

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - KITTENS

### Health Questions

**What should I feed my kitten?** When you first bring your kitten home feed her on the same food she has been used to. A sudden change of diet combined with the stress of adapting to a new home can cause stomach upsets and diarrhoea. You can then gradually introduce your preferred diet by mixing it with the kitten's usual food. Kittens have small stomachs and have to be fed little and often. Fresh drinking water should be available at all times but we don't advise that give your kitten cow's milk as it can cause diarrhoea.

Choose a high quality complete kitten food without additives and colourings. Cheaper diets are often packed with low quality ingredients, sugars and additives that can cause hyperactivity and may even cause dietary sensitivities. We are pleased to recommend foods and feeding quantities/frequencies for your particular kitten.

**Should I vaccinate my kitten?** We aren't under any obligation to vaccinate our cats – but it's something we recommend because it will protect them from serious illness such as feline infectious enteritis and feline influenza. The first injection in the course is given at 9 weeks old and a second at about 12 weeks. Your kitten should be kept away from other (unvaccinated) cats and stay indoors until at least a week after the second injection to ensure maximum protection. See fact sheet 'Cat Vaccinations'.

**Should I treat my kitten for worms?** Worms can damage your kitten's health – they will stop her absorbing all the vital nutrients in her food and can actually damage the gut. They can cause diarrhoea, bleeding into the gut, weight loss, vomiting and general ill-health.

The main risk to your kitten comes from two types of worm, the roundworm and the tapeworm. Roundworms can be transmitted to kittens through their mother's milk. Tapeworms mature in your kitten's gut if a flea is ingested.

Kittens should be treated for worms every fortnight until they're 12 weeks old, monthly until six months of age, then onto an adult worming regime suitable for her lifestyle. See fact sheet 'Cat Worms'.

**What about fleas?** We recommend protecting your kitten from fleas, especially if she goes outside or meets other animals. Fleas cause intense discomfort, irritation and allergies in your kitten, and bites and allergies in you. Fleas can also spread tapeworms to your cat. See fact sheet 'Cat Fleas'.

Traditional flea preparations - sprays, shampoos and collars - can contain substances that are potentially toxic to kittens and may not be very effective. We recommend getting flea treatment directly from a vet to ensure the product is both effective and safe for kittens.

**Should I neuter my kitten?** Unless you want to breed from your cat in the future, it's a good idea to neuter. A male cat can be castrated from five months of age. Neutering will reduce the likelihood that he will spray indoors to mark his territory. He will also spend less time roaming in search of mates and thus has less of a chance of him crossing busy roads or getting into fights.

A female kitten needs to be spayed to prevent unwanted kittens and can be done from five months of age. She does not need to have a litter before she is spayed. Spaying has no harmful effects and removes the stress on both you and your cat brought on by calling, pregnancy, birth and the care and rehoming of kittens.

**Should I groom my kitten?** Regular grooming great for your cat, especially long haired breeds, and it also helps build a bond between the two of you. Introduce grooming sessions when your kitten is calm – make it a soothing process.

### **Behaviour & Home Routine**

**How do I toilet-train my kitten?** Kittens will often have already learnt to use a litter tray by copying their mum. You may just need to show your new kitten where the litter tray is and place her in the tray after she wakes up from a sleep, after meals, or when the kitten is sniffing, scratching or beginning to crouch and looks as if it is about to go! If your kitten is inclined to mess elsewhere in the house, confine him to one room with a litter tray until he learns to use it regularly.

Place the tray in a quiet accessible corner where your kitten will not be disturbed, and away from food and water bowls. The litter tray should be kept clean and emptied regularly. Some disinfectants (like Dettol) which go cloudy in water are toxic to cats, so use only hot water and detergent when cleaning. When your kitten starts to go outside more often, gradually move the litter tray towards the door. A few handfuls of cat litter from the tray spread onto well dug soil in the garden will help make the transition to toileting outside.

**When can I let my kitten go outside?** Your kitten should stay inside until a week after the second injection in her primary course of vaccinations. Once protected and she has become used to life in the house, you can start to let your kitten go outside. Choose a dry day and a quiet time and accompany your kitten outside, allowing her to explore. It is best not to leave your kitten outside alone until she's at least 6 months old when she'll be more able to keep herself safe around 'streetwise' adult cats in the neighbourhood.

### **Should my kitten wear a collar?**

The first thing to consider is whether your cat really needs to wear a collar. Some people need to attach magnetic or electronic keys to a collar to give the cat access through the cat flap. Others want to have some form of visual identification (in addition to a microchip – see fact sheet 'microchipping'), or a bell to warn garden birds of an approaching predator!

However, wearing a collar for the sake of ornamentation or it could be argued, just for flea control when there are other very effective methods available, should be considered very carefully. There are potential dangers and few merits.

If you decide that you would like your cat to wear a collar, choose a safety collar with a snap-apart plastic fastening which will break if the cat gets caught up. When introducing a collar to your kitten – 5 months old is a good time - remember that they may panic and are very good at turning themselves inside out to get the collar off - they are particularly likely to get caught up by the collar. Only let your kitten wear the collar when supervised and remove it when the kitten is not being watched. The kitten will then get used to the collar gradually ready for when it's worn on a more permanent basis to go outdoors.