

## Bringing a new kitten home

A new kitten entering your life can be exciting. Start life with your new friend off on the right foot with proper care at home, proper veterinary care, nutrition, and socialization.

In the event that you already have other cats as companions in your home, an important consideration to take before your kitten has contact with them, would be to contact your veterinarian and find out whether it would be wise to have your kitten tested for any infectious diseases. Sometimes it may be appropriate for your veterinarian to test for Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV), Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). In addition your kitten should be given a physical examination, tested and treated for any other parasites (internal or external), and make plans to have the kitten vaccinated 10-14 days after your kitten has settled into your home. The purpose of this is to make sure that you are set up for maximum enjoyment of your lives together. On a larger scale, it will also aid in preventing the spread of a disease or parasites to other pets. If you have other pets, talk to your veterinarian about how to introduce your kitten to them.

Newborn kittens receive some immunity (protection against disease) from their mothers at birth through nursing. Unfortunately this immunity slowly wears off which requires that kittens be vaccinated against various diseases on a schedule, beginning at eight to nine weeks of age. The earlier the better, but most literature indicates that eight weeks is the best time to start with your kitten's vaccines. Ask your veterinarian for details of what their protocol is and what they recommend.

Intestinal parasites (worms) are common in newborn kittens. Faecal examinations (most people do not do this, but it is highly recommended where possible) and treatments (dewormings) are usually repeated until two consecutive faecal examinations have negative results. External parasites (fleas, ticks and mites) are treated with products approved for use on kittens.

The kittens develop quickly and in the case of non-breeding animals it is strongly recommended that they are spayed or neutered by six months of age. This helps to control pet overpopulation and reduces the chance of behavioural problems, as well as some medical conditions. Cats can be very difficult to keep inside a home, so they will tend to go out and explore their surroundings. It would be wise to have your kitten microchipped as well when he or she gets neutered or spayed (the anaesthetic makes sure that they do not feel the large gauge needle used for microchipping).

## **Bringing your kitten home**

Kittens can leave their mother and littermates after they have been weaned, usually at eight to ten weeks of age. The best time to bring a kitten home is when you have at least one or two days to focus on helping him adjust to new surroundings.

To transport your new kitten home safely, you'll need a pet carrier. Leaving mom is a big deal for your kitten; a carrier will help her feel more secure. Please don't use another pet's carrier because its smell could be stressful to your kitten. Place a towel in the carrier for warmth and to absorb urine in case of an accident, and be sure to carry an extra towel.

## ***Kitten supplies***

- High quality kitten food – there are many to choose from.
- Food and water bowls - ceramic and metal are preferred because some pets are sensitive to plastic.
- Cat toys that don't have small parts or string that can come off and be swallowed
- Cat brush; brush your kitten gently twice weekly
- Cat toothpaste and toothbrush - best to start toothbrushing during kittenhood; aim for at least three times per week.
- Breakaway collar and identification tag, and ideally, a microchip placed by your veterinarian as well.
- Scratching post and/or pad - when your kitten uses it, reward him with praise and/or a feline treat.
- Nail trimmers.
- Litterbox placed in a fairly private and easily accessible spot in the house.
- Litter; low-dust, unscented scoopable litter is best.
- Cat carrier.
- Cat bed.

Before you bring your kitten home, prepare a small room or space that will be his/her own for the first few days or weeks. Having a smaller area to explore at first will help your kitten get comfortable with her new home. Be sure to secure all electrical and blind cords that can cause harm to your new kitten. Have all the supplies needed available and ready, such as water and food bowls, kitten food, a litterbox, a scratching post, safe toys, a bed, a breakaway collar and nail trimmers.

Cats don't like to eat next to the litterbox, so place the litterbox on one side of the room and the food and water dishes on the other. Make sure that your kitten can get in and out of the litterbox without help; it might be necessary to provide a litterbox with low sides. To help your kitten feel secure, make sure that the room has hiding places. If there isn't furniture to hide beneath, place cardboard boxes on their sides or cut doorways into them. Providing a warm and comfortable bed is essential. You can purchase a pet bed or line a box with something soft; using a sweatshirt that you've worn will help your kitten get used to your scent.

When you bring your kitten home, put the carrier in the room you've prepared. Open the carrier door, but let your kitten come out when he/she is ready. After your kitten comes out, leave the carrier in the corner as another hiding place. Each day, scoop out the litterbox and provide fresh food and water.

Your kitten may hide at first, but he/she will explore when no one is watching, becoming more comfortable with its new home. Your kitten will likely want plenty of attention from you.

After your kitten has been checked by a veterinarian, becomes comfortable in his room and develops a regular routine of eating, drinking and using the litterbox, you can let him venture out into the rest of your house in small area increments at a time. At this point, you need to make sure that your kitten stays safe and has enough privacy to eat, sleep and use the litterbox. Keep your kitten's bed, litterbox and food/water dishes in the same place so that he knows where to find them.

## **Nutrition**

Proper nutrition is especially important in young animals and for kittens because they need two to three times as many calories and nutrients as adult cats. A mother cat's milk provides everything a kitten needs during the first four weeks of life. Cow's milk (the kind most likely in your refrigerator) should never be given to kittens or cats because it can give them diarrhoea. Most kittens are completely weaned between eight and ten weeks of age. At six to seven weeks of age, kittens should be able to chew dry food. Talk with your veterinarian to determine the right type of food to feed your kitten. When your kitten is between three and six months old, feed her three times per day, and once she turns six months old, you can start feeding her twice daily.

## **Socialization**

Cats learn how to socialize with each other from their mother and littermates; therefore, if possible, kittens should remain with their mother and/or littermates until they are about eight to ten weeks old. Kittens that have human contact before they are ten to 12 weeks old are more likely to interact well with people throughout their lives. Handling and playing with your kitten can help you bond with him/her. Feral (wild) cats haven't been socialized with people as kittens and may fear and avoid people throughout their lives. Your kitten should be gradually introduced to other pets with care and supervision. Ask your veterinarian for advice on the best way to do this.

Enjoy your new kitten, and be sure to schedule a yearly check-up with your veterinarian.