



## Kitten's First Year

### All kittens need:

- A clean, well-ventilated litter box
- Quality life-stage nutrition
- Proper parasite control
- Appropriate vaccinations
- A microchip if going outside
- Regular activity
- A great, loving home

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### Litter box training, providing activity, and how to avoid kitty scratching the new leather couch.

With any new kitten, there is a period of time when you need to learn how your pet reacts to their environment, and when they need to learn how to live with you. Behavioural problems, such as biting, destructive scratching and inappropriate elimination, are common reasons why cats are abandoned or given up. Fortunately, most problem behaviour can be avoided by starting with proper training techniques at an early age, by being consistent, and by having everyone in the family get involved in training.

Litter box training is usually easy for cats, with most adapting very quickly to the toileting. However, some kittens, given the opportunity, will soil in plant pots or in hidden basement areas if they resemble litter areas. Cover plant pots with foil or rocks, and block off areas of dirt floors. Offer one more litter box than the number of cats in the household, and place them in well ventilated

areas, away from loud furnace motors or similar distractions. Although convenient, we do not recommend using covered litter boxes, as this causes the cats to inhale very dusty air from their litter, contributing to airway problems such as asthma. Cats that defecate or urinate outside of litter boxes may dislike the type of litter used, so try using different types. Litter should be cleaned daily, as cats soon learn to avoid soiled litter.

Clumping litter helps one to remove urine and feces without having to change the whole litter, but a complete litter change should be done weekly, and the litter box cleaned and disinfected before refilling. Make sure to wash hands after handling litter and litter scoops.

Scratching and biting at people can be due to fear, ag-

gression, or from excessive play behaviour. Cat nails and teeth can inflict deep and often infected wounds, so it is important to reduce that risk. Learn to clip kitty's nails regularly, usually every 4 to 6 weeks, and monitor children closely when handling or petting cats to make sure that they are not distressing the pet. Signs that the cat is becoming upset are low growls, a flicking of the tail, and attempts to move away.



Teach children to be gentle and stroke the fur in its natural direction.

In order to deal with cats that scratch at furniture, it is important to realize that

## Kitten behaviour continued...

scratching is a normal behaviour for cats. Cats have scent glands in their pads and cheeks,



offering a scratching post in an area that the cat seems to prefer. You may have to experiment with different types of material fixed onto a vertical post to see which one the kitten uses the most. Try bark, roughened wood, carpet or other fabrics. Special scents called pheromones are available to spray on these areas to encourage their use.

kitten when it tries to scratch. Always provide an alternate, acceptable scratching area.

We generally do not recommend declawing unless all other alternatives have been exhausted. Declawing a cat involves ten separate amputations of the bones in the toes, not just the nails, and can cause long term problems in some cats after surgery. Most problems with scratching can be avoided without having to resort to this surgery. We will be pleased to discuss the surgery or other options to cat owners.

To deter the kitten from scratching at valuable furniture, place double-sided sticky tape on the vertical arms, or wherever the kitten seems to be scratching. You can also spray a citrus scent or other noxious but harmless substance on the surfaces, or spray water at the

and will mark areas with this odour. This has a calming effect on cats, provides pleasure, and also helps with removing older nail tissue. Rather than preventing scratching of inanimate objects, we recommend

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## What to feed Garfield

There are hundreds of choices for cat food available for your new kitty. Sorting through the myriad diets can be challenging, especially as so much emphasis is placed on marketing the food. Whatever resonates with



us in terms of what we think constitutes good nutrition will likely show up on the exterior of the food bag. Plus, there are so many myths about what cats should eat. Fortunately, most foods available likely provide the basic needs of pets, but only a handful of companies actually conduct nutritional research to prove the quality of their foods. While not the only companies providing excellent nutrition, there are only

four companies that conduct research on their food products: Purina, Hill's, Iams, and Royal Canin/Medi-Cal. These companies have created diets to manage many health problems, from obesity to diabetes, from urinary tract disease to arthritis and joint disease. We now have a tremendous understanding of the role of good nutrition on health problems, and by extension, the role of good nutrition in pro-

moting good health. While we do not advocate any one company, premium foods from these companies are backed by years of research and can be trusted to offer great products.

Safety of food sources is of paramount concern for companies making cat food, as we saw with the melamine scare recently.

A number of serious health conditions that affect cats can be managed nutritionally. Some cats produce crystals in their urine that may lead to a urinary obstruction. Left untreated, this is a very painful and life-threatening condition. Good diets for cats will prevent this condition by helping to produce an acidic urine low in crystals.

## What to feed Garfield cont...

Obesity is the most common nutritionally managed disease affecting cats, particularly those who live mostly indoors.

We advocate controlled feedings by providing a fixed amount of high quality food at meal times, and removing the food between meals. Cats that

gain too much weight can be more easily restricted on the amount fed, or the owner can feed a lower calorie food for obesity-prone cats.

## Parasite control for your Kitten

Many parasites have the ability to infect cats, with kittens being most susceptible. Intestinal parasites include the common roundworms and hookworms, but kittens may also be infected with Coccidia, and Giardia. Intestinal parasites may cause weight loss, diarrhea, blood loss, and vomiting, although many cats may seem healthy with only intermittent gastro-intestinal signs.

