



AGAVE VETERINARY CARE  
AND EXOTIC ANIMAL HOSPITAL

## Your Complete Kitten Care Guide

Congratulations on your new kitten! Getting a kitten is both exciting and stressful but we're going to help ease the transition for both you and your new furry friend. We'll help you know what to expect for the next few months.

### What should you expect from your first vet visits?

Kittens should receive vaccines as early as 6 weeks of age and should come in every three weeks for boosters until they are 15 weeks of age or older. Kittens at higher risk of disease (like cats in animal shelters) may need earlier, more frequent, and more numerous vaccines. When kittens are first born, they receive antibodies from their mother. This protects them from diseases during their first few weeks of life, but it doesn't last forever. Vaccines are given during this time to support the immune system and teach it how to fight off diseases.

- Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (Given as **FVRCP**)
  - Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis is an upper respiratory virus (feline herpesvirus-1) that causes the majority of upper respiratory infections in cats and is spread through direct contact and indirect contact of saliva or nasal secretions. Affected cats have eye discharge, fevers, inappetence and eventually long term bone damage in the nose and mouth.
- Feline calicivirus (Given as **FVRCP**)
  - Feline calicivirus is another upper respiratory virus that is spread through direct and indirect contact of saliva or nasal secretions. Affected cats may have eye discharge, lethargy, and ulcerations around the mouth; severe infections can lead to pneumonia, joint inflammation, multi-organ failure and potentially death.
- Feline Panleukopenia (Given as **FVRCP**)
  - Feline Panleukopenia, also known as feline distemper, is a gastrointestinal and bone disease spread by direct and indirect secretions. Affected cats have lethargy, diarrhea, vomiting and eventually weight loss, fever, collapse and eventual death.
- Rabies
  - Rabies is a zoonotic neurological disease that is spread through salivary transmission. Affected cats will showcase sudden behavioral changes such as being overly affectionate or being disinterested in usual activities. As the disease progresses it causes increased aggression, excessive saliva, seizures and death. Rabies is 100% fatal once symptoms arise. Rabies vaccination is required by law in the state of Texas.
- Feline Leukemia (FeLV)

- Feline Leukemia is a disease that suppresses the immune system and is spread through direct contact, usually from stray cats. Affected cats develop increased thirst, lethargy, jaundice, potential breath difficulties and potential blood disorders.

In addition to the vaccines, kittens are also screened for intestinal parasites, checked for fleas and ticks, examined for evidence of contagious or hereditary disease, given heartworm and flea prevention based on their growing size, and acclimated to the veterinary office and team.

### What's the point of heartworm and flea prevention?

What are heartworms? Heartworms are parasitic worms that survive in the heart of your pet. Heartworms are not directly contagious, an infected cat cannot give another cat heartworms through saliva or blood. Instead these worms are spread by mosquitoes, meaning if there are any infected animals within a couple of miles then it can infect your healthy kitten without you knowing about it.

Since mosquitos are present in Texas year-round both in our yards and homes, it is critical to keep all cats on preventative. Kittens can start taking heartworm preventative as early as eight weeks and should stay on this medication lifelong.

While there are heartworm tests for cats, they are not reliable and often give faulty results. Most cats' immune systems tend to fight off heartworms fairly well. Unfortunately, cats also tend to hide symptoms and are unable to handle a very large worm burden. This means when a cat ends up heartworms, most cases go unnoticed until it's a significant issue.

Treatment for cats with heartworms is rare and often unsuccessful. Due to how aggressive treatment is for heartworms, most treatments are actually toxic for cats.

Heartworms aren't the only parasite you'll have to worry about. Fleas and ticks are another common issue with pet owners. These are blood sucking parasites that can lead to anemia and other issues in pets if left untreated.

Cats tend to be very good at finding and killing fleas before you can spot them; however you may still see small dark speckles though your pet's fur. These dark flakes are called flea dirt and are actually feces of digested blood left by the fleas. Fleas tend to make pets itch excessively and some cats may also experience flea bite dermatitis which is an allergic reaction to the flea's saliva and leads to horrible itching and secondary skin infections. Kittens prone to this issue only need to be bit by one flea in order to have a reaction so staying on top of flea prevention is vital.

