

# Your New Kitten

Congratulations on your new kitten! Kittens are entertaining and a lot of fun, but this is also the time when you can make the most difference as to what your kitten will be like as an adult. There are several things that you can do now that will make for a better life for your cat as an adult.

## Diet:

- **Amount.** Kittens require a lot of fat and calories to grow normally. Until your kittens reaches adult size, usually around 9-10 months of age, it is best to let them have as much food as they want to eat. If they start to become a little too rounded, you can start measuring their food out. Most foods will have amount recommendations listed on their labels or websites.
- **Dry vs. Moist.** Kittens imprint on what is food when they are young. We recommend feeding both dry and moist food to your kitten so that they will recognize both as food. The easiest way is to feed your kitten moist food once or twice a day, and leave dry food down for them to munch on in between.
- **Quality.** Just because a food is available, does not necessarily mean it is good quality. There are several foods out there that are hard for your kitten to digest, and that can lead to obesity and other health issues. Kittens need high quality high protein easily digestible food. If you have any questions regarding brand recommendations, please ask us.
- **Treats.** If you are going to give your kitten treats, then it is better to use them as training aids rather than just feeding them treats. If you want to reward your kitten for using the litter box or scratching on a scratching post, that is the time to give them treats.
- **Timing.** Never feed your kitten first thing when you get up in the morning unless you want an alarm clock 7 days a week for the rest of your life. Set times that are convenient for you every day of the week for feeding, and stick to that as much as possible. Kittens, just like adult cats, do better with routines.
- **Water.** Always make sure that there is plenty of fresh water available for your kitten to drink. Kittens and cats are not natural water drinkers, so anything that you can do to encourage your kitten to drink water will help over their lifespan, which is another reason that it is good to feed them canned food which is 70% water.

## Activity:

- **Playing.** Kittens are high energy bundles of joy. They should play hard and sleep hard. Because of this, they need lots of stimulation and a playmate. If you have another young cat or dog in the home, or if you have time to play with your new kitten for a few hours every day, then that may be sufficient. If not, then you may want to strongly consider getting another kitten.
  - If your kitten is not playing hard, then there may be a medical issue with your kitten that needs to be addressed. While kittens can be introverted and reserved, they still tend to play hard when they are young, so if your kittens sleeps most of the time, then we recommend bringing them into the clinic for us to examine.
- **Socializing.** If you do not have any other cats in the home, then you will have to teach your kitten manners. Kittens learn their adult manners from each other when they are young, and that includes how hard to play, and when to stop. You may want to consider getting together with friends or family that have kittens and having

play dates on a regular basis. Kitten Kindergarten, if it is available in your area, is another good way to socialize your kitten.

- The younger your kitten, the better it is to socialize them with other kittens. The older they get, the less tolerant they will be of other kittens, and the harder it will be to socialize them.

### Training:

- **Timing.** The most effective time to train a cat is when they are a kitten. Kittens are much more malleable and formative, and can be shaped into the type of cat you want as an adult. There are many different things that you can do with your kitten to train them.
- **Being picked up.** If you want your adult cat to be cooperative for being picked up and carried around, then do this a lot with your kitten. Periodically, pick your kitten up and carry them around the house while snuggling with them and cooing at them. This is also a time when you can give them treats to reward them for being good about being picked up.
  - If they struggle and try to get out of your arms, try to distract them with food or a toy while you are holding them. Always reward in a positive manner, never ever punish them for not doing what you want them to do.
- **Lap cats.** If you want your cat to be a lap cat, then when your kitten is worn out and ready to sleep, or when they are already sleeping, pick them up and put them in your lap. Don't force them to stay, but if you do this often enough, eventually they will start seeking out your lap when they are tired.
  - Keep in mind, once they are on your lap, you will need to stay there for awhile. It isn't fair to your kitten to get used to snuggling on your lap, only for you to get up 5 minutes later consistently. If you do that enough, they will stop seeking out your lap.
- **Scratching posts.** This one is a biggie. If you do not plan to declaw your cat, but prefer to keep your furniture intact, you need to start working with your kitten on using a scratching post as soon as you get them.
  - **Different types.** Have more than one type of scratching post available so that your cat has options to choose from. Some of the more common types include carpet, sisal, cardboard, rope, wood, etc., and in both horizontal and vertical forms.
  - **Catnip.** Put catnip on the scratching posts to make using them a rewarding experience for your kitten.
  - **Praise and rewards.** If you catch your kitten using one of the scratching posts, praise them and give them a treat.
  - **Deterrents.** To keep your kitten from using the furniture, put deterrents on it such as double sided sticky tape anywhere your kitten can reach. Most kittens do not like to stick to things, and will find something better such as the scratching post. Stinky sweet smells like vanilla and peppermint may also help to deter your kitten.
  - **Negative reinforcement.** You can also scare your kitten if you catch them scratching on furniture, but be careful to try and keep them from realizing that you have anything to do with it so they don't fear you. You also have to catch them in the act – even a few seconds later and they will have no idea why they are in trouble.
    - **Loud noises.** Most kittens will stop what they are doing if they hear a loud scary noise. One way to do this is to have a glass jar with change or nuts and bolts in it, and shake it if you catch your kitten scratching in undesirable places.
    - **Water.** Squirt guns and spray bottles can also be used to get your kitten we if they are scratching somewhere they shouldn't be. Again though, make sure you only do it while they are in the act, and one squirt is usually sufficient. The goal is just to make it an unpleasant experience so they won't repeat it. Don't soak your kitten, they may start to like it and think it is a game.

