

# The Kitten Wellness Guide

Designed and written by

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## **Kitten Guide**

The decision to bring a kitten into your home is not a decision to be taken lightly – or made hastily. Bringing a kitten into your family will impact your family life in many ways and for many years. But it is a tremendously rewarding experience. This kitten will make its way into your family and your heart and form a relationship you will never forget. That said, kittens do require some work and patience. There is the additional expense of feeding and health care. You must consider your lifestyle and be sure that you are able to offer the care and companionship your pet will need. Re-homing an adult cat is not always easy to do. You want to do all you can to give this kitten a permanent home. If after careful thought and consideration you decide to take on this commitment, here are a few more things to consider:

### **Where to get your kitten....**

#### **Breeders**

If you are interested in buying a purebred cat we recommend that you go to a reputable breeder. Pure breed cats are at a much higher risk for certain diseases. Therefore you want to be sure that you are dealing with an experienced and knowledgeable breeder. Be sure to thoroughly research the breed of cat you are interested in as well as the breeder you choose to work with.

#### **Pros:**

- ✓ Responsible breeders make their breeding choices based on producing kittens with the genetics for both good health and good temperament.
- ✓ A reputable breeder is knowledgeable about the breed and can help decide if the breed is right for you and educate you about that particular breed of cat.
- ✓ They are careful to place their kittens in the right homes.
- ✓ They are there to offer you help and advice. A good breeder is a lifelong friend to your cat and a support system for you.

#### **Cons:**

- Kittens purchased from a breeder will generally cost more (as compared with shelter or rescue adoptions).
- You may have to wait until a kitten is available. Many breeders have waiting lists for their kittens.

#### **Shelters**

Animal shelters are usually overrun with homeless cats. You will often find kittens available in the spring through fall months. You can check with local shelters for their visitation hours and then spend some time with the kittens to try and find the right kitten (or two!) for you!

#### **Pros:**

- ✓ The adoption fee at shelters is usually an affordable amount. This fee helps to support the shelter.
- ✓ Many shelters are affiliated with reduced cost spay and neuter programs.

Adopting a kitten from a local shelter is an easy and affordable way to find a healthy kitten and a great way to help our over burdened animal shelters.

### **Did you know....**

- \* Between 3 and 4 million homeless cats and dogs living in shelters are euthanized in the United States each year. Many of these animals would make wonderful pets, if only they were given a chance.\*You may want to consider adopting one of the many wonderful adult cats. There are always **many** in need of a good home.

### **Rescue organizations**

There are many cat rescue groups who work to help care for and control the local feral cat populations. They often sponsor cat adoption days at local businesses. Kittens are often available.

#### **Pros:**

- ✓ This is a great place to find an adorable and healthy kitten at a reasonable cost.
- ✓ Your small adoption fee will provide food and care for homeless cats and kittens.
- ✓ You can find links to local rescue groups online at [petfinder.com](http://petfinder.com) on our hospital website.
- ✓ You can contact local shelters or pet supply stores for scheduled adoption days.
- ✓ Most rescue kittens have been evaluated by a veterinarian and may have received vaccinations, or have been neutered (depending on the cat's age).
- ✓ Rescue volunteers are happy to give you help and advice regarding your adopted kitten.

#### **An interesting, but unscientific observation:**

Black and white cats and tabby cats often have more affectionate personalities. Calico cats and tortoise colored cats are often more aloof or temperamental. However..... there are no guarantees!

### **Where not to get a kitten.....**

#### **Pet Shops**

We do **not** recommend buying kittens from pet shops. These kittens often have health problems (which may not be apparent until the cat gets older) and have not been properly socialized. Pet shops often get their kittens from animal brokers, also known as commercial breeders. These animals are bred under horrific circumstances. Animal brokers breed for profit with no consideration as to the health and temperament of the animals. They breed solely for quantity – not quality. The consumer protection laws do offer some protection if your pet becomes ill or dies, but it addresses the financial investment you have made – not the emotional investment. Your options include returning the kitten and being reimbursed for veterinary bills. Unfortunately, by this time your family has already become emotionally attached to the animal and financial reimbursement or replacement of the kitten do not compensate for the emotional upheaval of the situation.

Also, you will most likely pay a much higher price when purchasing from a pet shop. Unless you are buying a pure bred cat, there is no reason to pay a huge price for a kitten. And if you are buying a pure bred kitten, the **LAST** place you want to purchase it from is a pet shop. **No reputable breeder** provides their litters to a pet shop. There are many healthy and adorable kittens available through shelters and rescue groups for an affordable adoption fee. Here your money will go to fund the care of these homeless animals rather

than putting it in the pockets of the pet shop owners and animal brokers. When there is no market for these pet shop animals there will be no need for animal brokers.