Ticks are parasites that attach to the skin of a pet and slowly swell with blood. They may look like warts and have to be extracted carefully so their head isn't left in the pet's skin. Ticks can transmit a number of tick borne diseases that can make your kitten ill. These parasites are common in wooded areas so if your pet goes outside then you are likely to come across them.

Thankfully, there are a number of heartworm and flea preventions that come together in a topical that goes on the skin. When giving your pet parasite preventives, make sure you know what it treats for and what it's missing. Some prevention only cover for heartworm and fleas while others cover for all three parasites.

### What should you feed your kitten?

Young cats should be kept on kitten food until they are one year of age. These diets provide a higher level of proteins, fats, calories, calcium, vitamins and other components than a normal adult cat food wouldn't. All these nutrients provide kittens with the fuel they need to grow so quickly and keep up their nonstop energy! Recommended diets are Purina Pro Plan, Royal Canin and Hills Science Diet.

Another thing kittens need is more frequent feeding times. Kittens need to eat 3-4 times daily until they are at least twelve weeks of age, then at least twice daily long term. We recommend more frequent feedings because they are more at risk for hypoglycemia or low blood glucose when they are little. This can result in lethargy, trembling, vomiting, seizures, fainting and potentially death.

Cats are also known for getting kidney disease later in life. Due to this, feeding wet food or adding water to your kitten's food isn't a bad idea if your kitten will let you.

The FDA released a report in 2019 that dogs kept on a grain-free diet were being diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy. This is a disease where the ventricles of the heart become enlarged and the heart cannot contract as well. The research for cats has been unfortunately limited. While there are some cases of grain-free diets connecting the two, the FDA is hesitant to report it as a direct cause vs a coincidence. Due to the possibility of this link, we are recommending that cat owners avoid grain free diets.

### Why and When should you spay/neuter your kitten?

Spaying and neutering your pet can be a scary thought for a lot of people. In order to perform the procedure, your kitten will have to be put under anesthesia. The veterinarian will perform an exam and run blood work prior to the surgery. These are all done to confirm that your pet is healthy enough to go under anesthesia. From there, your pet will be given medication to help them fall asleep and provide pain control. Once the procedure is finished, we will wake them up and monitor them for a few hours to confirm that they have recovered well before sending them home.

Female cats should be spayed at six months. Spaying has many benefits for your kitten. It significantly reduces the chance of uterine cancer and eliminates the possibility of pregnancy

and the complications that can come from being pregnant. We also try to spay before they reach sexual maturity, which normally occurs at six months of age.

Male cats should be neutered by six months of age. Neutering your cats reduces unwanted spaying or roaming behaviors, lowering risk of testicular cancer in older cats and potentially impregnating another cat. Some males gain spaying and roaming behaviors when intact and, if not done early enough, may maintain those behaviors past the procedure. Due to this, we recommend neutering within the time frame rather than delaying it.

### What potential toxins do you need to look out for?

Cats are obligate carnivores and, as a result, have a more restricted diet than dogs or humans. There are many toxics that your newly adopted kitten could get into:

- Onions, garlic, leeks and chives
- Caffeine
- Grapes, and raisins
- Chocolate
- Essential oils
- Acetaminophen aka Tylenol
- Mouse and rat poison
  - This can be an issue if your cat eats a mouse who ate rat poison prior to this!
- Several Plants
  - Especially lilies, oleanders, and sago palms

If you realize that your kitten did eat one of these toxins, don't panic. Immediately call your vet, do your best to give them a time, an amount and what exactly your kitten ate. From there, you'll be directed to bring your pet in for treatment and supportive medications.

### Socializing your new kitten

Socializing kittens is often a neglected pastime. Since cats aren't as social as dogs and are often more independent, most owners don't consider that kittens need to be introduced to new environments and people as well. Kittens that are not properly socialized may become fearful or aggressive towards people, other cats, or new situations. This fear can develop into anxiety, which can make it challenging for the cat to cope in different environments.

Kitten socialization should start as early as possible. The critical socialization period for kittens starts at around four weeks old and lasts until they're around seventeen weeks old. During this time, kittens are highly receptive to new experiences, and they're more likely to develop positive associations with new people, animals, and environments. However, it's never too late to start socialization. Even older kittens and adult cats can benefit from socialization and training.

