even your next visit! Know lots of pet parents? Your special pet account sure could stack up!

**Have fun & start SHARING THE LOVE today! Anyone you 're-fur' receives a \$25 credit (and will love you for it)...and as a THANK YOU from us, you'll receive a \$25 credit too!**

## PET WELLNESS PLANS

Designed to help you keep your pet healthy and happy while saving money, Pet Wellness Plans provide excellent care with substantial discounts. Your pet will get the full benefit of health checks, disease prevention, and parasite testing and affordable payments help to spread out costs.

### How it Works:

- \$65 enrollment fee per pet, waived if plan paid in full at time of enrollment and waived the following year if renewed within 1 month of anniversary date.
- Pet Wellness Plans are NOT automatically renewed. We will call you 30 days prior to the expiration date and discuss plan services not used and reenrollment.
- At the time of enrollment, the enrollment fee and the first month's fee is due. The remainder 11 monthly payments will be done automatically via credit or debit card.
- Pet Wellness Plans paid in full can also be done with cash or check.

## Cat Plans

### Kitten Plan

- 2 fecal parasite tests
- 2 dewormings
- All Vaccines-Rabies, Distemper, Leukemia
- Feline Leukemia and FIV testing
- 10% off spay, neuter, and declaw surgeries
- NO CHARGE – **Unlimited EXAMINATIONS**
- NO CHARGE – **Unlimited nail trims**
- NO CHARGE – **Unlimited anal gland expressions**
- NO CHARGE – **Unlimited ear cleanings**

## Feline Bronze Plan

- Fecal parasite test
  - All Vaccines-Rabies, Distemper, Leukemia
  - CBC (Complete blood count) Full biochemistry profile
  - Complete Urinalysis
  - 10% off spay or neuter surgery
- NO CHARGE – Unlimited EXAMINATIONS**  
**NO CHARGE – Unlimited nail trims**  
**NO CHARGE – Unlimited anal gland expressions**  
**NO CHARGE – Unlimited ear cleanings**

## Feline Silver Plan

- Everything in the Feline Bronze Plan
  - Thyroid level
  - Dentistry and anesthesia (non-routine dental services such as extractions are NOT included)
- NO CHARGE – Unlimited EXAMINATIONS**  
**NO CHARGE – Unlimited Nail Trims**  
**NO CHARGE – Unlimited anal gland Expressions**  
**NO CHARGE – Unlimited ear cleaning**

# NUTRITION

## HOW TO CHOOSE A PET FOOD

One of the most common questions we as animal care providers are asked is - "What should I feed my pet?" Choosing an appropriate pet food has become a challenge for most pet owners of late. If you've been to a pet store recently to look for a pet food or watched the numerous TV ads about pet foods, you are likely overwhelmed by the tremendous number of pet food brands and options available today. Since one of the most important contributions you can make to your pet's health and well-being is his or her daily diet, it's a question that deserves a good answer.

## THE FACT VS FICTION ABOUT PET FOODS

Unfortunately, there is little government oversight on the quality of pet foods, and labeling requirements for pet foods are very lax and incomplete. The words holistic, grain free,

wholesome have no nutritional value. **The only label that does actually mean something is the term organic; there are specific rules that must be followed to be labelled organic.**

Choose a food that is for the life stage of your pet. **DO NOT feed any food labeled for "all stages of a pet's life"**- this is essentially a growth formula (kitten) food and it is NOT appropriate for an adult or senior cat.

**We recommend you feed your pet a food from the following list pet food manufacturers:**

1. Hills / Science Diet
2. Iams / Eukanuba
3. Royal Canin
4. Purina

**All of these companies meet the following criteria:**

1. They have board certified veterinary nutritionists on staff.
2. They conduct on-going nutrition research.
3. They perform feeding trials on ALL of their foods – ensuring palatability, digestibility, that they are nutritionally balanced and they perform regular quality control testing on their products. **This is the most important!**

## **Aren't by-products poor quality ingredients?**

**Many people have been led to mistakenly believe, by-products and secondary products** (i.e. parts of the animal or plant that humans typically do not consume) **are not healthy for our pets. Nothing could be farther from the truth!!** In fact, by-products provide high quality protein, fat, vitamins and minerals and play vital roles in renewing organs and muscles, supporting the immune system and supplying energy. Examples of these by-products or secondary products include internal organs, chicken stock, beet pulp, and gelatin. Some people do actually eat some of these secondary products. Have you ever heard of tripe or haggis? So, **having the term by-products in the ingredient list does not indicate anything about a pet food's quality, cost, or nutritional value.**



## Real “Meat” is better than “meal”, right?

So, what about 'real meat' as the first ingredient instead of a “meal”? Once again, having a 'meat' listed as the first ingredient does not indicate anything about the quality of that ingredient in the pet food. Meat just indicates that the ingredient is rendered, or that the water and fat content has been removed and the resultant product has been ground into a granular form; a “meal.” Meat is actually 70-80% water as compared to a meal which is only 10% water. Since ingredients are listed in descending order of weight on pet food labels, when meat is listed as number one ingredient followed by a meal, most of the protein and nutrients is actually coming from the MEAL and NOT the meat! **Thus, when pet food companies advertise the benefit of having a meat as the number one ingredient, they are not being truthful!!** Additionally, foods containing more meat are much more expensive for consumers.

## Aren't grains just fillers? Aren't grain-free diets better for pets?

Finally, what about grain-free diets? Many pet food companies also mention corn and other grains as being 'fillers' and not having nutritional value. **In fact, these grain ingredients are good sources of carbohydrates and have high nutritional value.** Corn and corn-meal are much maligned, but actually an excellent high-quality protein source, are a good source of energy (corn oil) as well as provide essential vitamins and minerals.

In regards to **grains causing potential allergies in pets, these are quite uncommon.** Animal proteins more commonly the cause food allergies in pets (for example, corn is responsible for less than 5% of food allergy cases in pets). Grain-free diets contain alternative carbohydrate sources such as potatoes, tapioca or legumes (peas, lentils). In fact, many grain-free diets have up to 80% of their diet being potato based making these diets of lower nutritional value than non-grain free diets and can even cause deficiency in certain vitamins/minerals.

**Do NOT feed your pet a grain-free diet unless it is recommended or provided by your veterinarian.** *These foods are under investigation and have been closely linked to a fatal heart disease called Dilative Cardiomyopathy in dogs.* It is suspected that these diets are somehow deficient in taurine or prevent taurine absorption/utilization; taurine is an essential amino acid found primarily in grains.

Because grain-free diets are higher in meat, they are higher in protein and often fat as well, thus they can lead to obesity, if portion control is not adhered to with pets.

## So how can you determine if a pet food is high quality?

All pet owners should read pet food labels with an eye to the above discussion but you should also look for a statement from the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) on the package. When present this will say that the food is complete and well-balanced, either through a feeding trial or because the recipe meets a pet's nutritional requirements. If the food has this distinction, there's no need to give your pet extra vitamins or supplements -- the food has all it needs.

## Summary

Again, select foods based on the lifestage of your particular pet and one manufactured by a reputable company.

You should always discuss diet choice with your veterinarian for their recommendation for your individual pet.

You should also, always feel free to call the manufacturer and discuss products with them directly. Some questions to ask them:

1. Does your company employ full-time qualified nutritional scientists and/or board-certified veterinary nutritionists?
2. Does your company perform nutrition research using your products? Do they perform feeding trials beyond palatability studies on their foods?
3. How does your company practice quality and food safety on raw materials and finished products?

## What about Raw diets?

Here is a blog from the Brook-Falls website --- Is feeding a raw diet worth the risk?

A recent article published in the British Veterinary Journal, Vet Record, based on a study done by Utrecht University scientists would say — NO !!

The study showed “no evidence for any benefit for raw meat-based diets (RMBDs) compared to mainstream dry or canned foods and may even be less nutritious” for pets and such diets, “places pet owners at risk of serious disease.” They additionally, asserted. “In nutritional terms, these diets are often deficient in several nutrients and may, therefore, lead to a serious health problem, especially in young animals that are growing.”

RMBDs include raw dried dog and cat treats such as pig ears, home-prepared meats based from food sold for human consumption and commercial raw meats marketed for pets. The study analyzed over 30 RMBDs and found significant pathogenic bacteria in the products: *E.coli* 0157 was isolated from almost 25 % of the products, *Salmonella* species were found in 20% and *Listeria* species present in 43 % of the products. Additionally, the products tested positive for several parasites: 11% of the products tested positive for one of two species of *Sarcocystis* and 6% revealed *Toxoplasma gondii*. Researchers also found evidence that the meat harbored antibiotic-resistant species of bacteria.

