



Maidstone Veterinary Clinic

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KITTEN CARE

Congratulations on your new kitten. Now that you have him home you may have a few questions. At your first vet visit you will be able to discuss vaccinations, worming, flea treatment, diet etc. with your vet. Your kitten will also receive a full health check. Kittens first vaccination is usually given at 8-9 weeks of age. You can take your kitten to see the vet sooner if you wish but you will have to return at a later date to start vaccinations. Two vaccinations are usually given 3-4 weeks apart. It is best to keep your kitten indoors until after he is fully vaccinated.

Nutrition.

The diet is very important as young kittens grow very rapidly. A kitten diet is recommended to be fed for the first 6-12 months. This provides the extra protein and calcium needed for growth. We recommend Proplan, Hills and Iams kitten food. Dry food is easier and more convenient to feed as it can be left in the bowl without fear of it spoiling. It is also more nutrient dense and they need to eat less of it than other brands to get equally as much energy to grow and play. Dry food can usually be fed ad-lib. Most cats will only eat to their requirements. Fresh water should be available when feeding dry foods.

Milk can be given but care is needed as some cats suffer from lactose intolerance and may develop vomiting or diarrhoea if fed milk. Special lactose reduced milk is available. Milk should only be fed as a treat (if at all) and not as a substitute for water..

If your cat seems to be getting obese or you have other pets who may steal the food you may need to feed at set times. Kittens should be fed 3-4 times daily reducing this down to twice daily by 6 months of age.

Dry food also helps to reduce tartar build up but will not prevent it entirely. The only way to prevent tartar is regular teeth cleaning i.e. brushing. This can be attempted if you are keen and special brushes and pastes are available (never use human toothpaste).

Toileting

Toilet training is also a big issue for new kittens. Most cats are very meticulous and therefore usually very easy to toilet train. One of the first things you should do once getting your kitten home is to show him the litter tray by placing him in it. You can also stimulate him to dig by gently holding his front paws and moving them. Place the kitten in the litter tray after meals and after he wakes up. Usually most kittens will get the hang of this within a few days. It is important not to punish the kitten for toileting outside the litter tray. If you catch him in the act you can say NO loudly and then place him in the litter tray and praise him. Most toileting problems occur because owners give the kitten unsupervised access to large areas of the house. A young kitten cannot be expected to remember which room his litter tray is in. Initially he may also consider any area outside his sleeping area to be "outside" his den and therefore a suitable toileting area. Start with the kitten being kept in a small area with easily cleanable flooring e.g. lino (bathroom, laundry etc.). If you have the kitten in another room playing, have a litter tray in the room with him and show him where it is. Once the kitten is older and spending more time outside he also will start to toilet outside and the litter tray may be removed. If you are having trouble convincing your cat to stop using the litter tray try mixing dirt with the kitty litter and even putting some faeces in the garden. Then start to move the litter tray slowly closer to the outside door and then eventually place it outside.

Socialisation & Behaviour.

Socialisation in cats has received much less public attention than in dogs. Kittens learn to socialise at a much younger age than puppies. Puppies learn socialisation skills between 6 and 16 weeks. With kittens it is between 2 and 8 weeks of age. This means that most kittens are nearing the end of this period by the time they are rehomed as this usually occurs between 6 and 8 weeks of age. When selecting your new kitten you should be looking for a confident, friendly and outgoing kitten. A timid kitten is likely to remain timid if it is already over the age of 8 weeks. Some kittens are born timid and this seems to be genetic - these kittens will remain antisocial regardless of early socialisation. So if you are wanting a friendly outgoing adult cat it is important to select a kitten with these traits.

If you have children and dogs or other pets at home you will need to introduce your kitten to these. This should be done in a well controlled and supervised situation. Dogs should be kept on a leash initially to ensure you can quickly get them under control. Kittens that are not used to dogs may try to scratch and hiss at the dog and can do damage - so be careful. Young children should be supervised at all times when around the kitten. Older children can be taught how to pick up the kitten correctly and to play with it gently.

Toys are important too. Kittens tend to have short but very boisterous periods of play. Toys need not be expensive - empty cotton reels and toilet rolls are lots of fun too. Kittens are attracted by things that move and make noise. Make sure that all toys are kitten proof - i.e. can't be swallowed or become entangled. Scratching posts are a good investment - they provide exercise for your cat and also help prevent damage to your carpet and furniture. A large post will be required if you want the cat to use it as an adult as it will need to be tall enough to allow the cat to stretch itself fully. Place the post next to your kittens bed and encourage it to use it when it first wakes and stretches.

Scratching and biting are normal kitten behaviours as this is how they interact with other kittens and cats. However they need to learn not to do this to you as it can be very painful. Say NO loudly and stop playing with the kitten. Don't be tempted to pull away as this will cause them to bite or scratch harder - instead push your hand towards the kitten and he should release his grip.

Kneading is part of the suckling reflex and was used by the kitten to help stimulate milk let-down. When feeling relaxed and contented some cats will still show this behaviour. Often the claws are extended and this can be quite painful if it is your knee they are kneading. You can use your spray bottle to deter this behaviour also but another alternative is to purchase a small sheepskin for your cat to knead instead.

Grooming

Grooming can be a pleasurable experience for your cat but it may also be essential to avoid matting of the coat and furballs especially in long haired cats. Start getting your cat used to being groomed as a kitten as they will more readily accept it at this age. Cats will need extra grooming around spring time as they moult their thick winter coat - this is also the time for furballs (these are balls of ingested fur that occur in the gut from fur swallowed when the cat grooms itself). If your cat has a problem with furballs then discuss with the receptionists or vet and they will advise you of the appropriate remedy for you.

Training

Do not chase after the kitten if it has been naughty as this can become a game that then encourages bad behaviour. If saying NO isn't enough for your kitten a water bottle or water pistol can be sprayed at the kitten. This is a very effective means of punishing a kitten. It does not hurt the kitten nor the house and furniture. Best of all the kitten does not associate the punishment with the owner.

Well have fun with your new arrival and if you need more advice on any aspect don't hesitate to contact the clinic on 528 5927.

Your Animal Health Professional