- **Plants.** Plants are not a good thing to have around kittens. The dirt is just too tempting as a play box, and the plant itself may taste good to your kitten. A LOT of plants are toxic to kittens, so if you cannot find a different home for your plant, it is best just to make it a hanging plant and pick up any leaves off of the floor immediately as even these can still be toxic to your kitten. You can find a list of plants that are toxic to cats at <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/plants>.
  - If you just absolutely cannot remove your plant from where your kitten has access to it, and you have made sure that it is not toxic to your kitten, one way to keep your kitten from digging all of the dirt out of the planter is to put large pebbles over the dirt that are too big for your kitten to dig out. You can still pour water over these to water your plant, but your kitten cannot access the dirt underneath. Sometimes there is no training that can be done on the kitten's part, instead it is on your part, such as being trained to keep certain items away from your kitten.
- **Litter boxes.** Most kittens will tend to instinctively use a litter box, especially if you have another cat or kitten in the home that is already using it. But if this is your first kitten and first litter box, then you may need to work with them just a little to get them to use it consistently.
  - **First rule is easy access.** Your kitten should not have to travel more than a few rooms to find a litter box, even if this means that you may need multiple litter boxes in your home. You can always gradually move them and combine them as your kitten ages. You should also have the litter boxes in areas that are low traffic and that do not have any scary noises next to them such as a washer/dryer or HVAC unit.
  - **Start in a small area.** If your kitten is having problems using the box, then keep them confined in one room with a litter box in one corner, food and water in another corner, and a bed in another corner. Don't clean the litter box immediately; let your kitten get used to the odor of stool and urine in the litter box to be able to associate it with eliminating. Don't go overboard on that though, if it is too full of stool and urine, your kitten won't want to use it.
  - If your kitten goes somewhere other than the litter box, place the stool in the litter box and clean the area thoroughly with a cleaning agent designed to eliminate urine smells.
  - If you catch your kitten using the litter box, once they are done, praise them and give them a treat. Don't interrupt them in the litter box, that could make them stop using it.
  - Once your kitten is using the litter box consistently, you can expand their living area.
- **Biting.** If your kitten is a biter, then they were not around siblings long enough to learn good manners. If your kitten is still young, socializing them with other kittens or getting another kitten may help to curb this behavior. If your kitten is getting older, then you may need to do the work yourself.
  - **Intensity.** If your kitten is biting so hard they are drawing blood, then this needs to be curbed much more quickly. If your kitten is just play biting and not breaking skin, this is still something you want to discourage, but you have more time to work with them.
  - **Don't encourage.** If your kitten is biting in play, then play is over as soon as they start biting. Don't yell at them or punish them, just walk away. They will eventually figure out that biting leads to lack of fun. Don't play with them with your hands in such a way that they think biting your fingers is part of play.
  - **Negative reinforcement.** Just like with scratching post training, a loud scary sound or a quick squirt of water can be enough to let your cat know that the biting was not a good thing. This may require another person to help so that the kitten does not associate the negative reinforcement with you.
  - **Positive reinforcement.** If your kitten is behaving well, and is not biting in a time when they might have previously bitten, reward them with a treat and praise.

## Grooming:

- **Teeth brushing.** Even though your kitten still has their baby teeth, this is the best time to get them used to having their teeth brushed if this is something you can do consistently when they are an adult.

- Cats in the wild will chew through skin and bone, which helps to keep their teeth clean. Domestic cats do not have this benefit, and dry food actually does very little to clean along the gum line which is where dental disease starts.
- If you can brush your kitten's teeth on a daily basis, and continue this on through adulthood, you will go a LONG ways towards keeping your cat's teeth healthy and minimizing dental disease. It doesn't mean your cat will never need a cleaning, but it will drastically minimize what does need to be done.
- To start brushing your kitten's teeth, get a very soft bristled brush, either one designed for kittens or an infant tooth brush. Use cat or dog tooth paste, NOT human toothpaste, and if you can find a flavor your kitten likes, so much better.
- Brush gently just like you might brush an infant's teeth. There is no need to rinse, cat and dog toothpaste is designed to be swallowed.
- Praise your kitten afterwards, and give them a treat. This will help to make it a positive experience. For your kitten to get used to this, you really have to do it on a daily basis. Plus, as an adult since plaque starts to build up within 12 hours of eating, it should be done daily anyway.
- **Nail trimming.** If you do not plan to declaw your kitten, but you want to keep their nails short, now is the time to get your kitten used to this. Now, you do not need to trim your kitten's nails – they will wear them down by scratching with their front nails, and they will chew on their back nails to keep them from getting too long. But, if you want them as short and blunt as possible, then if you start doing this while they are a kitten, they will tolerate it much better as an adult.
  - Play with your kitten's paws on a daily basis. Practice extending their nails on each foot and praise them and reward them for letting you do so.
  - When you do start trimming their nails, be very careful not to cut the quick, which is the blood vessel in each nail that looks like a little pink triangle. If you do this, it will hurt, and your kitten may not be so cooperative next time. Reward your kitten after each foot.
    - Have some styptic powder on hand before you start trimming to stop the bleeding if you do accidentally trim the nail too short and cut into the quick.
- **Brushing.** If your kitten is a longer haired kitten, or if you just want to be able to comb them regularly to minimize loose fur in the home, now is the time to start.
  - Using a brush or flexible comb, brush or comb your kitten on a regular basis. Praise them or reward them every time you do this to make it a positive experience.