## **Now that you have your kitten....**

Congratulations .....

This is the beginning of a long and rewarding relationship with your new kitten. Taking the time to educate yourself on some basic information regarding the health and behavior of your pet will help to ensure that this relationship is a successful one.

It is recommended that you bring your kitten in for an exam as soon as possible. Calling ahead (even before you bring him home) will ensure that you are able to get an appointment within the necessary time frame. Please forward any paperwork and information you have regarding your kitten prior to your appointment. This gives the doctor the opportunity to review everything before you arrive and to better prepare for your appointment.

Being prepared for the arrival of your new pet will help make the transition easier for both you and your pet. The following is a list of things you will want to have on hand **before** the arrival of your new pet.

- ✓ Cat carrier
- ✓ Litter box (one per cat and one on each floor of the house)
- ✓ Litter
- ✓ Litter box scoop
- ✓ Food
- ✓ Food and water dishes (we recommend stainless steel or ceramic – some pets have an allergic reaction to plastic)
- ✓ Toys
- ✓ Carpet cleaner (one of our favorites is Spot Shot)

## **Kitten –Proofing your home and yard:**

Kittens can easily get themselves into a lot of dangerous situations, therefore kitten proofing your home is an important step in safe-guarding your new pet.

The time to begin safe-proofing your home is **before** you introduce your kitten to your household. The best way to get started is to get down on the floor to his eye level and check your home for any potential dangers.

## **Potential household dangers:**

- Small areas through which the animal can become stuck or escape.
- Things he can chew on such as electrical cords, plants, carpets, toys....
- Poisons he may encounter such as plants, pesticides, rodenticides, antifreeze....(refer to our website for a link to the ASPCA Poison Control Center).
- Choking hazards
- Things that can easily be knocked over that may be fragile, or may fall on and injure your pet.
- Access to trash.
- Access to human medications and vitamins.

- House plants – be sure any houseplants you may have are not toxic. Also, be cautious when plants and flowers are delivered from a florist. The florists are not always aware which plants are dangerous to pets. And they are probably not aware that you have a pet – so it is your responsibility to evaluate any new plants for safety. Once again you can refer to our website for the link to the ASPCA Poison Control Center for a list of toxic plants.

Many people overlook the dangers their pet may encounter in their yard. Getting down on their level here again is a good way to eliminate any possible problems.

### **Potential dangers in the yard:**

- Areas of escape
- Poisons (lawn chemicals, pesticides, antifreeze....)
- Trash
- Choking hazards
- Drowning (be sure your pet does not have unsupervised access to your pool).
- Safety from other animals
- Safety from vehicles

### **Some specific concerns about lawn maintenance:**

Lawn maintenance can pose a serious threat to pets. Many people use chemicals on their lawn that are hazardous to animals. Our pets are constantly walking on these chemicals, sniffing and possibly eating them (grass chewing). You should be very cautious about what chemicals you put on areas of the lawn that your pet has access to. Be sure that your lawn maintenance service knows that you have a pet and have a list of chemicals used in case there is a suspected poisoning in order to help identify the poison. Beware of organic lawn care products. Read labels carefully. Just because they are organic does not mean they are not a danger to your pet.

Always **supervise** your young pet. Restricting them to certain areas of your home and yard will make it easier for you to supervise their behavior and prevent them from getting themselves into trouble.

### **Introducing Your Kitten to Children and other Pets:**

Once again, **supervision** is the key to safely introducing your kitten to your children and other resident pets. Young children should never be left alone with an animal. They can easily harm a kitten or be inadvertently injured themselves by a frightened or rambunctious animal. Children must learn to respect animals. They must understand that kittens are not toys and should be treated with the same care you would provide a human baby. They need to be handled gently and require a lot of sleep.

When introducing your new kitten to existing pets, it is important follow some basic guidelines in order to help the two animals adjust to each other. We recommend that you confine your new pet and allow your existing pet the household freedom he has been accustomed to, but do not allow him to have access to the new pet. You can allow each pet to become familiar to the other animals scent by letting them sniff a cloth with the other pets' sent on it. With the first face to face introduction it is best to have the new animal in a crate and allow them to sniff each other through the crate, and then separate them once again. Do this until the reaction from the older animal seems favorable. The next day you

can try introducing them to one another outside of the crate, preferably on leashes. Once you are confident that they are comfortable with each other you can let them be together without restraint (with supervision), but be sure to separate them when you are not home. We recommend having a trial run before leaving the two animals out alone together for any period of time.

### **Where to keep your new kitten.....**

We recommend that you confine your new kitten to a small room (bathroom or laundry room...) with food, water and a litter box whenever you are not able to supervise him. This can be a temporary situation until you are confident that the cat can be allowed to roam the house without getting into any mischief. Have a trial run before leaving him unattended for long periods of time – increasing the length of time you are away gradually. If you prefer, this can be his permanent home whenever you are not home to supervise.