External parasites include fleas, ear and skin mites, lice, and ticks. Although rare in cats, the dog Heartworm, transmitted through mosquitoes, can sometimes also cause infections.

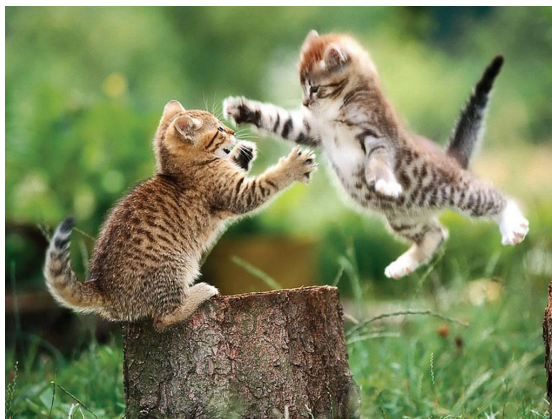
Roundworms have a particularly stubborn lifecycle in cats. The microscopic eggs hatch following ingestion, and the larvae burrow through the intestinal wall and travel through body tissues for a period of time, an event known as Visceral Larval Migrants. Eventually, these tiny parasites emerge back into the intestines, grow into adult spaghetti-like worms, and breed, releasing thousands of

eggs back into the environment. Dewormers only work in the gut, so it is important to continue to administer them every 2 weeks until the kitten is 3 months of age, then once a month until the kitten is 6 months of age, as the larvae emerge back into the intestine.

Roundworms can be acquired from infected soil, or from eating infected birds. Tapeworms

and outside. Within several weeks, if the conditions are right, the eggs will hatch into larvae, transform into pupae, and eventually emerge as young adult fleas looking for a warm pet to call their own. Fleas can cause intense itching, skin diseases and can even transmit diseases. In our region, most flea problems peak in late summer and fall as the number of eggs builds up in the environment.

Currently, we can prevent many intestinal parasites and fleas with safe and effective medications. Having a stool sample checked in all kittens, and in outdoor older cats allows us to identify parasites before they become a problem.



can be transmitted by ingesting infected fleas or rodents.

Fleas can be a problem at any time of the year if your kitten meets another animal with fleas. Adult fleas spend their entire life cycle on the animal, but will lay 20 to 30 eggs a day following a blood meal. The eggs fall off the cat and lodge in cracks and crevices, around baseboards

Some parasites can also infect people, especially children and those with lowered immune systems. For a great resource on parasites, pets and pet ownership, see the University of Guelph's [www.wormsandgermsblog.com](http://www.wormsandgermsblog.com).

We will recommend a parasite control program for your cat that matches your pet's lifestyle.

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## Vaccines for Kittens

All kittens need vaccination to protect them against infectious diseases. Our recommendations for vaccination are based on the North American AAFP Vaccination Guidelines, available to the public at: <http://www.catvets.com/professionals/guidelines/publications/?Id=176>.

All kittens should be vaccinated against panleukopenia, herpesvirus, calicivirus, and rabies. These diseases are either highly contagious, fatal or serious, or, in the case of rabies, of public health concern. In addition, we recommend Feline Leukemia Virus vaccination for all kittens, and then to those adult cats who live in multi-cat households or go outside.

We review your kitten's life-

style, previous vaccines, and consider his age, breed, and health status before determining what vaccines to recommend. Most kittens receive vaccines between 2 and 4 months of age, again a year later, and then through life at an interval determined by the vaccine.

Panleukopenia, herpesvirus/calicivirus are given every three years to adult cats, whereas Rabies and Feline Leukemia Virus vaccines require annual administration.

While reactions to vaccines do occasionally occur, the vaccines we recommend and the schedule we advise are designed to minimize the risk while helping

to protect your cat.

Although not obvious, indoor cats also require vaccines. Panleukopenia virus, herpes- and caliciviruses can be transmitted by aerosols or by contact with infected hands or materials. If a cat requires hospitalization, there is a risk of exposure, and an owner handling a cat outside the home can transmit the viruses to pets in the home. For rabies, the Ottawa Health Unit requires all cats, regardless of lifestyle, to be vaccinated by law. Although risk is low for an indoor cat, bats are a high risk species for rabies transmission and have been known to fly into people's homes. Due to the public health risks with rabies, a broad policy for vaccinating all cats and dogs is in place.

*'Unexpected breedings account for many of the cats surrendered to shelters and humane societies.'*

## Spay and Neuter

If you do not plan to breed your cat, you should seriously consider spaying her or neutering him. Ottawa has an overabundance of cats that need homes, so adding to the numbers doesn't help. We discourage the breeding of cats just to experience the "joys of birth", as interesting as it is. Serious breeders invest a significant amount of money and time on breeding to reduce genetic problems and to promote positive conformational and behavioural traits. Unless you intend to make a career from breeding, you should consider the risks of not having your pet spayed or neutered.

Female cats have seasonal periods of heats, or times when they can breed, usually during

winter and spring, at which time they will attract any males in the vicinity. Unexpected breedings account for many of the cats surrendered to shelters and humane societies.