## THE SCIENCE IS CLEAR!

The scientist stated that "it is clear that commercial RMBDs may be contaminated with a variety of zoonotic bacterial and parasitic pathogens that may be a possible source of bacterial infections in pet animals and if transmitted pose a risk for human beings."

Pets fed RMBDs can pass pathogens to humans through direct contact, such as licking or brushing up against them, as well as, through direct contact with the food, through contact with household surfaces or by ingesting cross-contaminated human food.

They issued several dire warnings for pets and pet owners feeding RMBDs. "The presence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in RMBDs could, therefore, pose a serious risk to both animal health and public health — not only because infections with these bacteria are difficult to treat, but also because of the potential of it contributing to a more widespread occurrence of such bacteria."

This study very conclusively, confirms that there is no benefit for animals to eat a raw diet and there is significant evidence that it can, not only harm the pet but can pose risks to human health, especially the young, old or otherwise immunocompromised individuals.

### **So, for everyone's sake – Just Say No to Raw Diets!**

If you still have questions or need more information regarding this important issue, you are encouraged to go the AVMA website --- [www.avma.org/KB/Resources/FAQs/Pages/Raw-Pet-Foods-and-the-AVMA-Policy-FAQ.aspx](http://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/FAQs/Pages/Raw-Pet-Foods-and-the-AVMA-Policy-FAQ.aspx).

## FEEDING OPTIONS

**Cat foods are available in three types** -- *dry*, *canned*, and *semi-moist* formulations. Any of these formulations is acceptable, as long as the label states that the food is intended for growth (or is a kitten food), and is "complete and balanced". This means that the food is nutritionally complete to meet the needs of growth and development. Each of the types of food has advantages and disadvantages.

**Dry food** is definitely the most inexpensive and food can be left in the cat's bowl at all times. If given the choice, the average cat will eat a mouthful of food about 12-20 times per day. Free feeding – food available at all times can be acceptable in kittens. Unfortunately many indoor adult cats tend to over eat in face of inactivity, when food is left out available at all times. It is advised to meal feed, even dry food, too cats too reduce the risk of obesity.

**Semi-moist foods** may be acceptable, depending on their quality. The texture may be more appealing to some cats, and they often have a stronger odor and flavor. However, semi-moist foods are usually high in sugar, and if they are fed exclusively, can cause the cat to develop a very finicky appetite. They are also inappropriate for cats with diabetes or at risk of diabetes. We do not generally recommend this type of food.

**Canned foods** are a good choice to feed your kitten, but are considerably more expensive than either of the other forms of food. Canned foods contain a high percentage of water, and their texture, odor and taste are very appealing to most cats. However, canned food will dry out or spoil if left out for prolonged periods of time; it is more suitable for meal feeding rather than free choice feeding.

**Table foods are not recommended.** Because they are generally very tasty, cats will often begin to "hold out" for these and not eat their well-balanced cat food. If you choose to give your kitten/cat table food, be sure that at least 90% of our pet's diet is a good quality commercial kitten/cat food. We enjoy a variety of things to eat in our diet. However, most cats actually prefer not to change from one food to another unless they are trained to do so by the way you feed them. Do not feel guilty if your cat is happy to just eat one food day after day, week after week.

## How Much, How Often?

There are three main strategies for feeding our feline friends as well. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

## The Different Ways of Feeding Cats

### Meal Feeding Cats

Meal feeding means you're providing food to your cat only at specific meal times during the day. Both canned and dry foods can be fed in this manner. Since most cats will eat their main meals at dawn and dusk, when they would normally be hunting and catching prey in the wild. It often makes sense to be offering them food at those times.

**Advantages:** This type of feeding schedule most closely mimics natural cat behavior as stated above. Food intake can be closely monitored, which means it will be easy to tell if your cat has had a change in appetite. In addition, if you have the joy of having a multiple cat household all cats will have access to food without one being dominant over the others — one cat could be eating all the food and gaining too much weight, and the other cat(s) could be missing out on the nutrients they need to stay healthy.

**Disadvantages:** Cats might beg for food between meals. Your cat cannot control how much she eats at a certain time. However, if you are following your veterinarian's advice with proper amounts and regular feeding, you can rest easy that it is indeed getting the right amount of food and nutrients.

**The bottom line:** While kittens should be fed up to three times a day, once a cat becomes an adult (at about one year of age) feeding once or twice a day is just fine, says the **Cornell Feline Health Center**. In fact, feeding just once a day should be acceptable for the majority of cats. "Once cats reach adulthood, once a day feeding is fine as long as they are healthy and have no disease problems suggesting a reason to feed differently," Cornell reports. Again, always check with your veterinarian before deciding on a feeding regimen.

If you have multiple cats, ideally each cat should have its own food and water station in a quiet, low-traffic place where the cat likes to spend time. That's because cats are solitary eaters — they prefer to be alone when they eat.

### Free Feeding Cats

If you're not considering other options, you might be wondering if free feeding is an acceptable method. When you free feed your cat, her food is available at all times. Keep in mind that only dry foods can be fed in this way because wet food should not be left out throughout the day. If you're noticing that your cat is leaving dry food in her bowl for more than a day, you should still throw it out to maintain its freshness.

**Advantages:** Your cat can eat multiple (hopefully) small meals per day on its own schedule.

**Disadvantages:** Free feeding cats can lead to overeating and obesity. It can also be difficult to tell if your cat's appetite has changed, for the better or worse. It's also difficult to tell, if you have multiple cats, how much each one is eating.

**The bottom line:** While free feeding can lead to extra weight if not correctly managed, there are ways to allow free feeding that keeps your cat's weight and food take into account. Make sure to properly measure the amount of food necessary for them for the day. When the food is gone, don't fill it back up until the next day. This will teach your cat to feed throughout the day, rather than gobble it all down at once.

Another option for free feeding cats, it's a good idea to use a food puzzle with pre-measured food so you control how much and how often your cat eats. Many cat behavior experts are using food puzzles not just for rewards, but as a way to feed cats. The thinking is two-fold: the first is that food puzzles provide activity and mental stimulation for cats; the second is that as obligate hunters, cats would naturally *work* for their food. No one would hand them a bowl of mice!

## Combination Feeding Cats

Mixed feeding can be defined as serving canned food as a twice-daily meal and dry food is freely available.

**Advantages:** Combination feeding allows your cat to eat multiple, small meals per day on its own schedule. You can monitor appetite at least partially when you feed its wet food. It also gives cats the nutritional benefits of both wet and dry food.

**Disadvantages:** Combination feeding, like free feeding, can often lead to overeating and obesity, so it is important to measure the food out and not refill the cats bowl until the next day. If you have multiple cats it can be difficult to monitor each one's total food intake, so any form of free feeding may not be the best option.

**The bottom line:** Both wet and dry foods have advantages and disadvantages, when it comes to your cat. For instance, cats diagnosed with certain medical conditions — such as urinary and kidney issues — might benefit from the higher moisture content in wet food. Dry food, meanwhile, may be better for a cat's teeth and is often less expensive and is easier to store.

If you do try combination feeding, consider using a food puzzle so your cat feels challenged by playing with its snacks.



**Final thoughts:**

**If you have a multi-cat home**, keep in mind that the volume of food offered should not exceed the total calorie requirements for all the cats each day. Otherwise, your cat or cats could become overweight, leading to a higher risk of developing other health problems.

**All kittens should receive a growth-formula/kitten food till approximately 1 year of age.**

Following this they should be transitioned to an adult formula food. Transitions should take 5-7 days at least, to slowly acclimate them to the new diet to avoid unnecessary gi upset.

**No matter what method you choose, measure food out each day** to best track how much your cat is eating. A cat's needs will vary depending on her size, energy level, and health issues. Consult your veterinarian about the number of calories your cat should be consuming each day.

**No matter what method you choose for your feline friend, make sure to choose a high-quality food** to provide it with the nutrients it needs to live a happy and healthy life. If you feel like your cat is struggling with weight management, or just eating in general, we highly recommend setting up an appointment with your veterinarian to come up with the healthiest game plan.

## KITTEN/CAT BEHAVIOR AND SOCIALIZATION

We would like to congratulate you on the acquisition of your new kitten. Owning a cat can be an extremely rewarding experience, but it is also a large responsibility. We hope this discussion will give you the information needed to make some good decisions regarding your kitten.

