

Welcoming home your new kitten

Congratulations on welcoming your new family member to your home. This is an exciting time and we want to help make your kitten's transition into its new home as smooth as possible. In order to lay the best foundation for a happy, healthy cat, it is important to start off properly while it is still a kitten. We hope the information below will be helpful. If you have any questions or concerns, please call us.

Exams:

Your kitten will receive a thorough physical exam at each of their appointments. This will ensure that your kitten is healthy enough to receive vaccinations, as well as evaluate its development, and identify any genetic issues that may cause problems later in life. As an adult, your cat should have a physical exam annually so that we can identify and address health issues early. This includes cats who live strictly indoors. It is the best way to promote a long, healthy, happy life for your cat.

FeLV/FIV Testing:

Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus are highly transmissible and incurable diseases in cats. They attack your kitten's immune system and leave them vulnerable to other diseases, significantly shortening their lifespan. Your kitten can be infected with these viruses if either or both parents were infected when the kitten was conceived, or while the kitten was nursing from an infected mother. Adult cats can contract the disease from exchanges of bodily fluid (bites, licking, mating) with an infected cat. Your new kitten should be tested for these diseases by 6 months of age, and before being introduced to any resident cats in your household.

Vaccinations:

Vaccines are a critical part of your kitten's health. When a kitten is born, its only immunity to illness comes from the mother's milk. This is known as passive immunity and it diminishes with time. By the time your kitten is 8 weeks old, this passive immunity is almost gone and their own immune system is still developing. Therefore, most vaccines are given as a series in order to stimulate stronger immunity.

1. Distemper Combination: This is considered a "core" vaccine for kittens. It should be given to your kitten in a series of 3 shots, each given 3-4 weeks apart. The third vaccination will be good for 1 year. After that, the vaccine is boosted every 3 years. The distemper combination protects against the following:
 - a. Feline Rhinotracheitis: This is an upper respiratory virus that also causes conjunctivitis.
 - b. Calici Virus: This is another type of upper respiratory virus.
 - c. Panleukopenia: This is a virus which destroys the white blood cells, leaving the kitten vulnerable to other infections.
 - d. Chlamydia: This is an upper respiratory bacterial infection.
2. Rabies: This is **THE** "core" vaccine. It is given at 16 weeks of age or older. It will need to be boosted in one year. After that, it is boosted every 3 years. Rabies is 100% fatal and can be passed to and from all mammals, including humans. It is spread by bite wounds from infected animals. In Minnesota, the main wildlife reservoirs for rabies are bats, skunks, and foxes. Rabies infects the nervous system,

and once infected, there is no treatment or cure. All cats should have an up-to-date rabies vaccine, even if they are “indoor only” cats.

3. Feline Leukemia: (FeLv) This is considered an optional vaccine for cats who are at risk, mainly cats who spend time outdoors unsupervised. As described above, this is a very contagious disease. There is no cure for feline leukemia, but vaccination can help to prevent infection.

These vaccines are very safe. Side effects are usually minimal, and include tiredness, decreased appetite, and minor pain at the injection site. Severe side effects are rare, and include facial swelling, difficulty breathing, hives, swelling at the injection site, or vomiting. If your cat develops any of these symptoms within the first few hours after receiving a vaccine, please call us right away.

Parasites:

- Intestinal Parasites: Kittens can get intestinal parasites in several ways: through the placenta, through the mother’s milk, or from the soil. These intestinal parasites include roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms. Having intestinal parasites can cause diarrhea, weight loss, lethargy, and anemia. And some of these parasites can be passed to humans, causing GI upset and possible blindness. Kittens should be given de-wormer every 2 weeks, starting at 4 weeks of age and continuing until they are 8-10 weeks of age. At that point, they are old enough to begin monthly topical parasite prevention. This should be applied every month of the year on all cats who go outside the home, or live outside.
- Fleas: Fleas are EVERYWHERE outdoors. They cause itching, allergic reactions, and anemia. They can also infect your cat with tapeworms, or transmit plague. The flea life cycle is very hard to break, because one of the four stages, the pupae, can survive for up to a year, even in freezing conditions, until conditions are right for the larva to hatch. Preventing fleas on your cat, and therefore in your house, is simple. Using a once-a-month flea & tick preventative all year round will keep your cat, and your house, free of fleas. If your cat is strictly an indoor cat, the risk of fleas is much lower. However, if you also have a dog, then be sure that it is on flea preventative, so it will not bring fleas into the house and infect your cat and the house.
- Ticks: Outdoor cats are as susceptible to ticks as dogs are. If your cat is going to be outside at all, it is important to be sure that they are protected. Ticks can transmit a number of diseases if they are allowed to attach to your cat.
- Ear Mites: As the name suggests, these are mites that live in cat’s ears. Ear mites are very contagious to other cats and dogs, but not to humans. Ear mites are passed by direct contact with an infected animal. Ear mites can cause a lot of irritation and itchiness, and can also lead to ear infections. If left untreated it can cause other issues such as deafness or bleeding from the ears.
- Heartworms: Heartworms are usually considered a canine problem, but cats are also at risk for infection. Heartworm infection comes from being bitten by an infected mosquito. Therefore, if your cat spends time outside, it is important to protect them from this infection.

This is not a complete list of all potential parasites; it deals with the most common ones that your kitten will potentially be exposed to. If you have any questions about these or other parasites, please ask us.

Parasite prevention and control:

There are countless products on the market for the control and prevention of parasites. The best way to determine what is best for your kitten is to consider its future lifestyle. The main considerations are whether your cat will go outside, and whether you have dogs that could bring parasites into the house. These are the products that we carry:

Revolution Plus: This is a topical product that kills fleas and ticks, prevents heartworm infection, kills intestinal worms like roundworms and hookworms, and kills ear mites. It is applied to the skin every 30 days.