### **The scoop on litter boxes:**

There are a number of things to consider when preparing your kitten's litter box. It is best to decide on some of these factors before your kitten comes home. Some cats can be finicky when it comes to changes in their litter boxes.

- Location – put the litter box where you would like it to ultimately be kept. Some cats do not respond well to having their litter box location changed! If you must move it, do it gradually.
- Be sure the location is easily accessible
- The litter box should be safe from dogs and small children
- Do not place the litter box near your furnace. Loud noises may startle the cat when he is in the litter box and he may not want to use it again
- If possible - have one litter box on each floor of your house
- Choose a litter that is agreeable to both you and your cat and stick with it (some cats do not like to have the brand of litter changed). Both clay and clumping litter are acceptable. Be aware that some of the scented litters may not be as popular among all cats. If your cat is boycotting the litter box, you may have to try a new brand or type of litter.
- Both covered and uncovered litter box designs are o.k., if your cat is o.k. with it.
- Have at least one litter box for each cat.
- Do not place food or water bowls next to the litter box. This will discourage the cat from using it. Cats don't want to relieve themselves by their food.
- **KEEP IT CLEAN!** Cats are by nature fastidious creatures. Especially long haired cats. Therefore you must clean the litter box often. Scoop out the box and replace litter frequently. At least once a month you should dump out all the litter and clean the box thoroughly.

### **Indoor cats vs. outdoor cats – what is best?**

In general, it is in the best interest for your cat to be kept indoors. However, that is not to say that letting your cat outdoors is a terrible thing. You must consider your circumstances. Certainly it is not a good idea to let your cat roam freely outside if you live very close to a busy road. Cats can roam quite a distance (especially if they have not been neutered – another argument for neutering them!) and can be hit by a car or become lost or stolen. You must be more vigilant with your outdoor cat and monitor their health more closely

because they are at a higher risk for illness and injury. So before letting your cat outside, be sure to evaluate your situation carefully in order to honestly decide what will be best for your cat.

### **Reasons in favor of indoor cats:**

- ✓ Indoor cats have a lower risk for disease and injury, and getting lost. There is also less opportunity for parasite infection (fleas, ticks, worms...)
- ✓ Protect the environment – cats are predators and hunt indiscriminately. There has been a serious reduction in the song bird population. Partly due to cats' predatory behavior.
- ✓ Cat feces in your yard can be a concern if you have small children. If they play in an area where the cat defecates, they can be at risk for a number of parasitic infections.
- ✓ You are better able to monitor your cat's health and behavior if he is kept indoors and you have more control over their environment.

For information on indoor cats you can refer to the "Indoor Cat Initiative" online. This site was created in order to enrich the lives of indoor cats. There is a tremendous amount of information available here to help keep your indoor cat happy and healthy.

### **If you will be letting your cat go outside, please consider the following....**

- Be sure your home is situated in a safe environment in order to minimize the risk of being run over by a car.
- Be sure your cat is up to date on all vaccinations at all times (this applies to indoor cats too!).
- Spay or neuter your cat!!!! Otherwise you will be contributing to the problem of over-population and homeless cats.
- Have your cat micro-chipped. This will help you recover him in the event that he becomes lost and turns up at an animal shelter or veterinarian's office.
- Be sure to use flea and tick preventatives.
- Do not declaw a cat that goes outside. They cannot climb or defend themselves.

### **Scratching behavior and declawing:**

Scratching is a very natural and satisfying behavior for cats. It sharpens their claws, assists them in marking their territory, and allows them to have a nice stretch! Some cats will scratch more than others. If your kitten begins scratching in inappropriate places, there are a number of strategies you can try before resorting to declawing him. First, you will need to supply him with an acceptable scratching area. There are a number of these items available at pet supply stores such as scratching posts, scratch pads hung from door knobs, cat trees and scratch trays filled with corrugated cardboard. You can also create your own scratch area by putting a piece of carpeting on the corner of some molding. Rubbing the new approved scratching area with cat nip will make it even more enticing.

Once you have an approved scratching area, make the unacceptable scratching area unacceptable to your kitten by putting double-sided tape on it. Cats do not like to touch

anything sticky. You can also try covering it with foil, plastic sheathing, or plastic carpet runners with the pointy side pointing out. Put the approved scratching alternative near the problem area. Once your kitten uses his approved scratching post you may move it (gradually) to a more desirable location. Be sure to leave the scratching deterrent in place until you are sure the kitten has gotten the message. You can also keep a squirt bottle handy and squirt the kitten every time he begins to scratch your furniture as an extra deterrent.