First let us say that we are grateful that you have chosen us to help you with your kitten/cat's health care. If you have questions concerning any subject related to your kitten's health, please feel free to call our hospital. Our veterinarians and staff will be happy to help you.

**Socialization** is the process of preparing your cat to enjoy interactions and be comfortable with other animals, people, places and activities. Socialization should begin during the kitten's "sensitive period" which is between 3 and 9 weeks of age.

### SOCIALIZATION TIPS:

- Create a socialization plan specifically for your kitten/cat to prepare it for life in your household.
  - Plan exposure to the animals, individuals, environments, activities and objects that will be part of its new life.
- Provide regular positive and diverse experiences to encourage your kitten/cat to enjoy new experiences without becoming fearful or aggressive.
- Provide praise, play and treats to reward engagement.
- Allow the kitten/cat to withdraw if it is uncomfortable.
- Move at a pace appropriate for your kitten/cat's personality.
- Well-managed kitten socialization classes are a good way to socialize a kitten within the sensitive period.
- Continue to reward your kitten/cat for calm or playful responses to social interactions throughout its life.
- For kitten/cats with special behavioral needs, develop a plan with your veterinarian and/or another animal behavior expert.
- Kittens/cats that have not been fully vaccinated should not be exposed to unvaccinated animals or potentially infected environments.

## ENVIRONMENT

A kitten/cat is naturally inclined to investigate its new surroundings. Kittens/cats are inquisitive and adventuresome, which frequently gets them into trouble. You will need to kitten/cat proof your home just as you would for a toddler, to prevent accidents and illness. It is suggested that the kitten's/cat's area of exploration be initially limited so that you can

supervise its activities. After confining the kitten/cat to one room for the first few days, you should slowly allow access to other areas of the home.

## **BRINGING HOME YOUR NEW KITTEN**

### **What is the best way to introduce my new kitten to my home?**

A new home with new sights, new sounds, and new smells can be a scary place for a young kitten, but there are things you can do to make the transition easier. Your new kitten likely left behind a loving mother, playful siblings, and a familiar environment, so he needs a little special care when being introduced to his new surroundings and new family.

## **GETTING STARTED**

Your kitty needs to feel comfortable with you as soon as possible, so start your relationship by interacting with him on his own turf where he feels safe and secure. Spend time playing and cuddling him before taking him away from his familiar environment. Bring home the comforting scent of his current home by petting his mother and siblings if they are present. Better yet, bring along a towel and rub his family members or even the inside of his kennel to carry these *old* scents to your kitty's *new* home. Familiar smells warm the heart and steady the nerves.

## **GOING HOME**

The ride home should be as pleasant as possible. Place the scented towel in a cat carrier and gently place your kitten inside. If he resists, remove the top of the carrier rather than nudging him through the door. Cats prefer cozy spots so they usually like being in a carrier. By encouraging your kitten to ride within the confines of a carrier, you are providing safety and security, as well as starting a good routine that you can maintain for future car rides.

## Arriving home

When you arrive at home, place the kitten and carrier in a small, quiet room in the house away from traffic. Open the door of the carrier and allow the cat some time to come out willingly. Place fresh water, food, and a litter box near the entrance of the carrier. Allow the kitty to come and go at will. If he cowers in the back of the pet caddy and refuses to venture out after 30 minutes, gently remove the top of the carrier, pick him up, and show him the food and water bowls and litter box. If the kitten is very tiny, a small litter box with low sides may be necessary at first. If possible, duplicate the type of litter material used in the previous home (see Litter Box Training).

"Give him lots of time to become familiar with this room before giving him a tour of the entire house."

All kittens will need time to investigate their new surroundings. This is less overwhelming for your new kitten if you initially limit the available space by keeping him in a single room. Give him lots of time to become familiar with this room before giving him a tour of the entire house. Gradually introduce him to rest of the one room at a time, and always stay with him when you bring him to other rooms.

## STAYING HOME ALONE

After interacting with your kitten on your turf, your scent will replace the smells associated with his old home and you will become his source of security. He will find comfort in having you around, but you can't always be with him so your kitty must learn to stay at home alone. Set up a safe and secure area where you can leave your kitten when you are not around to supervise.

This location should be large enough to accommodate a food bowl, water bowl, litter box, toys, and a resting area. Remember that cats prefer to have their food and water separated from the litter box, so designate a separate feeding area, litter box area, and resting/play area. Make sure the area is cat-proofed by removing things that may cause injury (sharp objects, string, electrical cords, rubber bands or other items that could be swallowed) and inspect the areas for nooks and crannies where a kitten might hide or get stuck. Cats are natural explorers and independent by nature, so most investigate and adjust to their safe haven readily.

## PREVENTING PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY START

The key to preventing behavior problems in kittens is to identify and provide appropriate outlets for all of their needs. This is especially important for indoor kittens since all of their playing, hunting, exploring, climbing, scratching, eliminating, and socializing will need to be channeled into acceptable indoor options.

Encouraging safe and appropriate play activities from the first day in your home will make life much more pleasant for you and your cat. Most of the physical activity of an outdoor cat is focused on the hunt. Indoor cats do not have to hunt for food, so interactive play that satisfies the hunting instinct makes for a happy cat. In fact, stalking and pouncing are important play behaviors in kittens that facilitate proper muscular development, so these activities should be encouraged within reason.

Provide predatory play sessions by playing together with wands, movable toys, or small lights. Chasing a toy attached to a wand or batting around a soft ball gives the cat needed outlet for his hunting instinct. The best toys are lightweight and movable. Avoid toys that are small enough to be swallowed and keep string and ribbon out of reach. These items can cause serious intestinal problems if they are swallowed.

Serving food inside foraging toys and hiding treats inside boxes or paper bags also piques a cat's interest in exploration (see Enrichment for Indoor Cats, Play and Play Toys, and Play and Investigative Behaviors).

In addition to play sessions with owners, highly social and playful cats may also benefit from having a second social and playful cat in the home provided a safe hierarchy has been established. In other words, all cats involved recognize the "top cat."

Cats climb trees in nature and lounge on the branches, so this instinct must be satisfied, too. Comfortable, accessible bedding in a quiet location will encourage the cat to sleep in his own quarters, but cats do like to sun themselves on the back of the best chair in the house.

**"Safe climbing alternatives and scratching posts will help deter destruction of furniture."**

Safe climbing alternatives and scratching posts will help deter destruction of furniture. One important rule of thumb is that each cat is different; you must choose the types of play and toys that are most appealing to your cat and most appropriate for your household. Try cat trees and scratching toys and posts with different types of materials and surfaces so you learn what your cat likes to climb and scratch. By providing a surface he likes and teaching him where it is appropriate to scratch, you can prevent inappropriate scratching before it begins.

## What should I do if I have other pets?

### INTRODUCING A NEW KITTEN/CAT TO YOUR RESIDENT CAT(S)

Most kittens/new cats receive a hostile reception from other household pets, especially from another cat. The other cat usually sees no need for a kitten in the household and these feelings are reinforced if it perceives that special favoritism is being shown to the kitten. The introduction period will usually last one to two weeks but can take much longer and will have one of three possible outcomes:

- The existing cat will remain **hostile** to the kitten. Fighting may occasionally occur, especially if both try to eat out of the same bowl at the same time. This is an unlikely occurrence if competition for food and affection are minimized during the first few weeks.
- The existing cat will only **tolerate** the kitten. Hostility will cease, but the existing cat will act as if the kitten is not present. This is more likely if the existing cat is very independent, has been an only cat for several years, or if marked competition occurred during the first few weeks. This relationship is likely to be permanent.
- **Bonding** will occur between the existing cat and the kitten. They will play together, groom each other, and sleep near each other. This is more likely to occur if competition is minimized and if the existing cat has been lonely for companionship.

Cats are territorial and solitary hunters by nature, but friendships can and do develop even in feral populations. If you already have a cat and are planning to adopt a new kitten/cat, there are some things you should consider.

