

HOW DO I CARE FOR MY NEW KITTEN?

RSPCA KNOWLEDGEBASE

Congratulations on the recent addition to your household! Now that you have a young kitten to care for there are several things you will need to consider. One of the most important things to do is to arrange to take your kitten to the veterinarian for a general health check. Your vet will be able to give you advice regarding basic care for your kitten as well as give them any vaccinations and worming treatments that are needed.

In the meantime, some of the basic aspects of kitten care you will need to consider include:

NUTRITION

Kittens should be fed a combination of both a high-quality commercial kitten food and some natural foods to ensure a balanced diet is provided. Avoid giving cow's milk to kittens but always ensure they have access to fresh, clean water at all times.

BEDDING

Although your kitten may want to share your bed it is important to provide them with a comfortable dry bed of their own as well. Use bedding that is safe, can be easily cleaned and dried and place the bed somewhere cozy and private.

LITTER TRAYS

Place a litter tray in a quiet and private area for your kitten to use when they need to go to the toilet. At least one more litter tray than the total number of kittens/cats is appropriate.

PLAY TIME

Play time is important for bonding between you and your kitten. Kittens are very playful and curious and love to expend some of their energy chasing cat toys and interacting with their owners. Try rotating a variety of different types of cat toys and try different games so your cat doesn't get bored.

Toys may include chase and catch toys; toys that you can put tasty food treats in and puzzle feeders.

GROOMING

Regular grooming (gentle brushing) is important particularly for medium-haired and long-haired cats. Start grooming your kitten early on so that it becomes an enjoyable bonding activity and part of routine care. Positively reward your cat with a tasty cat food treat, verbal praise and patting for allowing you to groom them. This way your cat will associate grooming with positive things, making it easier for both of you.

Grooming removes dust, dead skin, loose hair, grass seeds and tangles and shed fur, which can help prevent your cat experiencing 'fur balls' – some cats will swallow fur when they self-groom, especially long-haired cats, and this can build up in the stomach to eventually be vomited.

Grooming should always be comfortable for your cat. Avoid any hair pulling or jerking movements. Fur mats and tangles may need to be carefully trimmed using blunt-nosed safety scissors. Always point scissors away from your cat and ensure the skin isn't touched.

REWARD-BASED TRAINING

The RSPCA supports reward-based training which is the most humane and effective way to train pets. This type of training involves rewarding your cat when they perform a 'desired' behavior. Rewards can be in the form of a tasty cat food treat, verbal praise or patting. 'Rewards' positively reinforce the desired behavior and make it more likely your cat will perform the behavior again.

Reward-based training also involves generally ignoring 'undesired' behaviors. For example, play time is a good opportunity for you to teach your kitten good manners. Occasionally games can get a bit intense and rough – make sure play time ends if they scratch hard or if there is biting. In this way, your cat will learn quickly that they don't receive any attention for 'undesired' behaviors such as scratching hard or biting, and they will tend to stop doing these behaviors quickly.

If your kitten does scratch hard or bite, never punish your kitten physically or yell or spray with a water bottle, as this will scare them. Cats are also unlikely to associate the punishment with their behavior leading to confusion. The best thing to do in these situations is to generally ignore the behavior. Talk to your vet for advice about behavior.

SCRATCHING POLES

Cats instinctively need to scratch things to keep their nails in good condition and to express natural behaviors. It's important to provide a scratching pole or several scratching poles around the house. This will help to prevent your cat scratching other objects such as furniture etc. If your kitten does start to scratch furniture, cover the furniture with protective material and provide plenty of appropriate alternative things for them to direct their scratching behavior towards. Some cats may prefer a scratching mat.

HEALTH CARE

Talk to your vet about annual health check-ups, vaccinations, microchipping, desexing and flea and worm prevention.

Desexing, prior to sexual maturity effectively prevents unplanned and unwanted litters of kittens, helping to reduce the number of unwanted cats and kittens in the community. Desexing also provides health and behavioral benefits. Desexing commonly reduces behavior problems such as roaming and urine marking. Reducing the desire to roam to find mates also reduces the risk of cats being in cat fights (where they may be injured or catch infectious diseases) or a traumatic accident such as being hit by a car.

LAWS FOR CAT OWNERS

It is essential to know what the laws are particularly regarding registration, microchipping and desexing. Each State and council have their own laws and these may change over time, so it is important to keep up to date. Check with your local council regarding any laws relating to keeping a pet cat.