1. Start touching their feet, ears, and tail. You can gently squeeze their paws and gently lift their tails. You can give them treats as you go to help them associate these things positively.
2. Introducing their carrier for vet visits can help reduce you and your kitten stress for future visits. If possible, keep the carrier out of storage and out where your kitten can explore it. You can use treats and toys to encourage them to investigate the carrier.
3. Take your kitten on a short car ride while in the carrier to prepare them for vet visits or family vacations. Give them treats and toys to occupy them and always try to end on a good note!
4. Slowly introduce to new noises such as babies crying, cats barking, alarms, people talking, vacuums, fireworks and other common, but scary sounds. You can introduce these through recordings and gradually increase the noises as your cat gets more comfortable. By getting your kitten used to these noises, you reduce their fear and make it less likely that they will hide. This is very important in a crisis where sirens are going off and you need to grab them as fast as possible!
5. You should also have different people come over to meet them as well. Different outfits, hats, races, sexes are all times that will help your pet get used to strangers and not hide away. Always allow your kitten to approach first using treats and toys to lure them in if they're nervous. Make sure to stay quiet and make slow movements!
6. If you have any interest in harness training then now is the time to do so. Slowly introduce the harness by laying it on the ground and treating your cat when they come to investigate. Put the harness on for short periods of time and give treats every time it's on them. Don't push your cat if they're visibly stressed and always end on a good note.

### How to litter box train your kitten

Litter box training is an essential part of bringing a new kitten into your home. Proper litter box training can help prevent accidents and encourage good hygiene habits in your kitten. Here are some steps to follow when litter box training your kitten:

1. Choose the Right Litter Box: Choose a litter box that is big enough for your kitten to move around in comfortably. It should also have low sides, so your kitten can easily climb in and out. This is important for small kittens and for older arthritic cats. You can consider a taller or top loading litter box when your kitten is older.
2. Choose the Right Litter: Choose a litter that your kitten likes and is comfortable with. Some kittens may prefer a certain type of litter, such as clay, paper, or wood-based. Most cats prefer clay clumping litter. Avoid litters with strong scents or additives, as they may be off-putting for your kitten.
3. Show Your Kitten the Litter Box: Show your kitten where the litter box is located and encourage them to climb in and explore it. Place your kitten in the litter box after meals, naps, and playtime to encourage them to use it.
4. Keep the Litter Box Clean: Keep the litter box clean and scooped regularly to prevent odors and encourage your kitten to use it. It's recommended to scoop the litter box at least once a day and replace the litter entirely every 2-4 weeks.

5. Be Patient: Litter box training may take time and patience, especially for younger kittens. Be patient with your kitten and continue to encourage them to use the litter box consistently.

If your kitten has an accident outside the litter box, clean it up promptly and use an enzymatic cleaner to remove any odors. This will help prevent your kitten from returning to the same spot to eliminate.

By following these steps and remaining consistent, you can successfully litter box train your kitten and encourage good hygiene habits. Keep in mind that cats may pee outside their litter box due to pain or behavior issues. If you encounter any difficulties or have concerns, don't hesitate to reach out to a veterinarian or animal behaviorist for assistance.

### Why should your pet be kept indoors?

We recommend that cats be kept indoors if at all possible for a variety of reasons:

- Indoor cats are generally safer than outdoor cats. They are less likely to be hit by a car, attacked by other animals, or exposed to diseases.
- Indoor cats tend to live longer than outdoor cats. They are less likely to get into fights or get lost, which can lead to injury or death.
- Indoor cats are less likely to be exposed to parasites, toxins, or other hazards that can affect their health.
- Indoor cats are usually more comfortable in a climate-controlled environment, with plenty of food, water, and comfortable sleeping areas.
- Indoor cats also have less of an impact on your native environment. Multiple studies call cats an invasive species due to the number of native species, particularly birds, that they kill.
- Friendly indoor-outdoor cats also have a chance of getting picked up by someone well meaning. If no one finds a tag or microchip then they may be put into a shelter or adopted by someone else without you knowing.

### Works Cited

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