1. **Respect the resident cat(s) space.** DO NOT immediately drop a new kitten/cat into the territory of your resident cat(s) without some acclimatization time. It would be wise to confine the new addition to one area that is not “prime real estate” to your resident cat(s), such as a bathroom or bedroom where the resident does not spend much time. The new cat needs to adjust to you and your home before it its new housemate(s).
2. **Make the home a calm and safe place.** Pheromone sprays or diffusers can help create a tranquil environment. Cats are very tuned in to the cues and scents. **Feliway®**, synthetic facial pheromones mimic a safe and secure “marking” that tells your cats on a basic level that everything is “all right.” Provide hiding spots and quiet places for both cats far from each other where they can retreat if feeling threatened.
3. **Trade items between cats.** It is often good to exchange items between the confined cat and the resident cat(s) i.e. towel, bed or other items so the cats can become more familiar with the smell of the other cat(s) in a non-threatening way.
4. **Be sure there is no competition for resources.** Give each cat their own litterbox (and even one extra), food dishes and places to hang out. Make sure there is a “wide berth” where the cats can choose to avoid each other completely if they so desire. This way, the confrontation is not forced and the cats can choose their interaction without feeling like their survival is in jeopardy.



5. **There should be no other big changes to your home** during the introduction period. When you are moving to a new house, is not the ideal time to add a new cat. All cats are intolerant of change and if you change too much too soon, you set both cats up for a poor introduction. Even interior remodeling or home repairs where workers and new people will be around can add stress to cats.
6. **Be patient.** Cats can be slow to accept the presence of a new competitor and often see little advantage to friendship. Eventually, cats will likely come to an agreement about tolerating each other, but may never be friendly. Be sure not to lose patience and try to force an alliance. Immediate forced confrontation is more likely to end in a fight. This process can take weeks or even months. Some cats never truly bond, but learn the boundaries of the other's territory inside the home and live-in peace.

It is always nice to plan out face to face interactions when you can be present (with a squirt bottle handy if fighting starts). Choose a time when both cats have been fed a hearty and enticing meal and if you can interact with each separately first, it helps. If they are both full, happy and tired, you improve the odds of a more positive introduction. Consider all these tips to weigh the odds in favor of a pleasant introductory period and a happy "fur"ever after for you and your cats.

## HOW CAN I HELP MY KITTEN ENJOY PHYSICAL CONTACT?

Depending on his personality and early experiences as a kitten, your cat may either enjoy or dislike certain types of handling. In order for the cat to learn to accept and enjoy physical contact from people, it is critical that the human hand *only* be associated with positive experiences and that all physical punishment is avoided.

Begin with those types of handling that the cat enjoys like scratching him behind the ears. Speak to him in a kind voice while petting him. For reluctant cats, you may consider giving a treat during the petting sessions. This technique can be applied to other types of handling and can help the cat become accustomed to, and perhaps eventually enjoy, petting, grooming, teeth brushing, nail trimming, and even bathing.

## HOW CAN I HELP MY CAT ACCEPT THE CARRIER?

You probably got off to a good start with the pet carrier by following the recommendations for bringing your new kitty home. Continued crate training will come in handy over the kitty's lifetime. There will be trips to the veterinarian or vacation travel or times of home confinement (e.g. allergic guests, contractors coming and going, etc.) that require short stays inside the pet carrier.

## How can I help my cat accept the carrier - Continued

To foster positive feelings about the pet carrier, start by leaving the carrier in the cat's feeding quarters with the door open. Place toys or his food bowl inside the carrier to entice them inside. A pleasant experience and the freedom to come and go as they please will give your cat a better feeling about the carrier.

"A pleasant experience and the freedom to come and go as they please will give your cat a better feeling about the carrier."

After they he becomes comfortable entering and leaving the carrier of his own accord, close the door briefly while he is inside. Each time, try to leave the kitten in a bit longer before allowing him to exit. Contrary to your instincts, never allow the kitten out when they cry or scratch at the crate or they will associate those behaviors with escape. Instead, wait until the kitten is calm and quiet, praise them and then allow them to exit.

Take a short car ride with the cat in the carrier with a destination other than the veterinary hospital. No need for the cat to always associate the carrier with medical care! With a little patience, you can help your cat regard the carrier as a safe haven rather than a prison. Feliway® might help some cats to more quickly adapt to their carrier (see Crate Training and Travel).

## TRAINING KITTEN TO HAVE NAILS TRIMMED

As kittens grow, they discover all their fighting tools, including their nails. They also discover how much fun it is to climb furniture and bat at toys. But what they really need to discover is how to accept you cutting their nails so you can help protect them from the pain of overgrown nails and prevent damage to your furniture and flesh.

Kittens normally have their claws retracted so they have some control over whether they are scratching. But don't count on training your kitten to keep his claws retracted — you'll have better luck clipping their nails every few weeks.

Accustom your kitten to lying on its back in your lap facing you or in another position that is comfortable and calming for them. You can start when it's sleepy and give them some treats for remaining still for increasingly longer periods. Practice holding each paw in your hand, rewarding them for being cooperative. Then gently press on the tops of each toe until the claw is exposed. Again, give them treats for being good.

## Training Kitten to have Nails Trimmed - Continued

Finally, after several days (at least) of such practice, it's time to clip their first nail. For a kitten, you can use human fingernail clippers or small nail trimmers made for pets. Just make sure they're sharp, as dull clippers can crush the nail, which may be painful. For now, just cut off the very tip of each nail. Avoid the pinkish "quick" you can see within the nail. The quick contains both blood and nerve supplies to the nail, so be prepared for a bit of bleeding and protesting if you cut it. But don't panic. Stop the bleeding with some styptic powder, and if you don't have that, you can use flour or cornstarch. Make sure to apologize with treats and promises not to slip up again!

Give a treat after each nail and don't feel you have to cut them all this first time. It's better to stop before your kitten starts struggling than to push things to that point. Instead, give him a break and do a few more nails later. Just remember which ones you've already done! Cats have five toes (and five claws) per front foot and four toes (and four claws) per back foot — although polydactyl cats can have many more. One of the nails on each front paw is actually up on the wrist, so don't overlook it.

When your kitten learns early that nail trimming can be a positive and rewarding experience, they'll be more likely to cooperate with it later on in life. It's also important to provide your kitten with scratching posts or platforms so that they learn to sharpen their nails there, rather than on your furniture.

## WHY DO CATS SCRATCH ---

### **Why A Scratching Post Is Essential in Any Cat Home**

Scratching is a common cat behavior just like meowing or napping. But, why do cats scratch? Turns out, there are a number of reasons that cats like to claw at things.

### **Why Do Cats Scratch Exactly?**

Your cat isn't trying to be naughty when they set their claws into the side of your favorite sofa. This is a very normal behavior for them. And, it serves several important health purposes. Of course, you'll need to train your cat out of this behavior and give them something else to scratch on. But it's important to first understand exactly why cats scratch in the first place.

### **Scratching Makes Claws Sharp**

The main reason cats scratch is to sharpen their claws. The texture from fabrics and carpeting provides friction that helps remove dead layers from their nails. This kitty pedicure is essential for keeping their claws healthy and sharp.

## It's Kitty Yoga

The tension and height provided by a piece of furniture is also a great way for cats to stretch. As they pull down against the fabric, it gives their muscles a nice flexing. This feels good and helps your cat stay agile.

## Leaving A Mark on The World

Scratching is also a way for indoor cats to leave their scent on objects and places around the house. As they scratch a piece of furniture or carpet, their body leaves behind their unique smell. This mark is a way for your cat to announce to the other cats and animals, "Hey, this is my spot."

**Note:** Scratching inanimate objects, like the couch, is a different behavior than scratching humans. If your cat scratches **you** in an aggressive manner, then you should consult your veterinarian about their behavior right away.

## A Natural Part of Kitty Cohabitation

Cats scratch stuff. This is a natural fact of life. The good news is that cat parents can help control *what* their cat scratches with a little bit of training and perseverance.

One of the best ways to do that is to provide your cat with a scratching post. This offers them a designated object to claw at that isn't your furniture or carpet. Learn more about cat scratching posts and which ones are right for your cat below.

## What Kind of Scratching Kitty Do You Have?

All cats scratch, but not all cats scratch the same. Some kitties prefer to scratch on vertical surfaces (the arms of your sofa) and other cats prefer to scratch horizontally (your carpet). Take the time to observe your feline friend to learn where and how they do most of their scratching. Then, choose a scratching post that suits their needs.

If your cat scratches vertical surfaces, you can offer them standing scratching posts. Or, if they lie on their back when they scratch, you can also get them a bed made out of a scratchable surface like corrugated cardboard. While your cat might prefer one over the other, it's beneficial to provide both horizontal and vertical scratching posts. This can give your cat the option to stretch multiple ways as well as more variety to combat boredom and further prevent ruined furniture.

## Have Lots of Scratching Posts Available

You'll want to have a variety of scratching posts situated in various spots around the house. Place them near or around objects that you don't want your cat to scratch at, like the couch. This may help guide them towards objects that are scratch-friendly.

