



Kitten and Adult Cat Care

A guide to lifetime care for your best friend!

We know your cat is a member of your family. We know you want to take care of him or her to the best of your ability. With all of the information available on the internet and social media, it can be confusing! *“What vaccinations should my cat be given to stay healthy and protected? What if she never goes outside? Should I feed him dry food or canned food?”* These are just a few of the questions that you might ask yourself after reading an online article or talking to your neighbor. Our veterinarians can help you separate the misconceptions and marketing tactics from the evidence based recommendations that we make every day. We want your kitty to live a long and healthy life. Here’s how:

Vaccinations:

There are vaccinations that every kitten and cat should get, unless they have a proven medical condition that would cause them to be exempt. These vaccinations are called the “Core Vaccinations”.

FVRCP (“Distemper”) - This multivalent vaccine protects against four primary feline diseases. It is recommended for kittens at 6, 9, and 12 weeks, again at one and two years of age, and then every three years. In some cases, 100% outdoor cats or those exposed to large feline (especially unvaccinated) communities could benefit from annual vaccination.

1. Rhinotracheitis – a herpes virus that affects the respiratory system causing coughing and sneezing, with eye and nasal discharge; this virus can be dormant for some time and recur when the animal is stressed.
2. Calici virus – is an upper respiratory virus that causes coughing, sneezing, and oral ulcers.
3. Panleukopenia – infects the intestinal tract and causes profuse vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and pneumonia. This is a deadly virus.
4. Chlamydia – an upper respiratory virus that causes coughing, sneezing, and eye irritation.

Rabies – All warm blooded animals are susceptible to this deadly disease if bitten by or exposed to any animal that has the rabies virus in their saliva. Pennsylvania mandates every cat (beginning at 12 weeks of age) must be vaccinated for Rabies. The Rabies vaccine is good for one year the first time it is given, and then it is given every three years for the lifetime of your pet.

There is one additional vaccination available for your kitten or cat. Your veterinarian can help you decide if it is necessary for your cat to receive a **Feline Leukemia** vaccination. But before we discuss prevention, we need to be sure each cat owner is educated about this deadly virus.

Feline Leukemia:

The FeLV infection is one of the leading causes of death in kittens and cats. This virus is associated with numerous diseases because it suppresses the immune system. The Feline Leukemia virus is highly contagious. It is present in the saliva, blood, urine, and feces of infected cats, and is passed to healthy cats by licking, sneezing, bite wounds, and sharing contaminated food, water, and litter pans. Kittens can also become infected by nursing from an infected mother. High risk cats are those living outdoors, either some or all of the time, and multiple cat households.

Because FeLV is associated with so many disorders, observable signs vary dramatically. We recommend a **simple blood test** to rule out FeLV prior to introducing any new kitten or cat to a household which already has feline pets. If all of the household cats remain 100% indoors, the possibility of contracting Feline Leukemia is next to none.

If your kitten or cat spends all or some of his/her time outdoors, we strongly recommend the FeLV vaccination to protect at-risk cats against the many forms of suffering associated with and caused by FeLV infection, after they have tested negative for the virus. It is recommended for kittens at 9 and 12 weeks, again at one and two years of age, and then every three years. In some cases, 100% outdoor cats or those exposed to large feline (especially unvaccinated) communities could benefit from annual vaccination.

Spaying and Neutering:

The primary reason to spay and neuter your cat is to prevent unwanted litters. We recommend neutering at 6 months of age, but there is no upper age limit. In addition to population control, there are many health benefits for neutered cats. In females, spaying eliminates the risk of a uterine infection (a pyometra which requires an emergency surgery), endometriosis, ovarian cysts and tumors, and will eliminate the monthly heat cycle,

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which typically cause excessive vocalizing. In males, neutering at six months of age or sooner greatly diminishes the pungent odor of cat urine. In addition, intact male and female cats tend to make increased efforts to “escape” to the outdoors and sometimes inappropriately urinate due to an increase in hormone levels and the need to “mark” their territory. Neutering will not change your cat’s personality. Spaying/neutering does not make a pet fat. With proper diet and exercise, a normal weight cat is expected.

Diets:

Cats are naturally carnivorous creatures. In the wild, your cat’s diet would consist of high protein, high moisture, low fat *prey* (rodents, birds, lizards, etc.). Cats have specific nutritional needs and Mother Nature had it right! It is *man* who created meat flavored dry kibble. It is inexpensive and convenient. It is also high in carbohydrates, low in moisture, and often too high in plant based protein, making it less than ideal for a cat’s optimum nutrition.