Another alternative to declawing is to cover your kittens claws with “Soft Paws” nail caps. This product is a plastic cap that is glued onto the cat’s claws and prevents them from damaging your furniture. The caps do need to be periodically replaced. They are available here at our hospital and can be applied during an office visit.

Sometimes declawing a cat is the only option. It is better to have a declawed cat than a homeless cat. We do recommend that you declaw your cat at a younger age. Young cats heal quicker and there are fewer complications if they are declawed before 1 year of age. By the time your kitten is 6 months old, you should probably know if he or she is a “problem scratcher” who is resistant to any behavior modification.

Remember – we do not recommend declawing cats that go outside since they are unable to adequately defend themselves.

### **If you or a family member is allergic to your cat.....**

There are a few things you can try to alleviate some of the symptoms from cat allergies. This is one circumstance where it may be helpful to let your cat outside part of the day (providing you live in a suitable area and the cat has not been declawed!) to try and cut down on the amount of cat dander in your home. You can also wipe down your furniture and your cat daily with a damp cloth. There is no need to use special commercial products. Water works fine. It is a good idea to get your kitten used to water by giving him gentle baths. Maybe even try taking him in the shower with you. These steps can go a long way in removing cat dander from your home and may help any cat allergy sufferers minimize or eliminate their symptoms. There are also hairless breeds of cats available for those with serious cat allergies.

## **Your kitten’s First Veterinary Visit**

Here is what you can expect at our office:

**FECAL EXAM**—We will ask you to bring a fecal sample on your first visit – it can have kitty litter on it, that’s ok. Parasites are common in kittens and should be eliminated. Roundworms, hookworms, coccidia and tapeworms all cause diarrhea and poor growth. We deworm kittens for roundworms and hookworms, as recommended by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control), due to the risk of transmission of these parasites to people.

**FELINE LEUKEMIA TEST**—This is a simple blood test for the feline leukemia virus, a fatal contagious disease that causes anemia and immune suppression. We recommend this test for all kittens, to be sure they are healthy, and also to protect any other cats you may already have in your household.

**FVRCP VACCINE—(FELINE DISTEMPER)**—All kittens should be vaccinated against this group of viruses. Kittens start at 6 weeks old and need boosters every three weeks until they are at least 14 weeks old. Your kitten is boosted annually until 2 years of age, and then every 3 years after that.

**WHAT DO ALL THOSE LETTERS MEAN? (FVRCP)** This combination vaccine is commonly called feline distemper, but in reality it protects your kitten against much more. **FVR**—stands for Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, which is a highly contagious upper respiratory infection. It causes infections in the mouth, nose, and eyes and can cause pneumonia and death. **C**—stands for Calici virus which causes severe ulcerations in the mouth, nose, and eyes. This can be fatal also. **P**-stands for Panleukopenia (feline distemper) which is capable of killing a kitten in hours because it destroys all the white blood cells in the body.

**FELINE LEUKEMIA VACCINE**—If you plan to let your kitten outside in the future, he/she should be vaccinated against this virus. Because this virus takes direct contact for transmission, a kitten that never goes outside or never will be exposed to a cat that goes outside does not need this vaccine. If your kitten needs this vaccine he will need two vaccinations 2-4 weeks apart, then an annual booster to maintain immunity.

**RABIES VACCINE**—We recommend this vaccine for all kittens, even if they do not go outside, due to the serious implications of dealing with a rabid animal. The first vaccination is given at 3 months and does not fully protect your kitten until 30 days after it is given, and needs to be boosted after one year. Although there is a three year rabies vaccine available for cats, we recommend using the one-year vaccine instead. It is less likely to cause reactions which can include cancerous tumors at the site of injection.

**DIET**—Dry food is recommended for kittens and cats and is complete and balanced. You may want to give canned food to your cat, and that is perfectly fine. Feline obesity is a growing problem in our sedentary cat population. There are some very new ideas on feline nutrition that we may discuss with you in the future if your kitten shows a tendency to overeat. But for now using a good name-brand commercial dry food is a good way to start.

**MICROCHIPS**---We recommend implanting a microchip which allows a shelter or hospital to identify your cat if it is lost. We suggest combining the implant procedure with the spay/neuter.

**NEUTERING** - We recommend spaying or neutering your kitten at 4-6 months of age. Male cats have very odorous urine and a tendency to spray if not neutered. Female cats will stay in heat for months at a time, and can have 2 or even 3 litters a year. Neutering them not only prevents breast cancer and uterine infections when older, but helps with cat overpopulation. There are hundreds of cats in shelters that need homes. Let's try to help them by neutering all our kittens.

## **So – Once again – Congratulations!**

**We hope this is the start of a long and wonderful friendship for you and your new family member! Please always feel free to call us with any question you might have. We are always willing to help!**