The more variety you offer your cat, the more fun they can have. You can get posts made with carpet, sisal, and cardboard. This way, your cat will have the perfect material for all their scratching needs.

## Select the Right Scratching Surface

At this point, you may wonder, *why do cats scratch different surfaces and textures?* This is because certain surfaces offer different friction and nail-polishing benefits. That's why scratching posts come covered in a variety of materials. One of the most popular is sisal rope. This natural fiber is tough and able to withstand lots of scratching. Plus, it's satisfying for your cat to claw at.

## Supervise Your Kitty During Scratching

Place your new scratching post near spots that your cat normally scratches. Watch as they get accustomed to their new post. If they ignore it, you can move it slightly or make it more attractive by putting some food (or treats) on it. Also, put scratching posts near stuff that makes your cat comfortable, like their food or litter box. This might help them get accustomed to the presence of scratching posts.

## Offer Plenty of Rewards

Don't hesitate with the catnip. Offer positive encouragement and reward your kitty with their favorite treat when they start to use their new post. Also, try to place their favorite toys and foods around the areas you want them to scratch. This may help make the post more attractive to your kitty.

## SAFE WAYS TO DISCOURAGE FURNITURE SCRATCHING

Even with a scratching post in the house, your cat may still feel the need to claw at the furniture. There are ways to train your cat to stop this habit. Try some of these simple options to help educate your kitty on proper indoor behavior.

### Double-Sided Sticky Tape

Place some double-sided tape on your furniture. Cats have very sensitive paws, and the sticky tape is particularly annoying to them. As such, cats may steer clear of couches or other furniture with tape.<sup>13</sup>

### **Nail Trimming**

Weekly nail trimmings may limit the damage your kitty's claws can do. Plus, it reduces their need to scratch as a way to trim their own nails. Use lots of treats and kind words when clipping nails to help your cat stay calm.

### **Herbal Sprays**

There are all-natural sprays, like lemon water or apple cider vinegar, that you can mist on your couch to deter cats from scratching. Cats don't like the smell of citrus or vinegar, so they'll most likely avoid them. Be sure to do a test spot on the couch first, to make sure your choice won't damage your couch.

### **Soft Paws**

If scratching and clawing continues as a problem, you can also consider using special rubber nail caps that are attached to your cat's nails. It may not be the most comfortable thing for your kitty's paws, but it's not permanent and may help reduce the impact of scratching.

### **Embrace Your Kitty's Scratching**

No one wants to see their favorite couch torn to shreds by their beloved feline but, scratching is important for your cat's health and well-being. It helps them sharpen their claws, stretch their muscles, and stay entertained. So, what can you do?

Instead of discouraging this behavior, you can encourage it, but with guidance. Supply your kitty with safe and appropriate places for them to scratch. Posts and scratch-friendly beds are both great outlets for a cat's claws.

It's up to you to help your cat understand what's okay to scratch and what's not okay. With a little bit of guidance and plenty of catnip, you can have your kitty trained and scratching to their heart's content. Only, it won't be on your sofa anymore.

## **WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP CATS INDOORS**

After conversations with potential adopters and current pet owners, we've come to realize that people are unaware of the dangers of having "outdoor" cats.

Unlike dogs, who are outside on leashes or watched in the backyard, cats who are let outdoors are often allowed to roam freely until they feel like coming home.

This leaves your pet cat vulnerable to lots of preventable outdoor accidents. Here are our top seven reasons to keep your cat indoors.



### **Cars**

Cars kill about 5.4 million cats each year, making them the deadliest killer to outdoor cats. Most of the time, these accidents are fatal. If your cat does survive a car accident, they usually have severe injuries that will require surgery or other intensive procedures. You may feel that your pet is careful enough to avoid cars, but it only takes one moment to become a disaster. Both drivers and cats can become distracted or simply misjudge distance.

### **Cat Fights**

If you've ever been a cat owner, you know that cats are very territorial and solitary animals. Letting your cats roam around outside can lead to getting into territory disputes with other cats in the area. Those disputes can even turn violent. Cat fights often result in bites, scratches, infections and even abscesses.

Abscesses form when a bite becomes infected and are extremely painful for the cat. Some of the symptoms of abscesses are fever and decreased appetite. To treat these, you must consult your vet, have your cat undergo a surgical procedure, and take oral antibiotics.

### **Viral Infections and Parasites**

Outdoor cats are at a much higher risk for contracting both viral infections and parasites. Viral infections are another leading cause of death in cats. Some of those infections are

- Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)
- Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)
- Feline Leukemia (FeLV)
- Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper)
- Rabies
- Potential to Spread Zoonotic Infections to Humans

Some of these diseases can be transferred by close contact alone and do not require contact with exposed skin.

Unfortunately, not all of these infections have effective vaccines and there is currently no cure for any of them. The best way to protect your cats from contracting these infections is to keep them inside.

Additionally, outdoor cats are exponentially more likely to come into contact with parasites such as

- Heartworm
- Hookworm
- Roundworm
- Toxoplasma
- Whipworms

- **Viral Infections and Parasites - Continued**

If not treated, parasites can cause serious and fatal diseases in cats. Luckily, we are often able to treat these parasites and prevent cats from developing other more severe issues.

### **Poisons**

While roaming outside, your cat is also likely to come across poisons. The most common types of outdoor poisons that your cat can encounter are

- Anti-freeze
- Fertilizers
- Insecticides
- Paint
- Rat poison
- Rodenticides

The most dangerous poisons are the ones used to attract and kill pests and smaller animals, because they are often scented or sweetened to draw in animals. Unfortunately, that can include your pet cat.

### **Becoming Lost or Stolen**

By keeping your cats inside, they are less likely to become lost or stolen.

Even with all the precautions you may take as an owner, tragedies can still strike. Collars can be break or be removed. Not everyone will see your "lost pet" signs. Someone who steals your pet is not going to check with a veterinarian if they are microchipped or not.

It is safer for your cats and less stressful for you as an owner to keep your pet inside.

### **Weather and Temperature**

In places with unpredictable weather, such as Michigan, you never know what the day will hold. In just a week it can go from 70 degrees and sunny to 20 and snowing.

Cats left outside in rapidly changing weather can suffer heat stroke and dehydration in hot conditions and hypothermia or frostbite in the winter and at night.

### **Wild Animals**

When outside, your pet cat can be both predator and prey.

Outdoor cats are known to kill birds, mice, rabbits, and other small wildlife animals. The danger here is that these animals could be carrying diseases that are dangerous to cats and to humans. They could also try to bring these small animals into your home.

Outdoor cats can be killed by larger predators such as dogs, coyotes, foxes, snakes, and the like.

Hopefully these seven reasons have made you reconsider having an outdoor cat. If you have questions or would like to talk to someone, don't hesitate to give us a call.

## WHAT YOUR CAT ISN'T TELLING YOU:

### Top 10 signs of Illness in Cats

Sometimes it's difficult to identify when your cat's not feeling well. Watch for these signs of illness, and consult with your veterinarian as soon as possible if your pet begins to show any of them.

#### **Problem #1 --- That's not where he should be "going."**

**Inappropriate Elimination** --- A cat that urinates inappropriately could have any number of conditions associated with the behavior, including lower urinary tract disease, kidney disease, urinary tract infection, and diabetes mellitus. It can also be a sign of arthritis, which makes it difficult for cats to get into the litter box. This could also be an indication of environmental stressors.

#### **Problem #2 --- He's not acting like himself.**

**Changes in interaction** ---- Cats are social animals, so changes in interactions with humans or pets can signal disease, fear, anxiety, or pain.

#### **Problem #3 --- Is he just getting older?**

**Changes in activity** --- A decrease in energy maybe abrupt or gradual. If your pet is healthy— they should not be "just getting older. Activity changes could be a result of arthritis/pain or systemic illness, while an increase in activity can be caused by hyperthyroidism.

#### **Problem #4 --- What's up with his sleeping?**

**Changes in sleeping habits** --- If your cat is sleeping more than normal (keep in mind that average adult cats may sleep 16 to 18 hours a day—though much of that is "catnapping"), it could be a sign of an underlying disease. Has the pattern (time of day/night), places or posture of sleeping changed? Yowling at night could be caused by a decline in vision or hearing with age but could also be a sign of hyperthyroidism.

#### **Problem #5 --- He's not eating or drinking like he used to.**

**Changes in food and water consumption** ---- Most cats are not finicky eaters. Decreased food intake can be a sign of several disorders, ranging from poor dental health to cancer. Increased food consumption can be caused by diabetes mellitus, hyperthyroidism, or other health problems.