## Health:

- **Spaying or neutering.** If your kitten has not already been spayed or neutered, you will want to get this done before their hormones kick in around 6-8 months of age.
  - Female cats that are not spayed before their first heat cycle are 7 times more likely to develop mammary cancer in their senior years, which is aggressive and malignant. 30% of female cats in heat will also urine spray in the home. If your cat reaches 5+ years without being spayed, they are also more prone to pyometra which is a life threatening infection of the uterus, and ovarian and uterine cancer, all of which can be 100% prevented with spaying.
  - Male cats are more prone to fighting with other cats once their hormones kick in. 100% of male cats will urine spray in the home if there are other cats or pets present to mark their territory. It is much easier to prevent this than try and fix it after the smell of urine has already permeated into the carpet. Unneutered male cats are also more prone to prostate issues and prostate and testicular cancer as adults, all of which can be prevented with neutering.
- **Vaccinations.** You don't ever plan on your kitten leaving the home, so why do you need to have them vaccinated? Some of the things that your kitten will be vaccinated for are so contagious that even if they never

go outside, you or guests can bring them into the home on clothing. What if your kitten gets outside through an open door? It does happen, even with the most conscientious of owners. If you ever need to board your kitten, they will be required to have vaccinations, and if your kitten ever gets sick they will need to come to the clinic where they may be exposed to multiple illnesses.

- **RCP.** This stands for Rhinotracheitis also known as herpes virus, Calici virus, and Panleukopenia also known as distemper. While herpes virus and calici virus are not fatal, they will make your kitten absolutely miserable, and in kittens herpes virus can result in the loss of one or both eyes if not vaccinated. Distemper is a fatal virus in kittens. This vaccination is very safe, and will help immensely in keeping your kitten healthy.
- **Rabies.** This is required by law since this is zoonotic and is fatal to people as well as animals. Even though your kitten may not go outside, wildlife can and does get inside your home. Every year Animal Control gets thousands of calls just in the city of Lincoln for wildlife that has gotten into a home.
- **Leukemia.** While this does require physical contact to acquire, kittens are highly susceptible to this fatal disease, and it only takes one accident of your kitten slipping out the door for them to potentially become exposed to this virus.
- **FelV and FIV testing.** If you obtained your kitten from somewhere other than an animal shelter or pet store, and you have other cats in the home, then you may want to have your kitten tested to see if they have one of these diseases, both of which can be passed onto them from their mother. This is contagious to other cats in your home. If you do not have any other cats, and do not plan on getting any, then it is up to you if you want to know if your cat has one of these diseases to know if it will affect their lifespan.
- **De-worming.** If your kitten has loose stools, diarrhea, vomiting, or is passing gas, then this could be an indication of intestinal parasites. There are other causes for this as well, including stress and diet changes, but if the symptoms do not resolve after a week or two, then intestinal parasites are much more likely.
  - We can give your kitten a de-wormer for the most common intestinal parasites when they come in for their vaccinations, but this by far does not get every possible intestinal parasite.
  - You can also bring a fresh (within 12 hours) fecal sample in with your kitten for us to look for evidence of other parasites. Unfortunately, while this will catch a few more, there are still some parasites that are very difficult to find in a stool sample.
  - If your kitten's symptoms are not resolving, then please talk to us as we may need to do some additional testing or treatments.
- **Declawing.** A very controversial subject. For more information on how this is done, please check out our web page on declawing at [http://www.allfelinehospital.com/site/view/191340\\_Declaws.pml](http://www.allfelinehospital.com/site/view/191340_Declaws.pml). If you plan to have your kitten declawed, it is much better to do it when they are young as they will rebound much faster. If you wait until your kitten is a full grown adult, it will be a much more stressful experience for them.

Kittens can be a lot of fun, but please keep in mind that the habits and mannerisms that you form with them now will likely remain for the rest of their lives. If you have any questions regarding any of the above information, please do not hesitate to contact us at All Feline Hospital at 402-467-2711 or [info@allfelinehospital.com](mailto:info@allfelinehospital.com).