Because many cats are 100% indoors, which is the safest place for him/her, they are dependent on their owners to make the right feeding choices. *We recommend canned foods to be the majority of your cat’s diet* with dry kibble to supplement if the pet owner chooses. Cats naturally have a low thirst drive which makes it imperative for them to ingest a water-rich diet. A cat’s normal prey is 70-75% water. Canned cat food is generally 78% water. Dry kibble is only 5-10% water. Cats are at a significantly higher risk to develop urinary blockages (especially male cats), bladder stones, cystitis, and kidney insufficiencies when fed dry kibble as a primary diet. The high carbohydrate content can also increase a cat’s risk for diabetes and obesity. Adding water to your cat’s canned food and purchasing a fresh running fountain can also promote increased water intake. Cats do prefer their food and water to be placed in different locations.

Intestinal Parasites and Fecal Samples:

All new kittens and “new to you” pets should have a stool sample checked at the first visit with the veterinarian. Yearly fecal exams are recommended throughout your cat’s lifetime. A microscopic examination is performed to detect the eggs of multiple dangerous parasites, including roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, and coccidia. Roundworms and hookworms are zoonotic - meaning they can infect people - so it is important to be sure your cat is parasite-free. Although your cat may remain indoors 100% of the time, he/she is at risk to become infected with parasites by ingesting fleas, bugs, and/or rodents that find their way into your home and also potting soils used for many indoor plants.



Fleas and Ticks:

In addition to causing some serious health threats in animals, flea and tick infestations are some of the most challenging and bothersome issues that cat owners are plagued with. The market is inundated with flea and tick products – some are good and some are not. We carry what we feel are the safest, most effective and economical products for you and your cat. In addition to full flea and tick treatment and prevention education by our veterinarians and our staff, we have manufacturer coupons and promotions that are not available to OTC and on-line pharmacy purchases. Our staff will be happy to review the safest and most cost effective options for your cat.

Dental Care:

Oral health problems are very common in cats. By age 3, 80% of cats have some sign of dental disease. Plaque, gingivitis, inflamed gums, and periodontal disease may develop and can eventually affect other organs of your cat’s body. Our veterinarians recommend twice weekly brushing. You may use a “finger” brush, a soft child’s toothbrush, or specially made cat toothbrushes. You can also use your finger wrapped in gauze or a nylon stocking. We have enzymatic pet toothpaste in chicken, mint and malt flavors. There are products to help keep teeth clean and stimulate the gums like Hill’s t/d.



Scratching and Declawing:

Scratching is an inherent feline behavior and has a function – to groom the claws and to maintain the claw motion used to hunt and climb in the wild. Clawing is not a behavioral problem, however most cat owners see it as problematic due to the damage clawing can cause to furniture, etc., however punishing a cat for scratching can lead to stress, anxiety, and fearful behaviors which can cause increased scratching, housesoiling, or other undesirable behaviors.

Declawing is an elective procedure in which the third/last joint on each toe is amputated. The procedure must be done this way to eliminate the possibility of nail regrowth. We recommend declaw procedures to be performed at or before six months of age, before kittens their adult weight. This procedure is often done in conjunction with spaying/neutering. Each patient is provided multiple anesthetic/analgesic methods to provide the best pain relief currently available. There are alternatives to declawing such as “scratchers” and scratching posts in multiple textures and styles, regular toenail trimming, and temporary nail caps.

Litter Pans:

Cats need clean litter pans placed in convenient, yet private, areas of the home. As a general rule of thumb, provide one litter pan per cat plus one more. Be sure it is spacious, scooped daily, and dumped/cleaned weekly. There are many litter types to choose from. Some cats prefer a shallow level of litter while others are “diggers” and prefer more litter in the pan. Once you find what makes your cat happy, stay consistent to help reduce the risk of inappropriate urination in the home.

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Playing:

Cats are predators. Play and predatory behavior fulfills your cat's natural need to hunt. Be sure to provide toys and playtime that stimulates him/her daily, like feather toys, catnip filled "mice", wand toys that can be pulled across the floor to entice the chase and waved through the air. It is imperative to allow cats to capture the "prey" to prevent frustration. Reward with treats. Food puzzles and balls can also mimic hunting. Playing provides exercise for your cat and some laughs for cat owners.