**Problem # 6 --- His weight seems to be changing for no reason.**

**Unexplained weight loss or gain** --- Sudden weight loss can be a sign of hyperthyroidism, diabetes mellitus, or a host of other diseases. Obesity, on the other hand, can cause an increased risk of diabetes mellitus, joint disease, and other problems.

**Problem # 7 --- He won't stop grooming? And is that a hairball?**

**Changes in grooming** --- Patches of hair loss or a greasy or matted appearance can signal an underlying disease. Cats who have difficulty grooming often suffer from fear, anxiety, obesity, or other illnesses. An increase in grooming may signal a skin problem.

**Problem #8 --- Is he stressed?**

**Signs of stress** --- Stressed cats may exhibit signs of depression, hide more, or spend more time awake and scanning their environment. These signs may indicate a medical condition, so it's important to rule out physical ailments before addressing the stress behaviorally.

**Problem #9 --- His voice has/is changing.**

**Changes in vocalization** --- An increase in vocalization or howling is often seen with an underlying condition like hyperthyroidism or high blood pressure. Many cats also vocalize more if they're in pain or anxious.

**Problem#10 --- He has bad breath.**

**Bad breath** --- Bad breath is an early indicator of an oral problem but not always. Oral conditions account for most cases of bad breath but some are the result of an underlying metabolic illness. Periodontal disease is very common in cats —studies have shown that 70 percent of cats have gum disease as early as age 3.

## PLAY BEHAVIOR

Playtime is an important part of kitten/cat life. It's something that benefits cats, starting in kitten hood and extending all the way through the geriatric years. The way a cat plays as it ages may change but the desire to play should hopefully remain throughout a cat's life. If you live with more than one cat, hopefully, they have a good relationship and spend time playing together. If your cats are kittens, that playtime is also used as a tool for them to learn how gently to bite in order to keep in playtime mode. Kittens also use playtime to learn about their developing skills and practice stalking, chasing and pouncing. During playtime with their littermates, they also learn important body language and communication skills.

### **ARE MY CATS PLAYING OR FIGHTING?**

When it comes to adult cats, many still enjoy engaging in playtime with their companions. For some cat parents though, their cats' playtime may look as if it's crossed over into aggression. Cat parents are often left unsure about whether the cats are just having an enthusiastic play session or a physical battle that requires intervening before one or both cats get hurt.

**There are a few general guidelines to help you when trying to evaluate whether your cats are playing or fighting:**

1. **Play between cats can often look a bit more aggressive than we'd expect.** Even between kittens, playtime can look a bit rough. Don't expect your cats to wrestle and tackle each other with finesse and gentleness. If you're new at living with cats and are unfamiliar with how they interact with each other, it can be easy to misinterpret playtime exuberance for aggression.
2. **Cats who normally have a hostile relationship or cats who are unfamiliar with each other won't typically engage in play together.** If you notice two cats that view each other as opponents, are now wrestling, it probably isn't a friendly encounter. Unfamiliar or hostile cats may develop a friendly relationship and start playing together but that's something requiring behavior modification and a getting-to-know-you period first. They won't suddenly go from I hate you to let's play without interim steps.
3. **Body language and type of vocalization are important clues** for you to determine whether your cats are simply just enjoying a rollicking play session. Here are some typical ones during play:

## Body Language - Continued

- Claws should remain sheathed
- Ears should largely remain in normal position and not pinned back
- No piloerection (standing up/"poofing") of fur
- No growling
- No hissing
- Any biting should be minimal and done without causing pain or injury

## Wrestling and Chasing Between Cats

When done in play, you should notice the cats take turns. With wrestling, observe whether they each spend equal time being on the top and bottom. If you constantly notice the same cat pinned on the bottom, the encounter may not be playtime.

With chasing, it should also be reciprocal. Pay attention to whether you see the same cat always in the position of being pursued.

### **WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CATS ARE FIGHTING?**

**Let's start off with what NOT to do** and that's to never get in-between to try to physically separate them bare-handed. This action will almost certainly cause physical injury to you. (Cat bites are serious and require immediate professional medical attention.) It can also cause the cats to redirect their aggression toward you in a way that changes their behavior toward you even after the fight is over.

A safer way to separate fighting cats is to make a sudden noise to startle them. Bang a pan against the floor, clap two pot lids together, clap your hands or slam a door or drawer. You can also use a spray bottle of containing water to interrupt the activity from afar.

If the cats keep going back toward each other, use something safe to block their view of each other so you can usher one cat into another room; a large piece of cardboard, a sofa cushion, whatever is handy that will create a barrier.

Once the cats are separated, lower the lights to help them feel a little more hidden which may create calm. Leave the cats separated until their behavior appears back to normal and they are comfortable interacting with you. How long to keep them separated will depend on the severity of the fight. In some cases, a mini reintroduction may need to be done to help the cats learn to feel comfortable with each other again.



## AVOID CAT FIGHTS IN THE FIRST PLACE

If your cats have a “volatile” relationship with each other, take the time now to do behavior work to encourage a more peaceful co-existence. Start by making sure they don't have to compete for resources. Don't ask them to share a feeding station or a litterbox. Have more than one option available by increasing number and location of all resources. Also, look around the environment and see if it would benefit from being a little more cat friendly. Do you have an adequate number of elevated locations for each cat? Are there hiding places and retreats available for everyone?

In some cases, the reason cats may turn on each other is because they have no other outlet for their energy. Cats are predators that were born to move.

Dedicate time each day to engage your cats in interactive play sessions. If your cats don't get along, start by doing individual sessions so they don't have to compete with each other. In addition to those very valuable interactive playtimes, you can also set up puzzle feeders and puzzle toys to keep your cats occupied when you aren't home. If the cats have other outlets to satisfy their need for stimulation, they may be less likely to use each other as wrestling opponents.

If your cats normally get along but have a tendency when playing together to let things get a little out of hand, monitor them (without hovering, of course) so you can provide a positive diversion should you sense playtime about to cross over into aggression. Roll a ping pong ball, toss some treats, dangle a fishing pole toy, etc.

## APPROPRIATE TOYS

Encouraging appropriate play activities is very important from the first day in your home. Stalking and pouncing are important play behaviors in kittens and have an important role in proper muscular development. If given a sufficient outlet for these behaviors with toys, your kitten will be less likely to use family members for these activities.

Most people who have pets enjoy playing with them and giving them toys. Unfortunately, unlike with children's toys, there are no regulations to ensure that toys made for dogs and cats are safe. Many that are available in pet stores and supermarkets are unsafe.

Check any toy you purchase for parts or pieces that could come off and be inhaled or swallowed. 'Googly' eyes, little bells, small pieces of glued on felt, feathers and strings are some things to watch out for. **Never purchase any toy that looks like it could come apart.**

The best toys are lightweight and movable. These include wads of paper, small balls, and heavy string, rope or ribbon. Kittens should **always** be supervised when playing with string or ribbons

## Appropriate Toys - Continued

because these items can cause serious intestinal problems if they are swallowed. Any other toy that is small enough to be swallowed should also be avoided. Popular toys include little plastic balls with bells inside, the balls that can be batted around inside a large, donut-shaped plastic tube, the long piece of fabric on a stick, and assorted cat nip filled animals. Be sure to throw away any toy that is getting frayed or broken, before threads or pieces are swallowed by the cat.

Whatever toys you choose, it's a good idea to rotate them. Putting a toy away and getting out a different one every few days can help avoid having the cat or kitten get bored with the same old thing. Keeping a cat occupied with a different toy each week may also prevent him from finding excitement knocking over wastebaskets or scratching the furniture.

## - DISCIPLINE

Disciplining a young kitten /cat is discouraged and harsh punishment should be avoided. For most kittens, hand clapping, using shaker cans (can containing several coins or other metal objects) or horns can be intimidating enough to inhibit undesirable behavior when you are present. However, remote punishment is preferred. Remote punishment consists of using something that appears unconnected to the punisher to stop the problem behavior. Examples include using spray bottles, throwing objects in the direction of the kitten to startle, but not hit, and using booby traps that make loud noises. Remote punishment is preferred because the kitten will then associate punishment with the undesirable act and not with you.

## TO PREVENT PROBLEMS:

Spend lots of time playing with your kitten/cat so its energy is used up more constructively.