Intact female cats are at a significantly higher risk for life-threatening infections of the uterus called pyometra, and also for mammary cancer.

Intact male cats may have a greater urge to "wander", particularly if they sense a female in heat. Aggression between male cats can be a problem, as can excessive urine marking behaviour.

Spaying is usually performed after 6 months of age.



Spaying a female cat involves an abdominal surgery to remove her uterus and ovaries. She will not have any more heats and cannot develop infections of the uterus afterwards.

Neutering the male cat involves removal of both testicles. Both procedures are performed under full anesthesia, but the pets go home the same day as the surgery. We strongly recommend a pre-anesthetic blood test in the week prior to

surgery to assess the kidney and liver function, the blood volume and sugar and protein levels, all of which are important for safe anesthesia. Pets are placed on intravenous fluids through a catheter in their front leg during the surgery to help maintain their blood pressure. With constant monitoring of their heart rate and rhythm, blood pressure, and oxygen levels, we help to ensure a safe anesthetic procedure.

Following surgery, we advise pet owners to keep their cats quiet if possible. The sutures are absorbable, and buried below the skin, so there is no need for them to be removed once the healing has occurred. Please ask if you have further questions regarding anesthesia or surgery for your kitten.



## Microchip Identification

While most pet owners will hopefully never have to worry about a missing pet, the reality is that many cats go astray every year in Ottawa. Even the least expected wanderer may suddenly disappear. Cats are natural roamers and, even though they have an instinctive way of finding their way back home, they may be chased or scared away from their area. Identification in any form is essential to help re-unite lost pets with their owners. Tags on collars remain the first and most visible method to provide a contact number or name, but unfortunately, once the collar has come off, only the pet can tell you where she came from, and most can't talk! And cats are notorious for losing collars. Since the introduction of microchip technology for pet identification, many pets that

would have previously become lost have been reunited quickly and efficiently with their owners. Microchips, with rare exceptions, work throughout the life of the pet, do not fade with time, and do not fall off.

The microchip is the size of a grain of rice, and is inserted over the shoulders of the kitten at any age by a needle, only slightly larger than that used for vaccines. To "read" the microchip, a scanner is waved over the cat and the number encoded to that particular chip is displayed on the scanner's screen. Each chip is registered to an owner, so once the microchip number is found, all we need to do is call up the database to find

the owner. The databases are maintained 24/7 and microchips placed in British Columbia can be read by scanners in Newfoundland, or the US, thanks to standardization of chip technologies.

We highly recommend a microchip for any household cat, even those whose risk of wandering seems low. You never know when your pet may stray!

*“Microchips, with rare exceptions, work throughout the life of the pet, do not fade with time, and do not fall off.”*



# Pet Insurance: peace of mind for those unexpected accidents

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Currently, three companies offer comprehensive pet insurance in Canada: Petsecure, Pet Care, and Vet Insurance. In addition, the Canadian Automobile Association, HBC, President's Choice Financial, and Purina offer Petsecure insurance under their own branding. Pet insurance provides coverage for accidents and illnesses to cats of all ages and breeds. Some policies also provide coverage for routine health care, such as vaccination, dental care, and parasite control.

How much you can expect to pay for monthly premiums for your new kitten depends on how comprehensive the cover-

age is. Insurance premiums can also vary based on the level of co-insurance provided. For example, a company may require the owner to pay 20% of veterinary fees, while the insurance will cover the remaining 80%.

All companies provide free insurance for a month, and we strongly recommend taking advantage of this offer while you decide whether to use pet insurance long term.

Generally speaking, insurance is of great value in the first year or two of a cat's life, when they are most likely to have accidents or ingest things they are not supposed to. In addi-

tion, a cat with genetic susceptibilities to skin problems such as allergies, and to congenital problems may have life-long health problems for which insurance can be of great benefit. While not immune to health problems, middle-aged cats will likely need less insurance, but there is increased need for veterinary care with advancing age. Having insurance in place before problems such as cancer, heart disease, or arthritis develop can provide peace of mind for both short- and long-term care.

While Cedarview Animal Hospital opened its Barrhaven location in July 2009, Dr. Nigel Gumley has been practising in the region for 20 years and Dr. Lianna Titcombe for 10 years. Dr. Gumley holds a board specialization in Canine and Feline Practice, as well as certification in Canine Rehabilitation. Dr. Titcombe is the director of the Pet Loss Support Group of Ottawa. Sarah Baker is a Registered Veterinary Technician and is additionally certified as a Canine Rehabilitation Assistant and a Veterinary Dental Technician. Tracy Radbourne and Laura Orr provide reception and animal care assistance for your pets. The practice offers comprehensive medical and surgical care to dogs and cats, with a special interest also in reproductive work.

We support various pet-related charities and organizations, including the Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind, the Farley Foundation, the Ottawa Humane Society, St. John's Ambulance Dog Therapy Program, and various pet and breed rescue groups. For more information about Cedarview Animal Hospital, visit our web site at [www.cedarviewanimalhospital.com](http://www.cedarviewanimalhospital.com).

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