

Bringing Home a New Kitten

Congratulations on your new kitten! We are certain that your kitten will bring you hours of entertainment, joy and love! Here are a few guidelines to help ensure a safe and healthy start to your journey together.

Arriving Home

If your kitten is very young (8 weeks old or younger) and your house is large, start by placing them in one room of your house with the litter box and food and water. Sometimes, when they are this small they can literally “get lost” in your house and not make it back to the litterbox or food dishes. Any electrical wires should be hidden or covered up to prevent chewing and electric burns. If there is a sewer or knitter in the house, please put away any sewing or knitting supplies as string and yarn are very appealing toys with disastrous consequences if eaten. Hair ties are also a favourite toy and can sometimes be swallowed. We have even seen ear buds on abdominal x-rays! How did that happen??

Feeding

We recommend choosing a good quality kitten food in canned and dry versions. This is important for several reasons. Cats have very unique nutritional requirements, more complex than feeding a dog. Cats are obligate carnivores which means that they absolutely, 100% need to eat meat! If you are a vegetarian, you cannot expect your cat to be a vegetarian. Feeding a vegetarian diet to a cat will result in significant health problems from nutritional deficiencies. We also recommend high quality kitten foods because sub-par foods can pre-dispose certain cats to develop crystals in their urine. In male cats, these crystals can cause a blockage that can result in the inability to urinate. This becomes a true medical emergency, resulting in death if not treated quickly. A high quality diet is not a guarantee that this syndrome won't occur as there are also genetic components, but it plays a role in prevention. Please give your kitten access to clean drinking water and do not give milk. As the kitten gets older, it will lose the enzymes necessary to digest milk and will result in diarrhea. Water bowls should be large and wide so that the whiskers don't touch the rim. This will encourage the cat to drink more water also helping out its bladder health in the long run. Treats are fine as long as they are given in moderation. We recommend meal feeding your kitten 3 small meals a day to start and decreasing to 2 measured meals a day by the time they are 6 months old.

Scratching and Play behaviour

Kittens and cats are wired to use their claws to scratch both vertically and horizontally to release stress, and to mark territory. For this reason, we recommend investing in a large scratching post from the start. This scratching post needs to be tall enough that they can reach and stretch as an adult cat, with a wide base to scratch at the ground. If your kitten is using your couch you can use anti-scratch stick ons available at the petstore as a deterrent. There is also a pheromone spray or plug in called Feliway Scratch that can help deter them from this favourite area in your home. Bring them over to their scratching post and make scratching motions for them to copy you. If the kitten has decided your hands or feet are play things, try pushing the kitten away and redirecting play to a toy. Toys are no fun if they are just lying there expecting the kitten to play by itself. Cats are wired for motion. If it moves, they want to attack it. They want you to pick up the toy and play with them!

Grooming

You will likely never have to bathe your kitten or cat. They are fastidious groomers taking daily “showers” by licking themselves all over. It is helpful to reduce the incidence of hairballs by helping your cat groom itself using either a “slicker brush” for short haired cats or a wire comb for long haired cats. Long haired cats form matts if not brushed out. Using a slicker brush on a long haired cat will not get to the undercoat so a comb is needed to comb out the knots. If the matts get out of control, the cat may need to come in to be shaved. Sticking your kitten or cat in the bathtub is done at your own risk and may result in scratches and destroyed shower curtains in an attempt to escape the tub. They do not like water! We recommend you start trimming your kitten’s nails right away. We can show you how to do it properly at your first visit. Starting young and doing it correctly will prevent battles as the kitten grows up!

Indoors/Outdoors

We recommend kittens and cats be kept indoors their whole life. Neighbourhood cats who are allowed to roam off property almost always end up at the vet for cat fight wounds, bite wounds from other animals or getting hit by a car. They may also become food for coyotes.

If the kitten is never shown the outside world, by the time they are 6 months old they are usually too timid to venture outdoors. If you would like to expose your cat to the great outdoors, we suggest putting them on a leash and harness and being present while they explore your backyard. In this instance fleas and intestinal parasites may be your only concern.

For more environmental enrichment tips please visit:

[Enrichment Ideas for Your Cat \(thesprucepets.com\)](http://thesprucepets.com)