- An empty paper bag can give your cats hours of enjoyment!
- A cat dancer, a string on a pole with an object such as a feather on the end can be waived around while you are watching television.
- Similarly, a focused light source (laser pointer) can be pointed on the floor or walls for your cat to chase after.
- DO NOT play with your kitten by wiggling your fingers or toes - this encourages biting.
- Do not hit or strike your kitten for being naughty. This will only frighten or anger him and frequently leads to biting and clawing behavior.
- Punishment is the least effective training method for cats.
- Keep a squirt gun or bottle handy. A squirt of water in the face deters most kittens from doing things they shouldn't do, especially jumping up on counters or playing too aggressively, and it doesn't hurt them.
- Never force a kitten to stay in your lap if he or she wants to get down. Do not grab at your cat or scare him, or he may learn to bite.

### To Prevent Problems - Continued

- Rough and tumble play also encourages aggression, so play gently, using a toy and not your fingers.

Confine your kitten/new cat to one room when you aren't home, one that has no plants or dangerous objects. Swallowing or choking on small objects is very common in cats and kittens. Beware of things such as rubber bands, pencil erasers, needles and thread, small toys, metal objects such as paper clips, scraps of fabric, earrings etc. Anything smaller than 1" diameter can probably be swallowed and needs to be kept out of a kitten's reach. Don't give your kitten string or yarn to play with! These are among the most common causes of potentially deadly intestinal obstructions.

Provide at least one scratching post for your kitten/cat to use. Even declawed cats like to stretch and knead their paws. Rubbing catnip on the post will encourage its use, as will keeping it in a handy place where you and the kitten spend a lot of time. Cats usually prefer a larger post that they can climb up and down. Some cats like wood or rope-wrapped posts instead of carpet. The more your kitten likes its post and the more it is encouraged to use it, the less it will scratch at the furniture or rugs. Use your squirt bottle if you see it scratching where it's not supposed to.

To prevent chewing on cords or shoes, use unscented, roll-on antiperspirant on these items once or twice a week. Kittens/cats don't like the drying, bitter taste and will soon shy away.

Try putting aluminum foil around your plant pots or lay sheets of it on counter tops or tables, especially when you can't be home to use your squirt bottle! Kittens/cats don't like the shiny, noisy foil and will generally avoid it. Many types of plants are poisonous to your pet, so it's best to keep them all out of reach. Double sided sticky tape works well on couches and chairs – kittens/cats don't like the sticky feel on their feet. Just peel the tape off when it's no longer needed.

Be especially vigilant in the laundry and kitchen areas. Laundry soap and bleach are toxic when licked off of a cat's paws when they've walked through it. Many cats die each year after exploring the washing machine, taking a nap in the dryer, or jumping on a hot stove or into a hot oven. Kittens/cats are also good at learning how to open cabinet doors!

A collar and ID tag are a good idea, especially if your cat tries to escape outdoors. Use breakaway collars to prevent choking. Microchips are recommended for all pets. They are a safe and permanent identification for your pet and are an invaluable aid to help you reunite with a pet should it become lost.

## Most effective approach --- Addressing Inappropriate/Destructive Scratching Behaviors in Cats

Scratching of inappropriate objects is a frequent complaint of cat owners. Destruction of property is also one of the most common reasons given for relinquishment of a cat to a shelter and is the most common reason a cat is presented for surgical declawing.

Recent polling of owners of cats showed, most cats have a preference for inappropriately scratching furniture items and carpet, particularly, those items oriented vertical to the ground. This is very important to remember when consider a scratching prevention program. The survey also revealed that cats were more likely to use scratching posts positioned vertically as compared with horizontal scratching pads. A preference for substrate was not identified in this study, although a separate, previously published survey of cat owners found sisal rope and carpeting to be preferred by cats.

Typically, a number of punishment-based methods were described as used by owners to prevent their cats from scratching inappropriate items and included yelling, clapping, spraying water or air, shaking a rattle can, throwing things at the cat, and/or “spanking” the cat. None of these methods were (or have ever been) found to be effective methods of deterrence.

Owners who attempted to teach their cats to scratch on a designated item, by placing the cat near the scratch post/pad, actually caused their cats to be **less** likely to scratch the designated item as compared with owners who did not use this method. Although this study did not identify any method that may help increase the incidence of appropriate scratching, previous research has shown that owners who rewarded their cat for appropriate scratching saw an increase in their cat using the preferred scratch post.

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### Key Pearls to Put into Practice:

- 1 A vertical scratching post covered in sisal rope or carpet should be provided to cats to help prevent inappropriate scratching. Best placed near areas cats eat, rest/sleep; these are the areas cats want to mark as theirs.
- 2 Punishment is ineffective in eliminating inappropriate scratching and carrying a cat to its “desired” scratching post will make it less likely to use it. Use of catnip on the desired object is appropriate and can be effective to lure the cat to the item.
- 3 Positive reinforcement (rewarding a cat for scratching appropriately with verbal praise, food, or playtime) is the approach most likely to provide the desired results.

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## LITTER BOX BASICS

1. **Choose the right sized box.** The litter box should be 1 ½ times the length of the cat from the tip of the nose to the base of the tail. Match the box to the size of your cat and not to the fact that you want to wedge it in a small area.
2. **Uncovered is best.** Covered boxes concentrate the odor inside which makes it very unpleasant for the cat. In multi-cat households, covered boxes also don't provide adequate escape potential; the cat inside could get "ambushed" while in the box or when trying to leave. Covered boxes are also cramped and don't make the process of elimination very comfortable for most large adult cats. They also tend to get scooped less often because it's more trouble to remove the lid or stoop to reach inside.
3. **Use cat-friendly litter.** In general, cats prefer a soft, sandy substrate so stick to scoopable litter. Texture matters to many cats and how the litter feels on their paw pads can make a difference between acceptance or rejection. The scoopable litter also makes it easier to do daily cleaning and regular litter box maintenance.
4. **Scoop the litter box at least twice daily.** Your cat doesn't want to have to step over mounds of old waste each time it makes a trip to the box. Thoroughly clean the box and refresh the litter at least once monthly, if using scoopable litter. If you use non-clumping litter you need to thoroughly clean the box at least weekly, if not more often.
5. **Have the right number of boxes.** You should have the same number of boxes as you have cats PLUS one extra for the house. It may mean extra cleaning but it's important to not stress cats out by not having to share cramped litter box accommodations. Having an adequate number of boxes also helps alleviate multi-cat tension so one cat doesn't have to use the same box as a rival cat.
6. **Location is important.** The litter box shouldn't be near food or water. Nobody wants to eat in the bathroom. For cats, this is a survival factor because cats bury their waste to avoid attracting predators. In a multi-cat household, spread the boxes around so there's one conveniently located for each cat in a preferred area. This way, a cat doesn't have to cross through another cat's area when nature calls.

## **COMMON REASONS WHY CATS STOP USING THE LITTER BOX.**

When your cat stops using the litter box it's frustrating and stressful for both cat and cat parent. It's also, sadly, one of the most common reasons that a cat may get a one-way ticket to the nearest shelter. There are many reasons why a cat may avoid the litter box and it's important to figure out the true cause in order to get everything back on track. Inappropriate elimination shouldn't be a deal-breaker when it comes to whether kitty gets to stay in your family or not. While some reasons for litter box aversion may be more complex, there are often some simple mistakes cat parents make. If you're a new cat parent it's especially easy to make some simple errors that may not seem important at the time but, trust me, those mistakes can have a big effect on how your cat views his toileting set-up. Here's a list of some common reasons for litter box avoidance.

### **Underlying Medical Issue for the Cat's Behavior**

When dealing with a litter box problem be sure you look at this possibility first. Don't assume a problem is behavioral without getting your cat checked by one of our veterinarians in order to rule out any medical cause. It's common for a cat experiencing discomfort upon elimination to associate the box with the pain. It may also be that your cat can't make it to the box in time due to discomfort.

### **A Dirty Litter Box**

Would you want to use a toilet that is never flushed? Of course not. Cats are very clean animals and if the box is too dirty; they will seek other arrangements. Scoop the litter box at least twice a day and completely wash out the box monthly. If you're not using scoopable litter then wash out the box on a weekly basis.

### **A Covered Litter Box**

You may think a covered box is a good idea because it gives the cat some privacy and also confines the litter odor inside the box. The truth is, a covered box isn't cat-friendly. A covered box often makes the cat feel confined. The covered box makes it more inconvenient for you to scoop on a regular basis (out of sight...out of mind). Covered boxes also create more odor because air doesn't get in there to dry the soiled litter. My biggest complaint with a covered box is that it prevents the cat from having escape potential. In a multi-cat household this can be a crucial issue because a cat may avoid the box if he feels he'll get ambushed while in there.