Nexgard Combo: This is a topical product that treats for fleas, ticks, roundworms, hookworms, and tapeworms. It also prevents heartworm infection. It is applied to the skin every 30 days.

Spay/Neuter:

We recommend spaying (for females) or neutering (for males) your cat at between 5-6 months of age. Surgery recovery time is quicker at this age and males will be less likely to spray. Waiting longer than this will open the door to unwanted litters and male aggression. Cats that have been spayed/neutered also have healthier lives with little to no risk of testicular or mammary cancer.

Grooming

Start now to play with your kitten's feet and pinch the toes slightly. Trim one nail a day. Gently clean ears or wipe with a cotton ball, even when clean, to help ear maintenance later in life. If the coat will need brushing use a soft comb and brush a little every day, especially around the face.

Feeding

We recommend feeding your kitten 2-3 times a day rather than leaving food out at all times. As the kitten gets older, it will only need feeding in the morning and evening. Leaving food out at all times can lead to an overweight cat. This, in turn, can lead to a diabetic cat.

Litter Boxes

The best way to avoid litter box issues is to follow this rule of thumb: Always have 1 more litter box than you have cats. This will allow an alternative if you have not yet had a chance to clean the other boxes, or one cat is not allowing another cat to use a particular box.

Reasons Why a Cat May Urinate or Defecate Outside of the Litter Box

Medical problems (bladder infection, intestinal upsets, constipation)

The litter box is not cleaned often enough

The type of litter (texture or odor) is disagreeable

The litter box is located in an area with too much traffic

The cat was teased or frightened in or near the box

The litter box is too close to the food bowl

Anxiety (long absences by owner, punishment, new pets, new baby, new furniture, or carpet)

Could This be a Medical Problem? A variety of medical problem can lead to house soiling. None of your attempts to guide your cat back to the litter box will work if he/she has a medical problem that's undiagnosed and uncorrected. Signs might include:

- An increase infrequency of urination
- Large volumes of urine
- Straining or discomfort when urinating
- Blood in urine
- Diarrhea or constipation

If your cat is experiencing these signs, it is important to visit your veterinarian. The doctor may recommend test for her urine, feces, or blood

If the Problem Is Litter Box Related:

- Take immediate control of the problem and clean the litter box more often.
- Offer different types of litter to find one your cat prefers. It is better to use another box entirely rather than go through a series of litter changes in one box. Occasionally, some cats prefer actual sand in the box mixed with a few handfuls of soil. If this is the case, gradually replace the sand mix with a litter after several weeks.
- Cats, like people, prefer to do their business privately. Find a quieter area for the boxes.
- In multi-cat households, you should provide one litter box per cat plus one. (4 cats = 5 boxes)
- Place one litter box per floor.
- Try different types of boxes (open vs Closed tops)

If The Problem Has Been Going on For Some Time:

It may be necessary to re-train your cat to use the litter box. There are several things you can do:

- Confine the cat to a small area, such as a bathroom, along with a litter box. Most cats prefer a box over the floor. It is then a matter of confining them long enough for a consistent habit to be established. Only allow your cat out of the confined area when you can supervise them at all times. Gradually allow more freedom once litter box has been used in the confined area for one to four consecutive weeks. During this confinement period, remember to play frequently and interact socially with your cat. Let them out often, but only under close supervision.
- Removing the odor from the affected area is important. Use a good commercial product that is specifically made for use on feline stool and urine odors. Most products need to make direct contact with the urine or stool. Use as directed. To be effective on carpeting or other porous surfaces, you may need to clean more rather than less. If nothing else is available, a 50/50 mixture of white vinegar and warm water will do a good job.
- If your cat is using a specific spot for inappropriate elimination, try placing a litterbox on that spot. Then gradually move the box (a few inches every day) toward the preferred location. You can also safeguard previously soiled areas by placing motion detector alarms, food bowls, bedding or toys on them. Plastic, foil, double stick carpet tape can also be used.
- If your cat has developed a preference for the bathtub or sink, an inch of water in these locations will curb soiling there.
- Move furniture or close doors to deny your cat access to previously soiled areas.

Scratching on objects:

It is completely natural for cats to scratch at things. This procedure not only cleans and sharpens their claws; it is also an exercise that helps stretch the spine. Though this can be destructive to your furniture, there are ways to train your cat to scratch appropriate objects.

- Have several types of scratching devices like cat poles covered in carpet, and cardboard trays.
- Make the appropriate scratching devices more appealing by adding catnip to them
- If the cat is scratching inappropriate things, like the sofa, make this unattractive to them by covering the area with double-sided tape or chicken wire. Also be sure an appropriate scratching device is nearby so they can transfer the activity once they find the inappropriate object is now unpleasant.
- Use a spray bottle to discourage the cat when it attempts to scratch inappropriate objects. Most spray bottles can be adjusted to produce a long thin jet of water. The advantage of this is that the cat will not realize the water is coming from you, and just associate it with scratching that object.
- We **do not** recommend declawing your cat. This is an amputation of the first joint of each toe and can cause painful problems down the line.

Other things to know:

- Cats like to chase and play with strings. However, swallowing string can become a serious health issue. Always keep track of your cat's toys so you know if any are frayed or missing.
- If you are going to have your cat wear a collar, be very sure it is a break-away collar. Cats are very active and jump from place to place. If the collar gets caught on something, you will want it to break rather than strangle your cat.
- Having flowers and plants in the house is nice, but can be deadly to your cat. Cats love to chew on plants and certain varieties, especially anything in the lily family, is extremely toxic to cats.