### **Wrong Sized Litter Box**

Don't choose a litter box based on where it conveniently will fit in a location. Choose a box based on the size of your cat. The box should be about 1 ½ times the length of your cat.

### **Not Enough Litter Boxes**

In multi-cat homes you should have the same number of litter boxes as you have cats plus one extra. If there's a litter box issue, then you really can't avoid to "skimp" on the number of boxes. If you live with just one cat but you have a home with more than one level then there should be a box on each level.

### **Wrong Location for the Litter Box**

Location choice should be about convenience and security for the cat and not about what is convenient for the cat parent. Don't put the litter box near the feeding station, in a damp basement, in a closet or near household appliances that may frighten the cat (such as the washing machine or a furnace that may cycle on with no warning). In a multi-cat household, scatter boxes around the home and don't have them lined up in one room. You don't want a cat developing a litter box aversion problem because it's afraid to cross the path of another cat in order to get into the one room where all the boxes are located. Place a box in each cat's preferred area.

### **Litter Box Liners**

Litter box liners were created for the convenience of the cat parent but they often tear from the cat's claws. It's also easy for urine to form pools in the folds of the plastic and that creates an odor problem. Since cats are very tactile you also have to keep in mind how the plastic may create distress when a cat is trying to dig and cover its waste.

### **Not Enough Litter in the Box**

Don't be stingy when it comes to filling the litter box. If you don't want to create an odor problem, put an adequate amount of litter in the box and keep the level consistent. In general, about 3 inches of litter is a good amount. As you scoop, periodically top off the litter with a bit more to keep a consistent amount.

### **The Wrong Litter**

In general, cats like an unscented, sand-like substrate. They like the soft feel on their paws and the sand-like litter makes it easy for digging and covering. Cats also don't want to smell all the flowery, perfumed litters. Keep in mind how close your cat's nose will be to the litter when it's in the box. Texture is also important when it comes to litter. There are so many litters on the market that are created to appeal to the convenience of the cat parent but in many cases, they are just a litter box problem waiting to happen. While some cats may prefer the texture of an alternative litter, most prefer an unscented, soft, scoopable litter.

### **Stress and Environment Affects Your Cat**

Whether the stress is due to multi-cat issues, household chaos or sudden changes (such as a move, renovation, new baby, new spouse, etc.), the effect can end up being litter box aversion. Cats are creatures of habit who don't adjust well to abrupt changes or chaotic environments. A litter box avoidance problem may be the result of your cat being too fearful to even peek its head out from under the bed. Address multi-cat tension issues and/or environmental factors in order to provide your cat a sense of security and safety in his own territory.

### **Going High-Tech with the Litter Box**

Electronic self-cleaning boxes have so many downsides that I don't even know where to start. Many of them have motors that are frightening. Some are so big but the actual surface area for the cat is too small. Many self-cleaning boxes have covers as well. Even though some of these boxes are timed to not activate the cleaning until 10 minutes after the cat has left the box it doesn't account for another cat entering. Some rakes in the boxes easily clog when there's a large clump of urine or soft stool. The other important downside to a self-cleaning box is that you are prevented from monitoring what is or isn't happening in the litter box. When you clean the box it's an opportunity to check on your cat's health. It's during cleaning time that you may notice constipation (a lack of stool in the box, or scant firm hard nuggets only), diarrhea (soft or watery stools), larger or smaller-than-normal urine clumps or no urine clumps at all.

### **Strong Cleansers for Cleaning Litter Boxes**

Strong-smelling household cleansers may leave enough of a strong scent on the plastic box that it drives the cat away. When you clean the box use bleach that is diluted 1:10 in hot water or you can even use dish soap that is very diluted. When you're done cleaning you don't want to have any traces of scent on the plastic. To give you an idea of how sensitive a cat's nose is, cats have approximately 67 million scent receptors compared to the 5 million that humans have.

### **Litter Scatter Mats**

These mats are designed to catch the litter that gets trapped on the cat's paws as it exits the litter box. Some mats may have a rough texture that cats find objectionable.

### **Punishing Your Cat**

I include this on the list because it's important to know that a cat may avoid the box because it has been punished for eliminating in other locations. When you punish a cat for peeing or pooping outside of the box, the messages it receives are:

1. It should be afraid of you
2. Peeing and pooping will get it in trouble.

Even though you think you're teaching it that the location choice is what you objected to, the message it got was to avoid peeing and pooping when you're around. Punishment also means you are assuming the cat is misbehaving and in reality, it isn't. If a cat isn't using his litter box it's because it feels it can't or shouldn't. Your job is to figure out why. Punishment is inhumane and counter-productive.

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## **WHAT'S NEXT?**

Congratulations! Your cat/kitten has now completed its vaccination series/well-kitten examinations. We hope that your pet is well on its way to a long and happy life as a member of your family. To keep your kitten/cat healthy for a lifetime will require on-going care. The following list should help you to understand what health care needs your pet will have in the years to come.

1. The vaccines your kitten has received will provide immunity against disease for about one year. Boosters are needed to keep its level of immunity high enough to protect it from illness. You will receive reminders next year when its vaccinations are due.

2. Your pet will also receive an annual physical examination with its yearly booster vaccinations. By the time we see your pet again next year it will have grown through the equivalent of its teenage years and will be a young adult. Because a pet's lifespan is compressed into a shorter amount of time than that of a human, many changes can occur in your pet's body in the course of a year. The annual physical exam is very important to detect physical problems before they become serious.

Once your pet reaches the age of seven years, annual blood and urine testing are also recommended to detect the onset of age-related illnesses such as hyperthyroidism, kidney and liver disease. **We now see many, many cats that live to be 18 or more years old. Regular veterinary care is the reason why!**

3. We will also be asking you to bring in a fecal sample from your cat each year, to test for intestinal parasites which may have been picked up over the course of the year. **Even if your cat doesn't go outside it is wise to have a sample checked.** Some intestinal parasites are picked up by eating rodents (such as a mouse caught in your basement). Others can be dormant in your cat's system

and show up later on, even though your pet hasn't been exposed to them recently. (Did you know potting soil is one of the biggest sources of worms in indoor pets?) A fresh sample will keep about 24 hours if refrigerated. We need about a teaspoon or so. Litter is not a problem if some is stuck on the sample.

4. Your kitten should be fed a kitten/growth formula food until it is one year of age. Then switch gradually to an adult food by mixing the old and new foods together for about two weeks. This helps avoid intestinal upset from changing food too quickly.

Your pet will have a longer, healthier life on a good quality diet, such as Science Diet. Dry food is better for the prevention of dental disease.

Too many treats and snacks lead to fussy eating habits, obesity and digestive upsets. Give your pet praise and affection for rewards, not food! They will love you just as much.

5. Spay or neuter your pet at five months of age. Altered pets live longer, are healthier in their old age, have fewer behavior problems and don't contribute to the pet overpopulation problem.

### Your Pet's Age In Human Years

6 months =	12 years
1 year =	15 years
2 years =	24 years
3 years =	28 years
4 years =	32 years
5 years =	36 years
6 years =	40 years
7 years =	44 years
8 years =	48 years
9 years =	52 years
10 years =	56 years
11 years =	60 years
12 years =	64 years
13 years =	68 years
14 years =	72 years
15 years =	76 years
16 years =	80 years
17 years =	84 years
18 years =	88 years
19 years =	92 years
20 years =	96 years
21 years =	100 years

### What's Next - Continued

6. Your kitten will soon have a full set of adult teeth. Good dental care is essential to your pet's well-being. Regular brushing will slow plaque and tartar build-up as your cat gets older. By the time it is two to five years old, however, it will probably have enough tartar build-up to begin needing annual dental cleanings here at the veterinary hospital. A cat that gets good dental care throughout its life will live an average of 20% longer than one that doesn't. It will also have fresher breath, less pain from periodontal disease and be healthier and more energetic. Start brushing the teeth at about 6 months of age when all the permanent teeth have come in.
  7. Please call us with any questions or problems with your pet. Most medical problems are less costly to your pet's well-being and to your pocketbook if they are dealt with early.
  8. The same is true of behavioral problems. The earlier you contact us regarding a problem behavior, the sooner you can solve it. Behaviors such as urine spraying, biting, scratching or clawing the furniture can almost always be changed but you have to ask for help.
  9. Enjoy! Your kitten's boundless joy, love and energy are a precious thing to have!
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