

# General Cat Care

## **BEHAVIOR**

Tigers, lions, bobcats, mountain lions and domestic cats are all related. Cats have been domesticated for more than 5,000 years, since human beings began to farm and needed cats to control rodents at home and in grain storage areas.

## **Before You Bring Your Cat Home**

You will need food, food dish, water bowl, interactive toys, brush, comb, safety cat collar, scratching post, litter and litter box.

## **Feeding**

An adult cat should be fed one large or two smaller meals each day. Kittens from 6 to 12 weeks need to be fed four times a day. Kittens from three to six months need to be fed three times a day. You can either feed specific meals, throwing away any leftover canned food after 30 minutes or free-feed dry food (keeping food out all the time).

Feed your cat a high-quality, brand-name kitten or cat food (avoid generic brands) two to three times a day. Kittens can be fed human baby food for a short time if they won't eat kitten food softened by soaking in warm water. Use turkey or chicken baby food made for children six months and older. Gradually mix with cat food. Cow's milk is not necessary and can cause diarrhea in kittens and cats. Provide fresh, clean water at all times. Wash and refill water bowls daily.

## **Grooming**

Most cats stay relatively clean and rarely need a bath, but they do need to be brushed or combed. Frequent brushing helps keep your cat's coat clean, reduces the amount of shedding and cuts down on the incidence of hairballs.

## **Handling**

To pick up your cat, place one hand behind the front legs and another under the hindquarters. Lift gently. Never pick up a cat by the scruff of the neck (behind the ears) or by the front legs without supporting the rear end.

## **Housing**

Cats should have a clean, dry place of their own in the house. Line your cat's bed with a soft, warm blanket or towel. Be sure to wash the bedding often. Please keep your cat indoors. If your companion animal is allowed outside, he can contract diseases, get ticks or parasites, become lost or get hit by a car, hurt in a fight or poisoned. Also, cats prey on wildlife.

## **Identification**

If allowed outdoors (again, we caution against it!), your cat needs to wear a safety collar and an ID tag. A safety collar with an elastic panel will allow your cat to break loose if the collar gets caught on something. An ID tag or an implanted microchip can help insure that your cat is returned if he or she becomes lost.

## **Litter Box**

All indoor cats need a litter box, which should be placed in a quiet, accessible location. A bathroom or utility room is a good place for your cat's box. In a multi-level home, one box per floor is recommended. Avoid moving the box unless absolutely necessary. Then do so slowly, a few inches a day. Cats won't use a messy, SMELLY litter box. Scoop solids out of the box at least once a day. Dump everything, wash with a mild detergent (don't use ammonia) and refill at least once a week, less frequently if using clumping litter. Don't use deodorants or scents in the litter or litter box (especially avoid lemon scent).

## **Play**

Cats delight in stalking imaginary prey. The best toys are those that can be made to jump and dance around and look alive. Your cat will act out her predator role by pouncing on toys instead of people's ankles. Don't use your hands or fingers as play objects with kittens. This type of play may cause a biting and scratching problem to develop as your kitten matures.

## **Scratching**

Provide your cat with a sturdy scratching post, at least 3 feet high, which allows the cat to stretch completely when scratching, and stable enough that it won't wobble when being used. It should be covered with rough material such as sisal, burlap or tree bark to further prevent household destruction. Cats also like scratching pads. To train a cat to use a post or pad, rub your hands on the scratching surface and then gently rub the kitty's paws on the surface. When the cat starts to scratch furniture or rugs, gently say no and lure her over to the scratching post. Praise your cat for using the scratching post or pad. A sprinkle of catnip once or twice a month will keep your cat interested in it.

## **HEALTH**

Your cat should see the veterinarian at least once a year for an examination and annual shots, and immediately if she is sick or injured.

### **Ear Mites**

These tiny parasites are a common problem that can be transmitted from cat to cat. If your cat is scratching at his ears or shaking his head, he may be infested with ear mites. You will need to call for a veterinary appointment, as your cat's ears will need to be thoroughly cleaned before medication is dispensed.

### **Feline Urological Syndrome (FUS)**

Both males and females can develop this lower urinary inflammation, which is also called Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD). Signs of FUS include frequent trips to the litter box, crying, blood in the urine and straining to urinate. If your male cat looks "constipated" he may have a urethral obstruction (he can't urinate). This can be fatal if not treated quickly. Urethral blockages are rare in females. About 5 percent of cats are affected with FUS. Special diets may help prevent this condition.

### **Fleas and Ticks**

Fleas are a problem that should be taken seriously. These tiny parasites feed off of your pet, transmit tapeworms and irritate the skin. Carefully check your cat once a week for fleas and ticks. If there are fleas on your cat, there will be fleas in your house. You may need to use flea bombs or premise-control sprays and treat all animals in your house. Make sure that any sprays, powders or shampoos you use are safe for cats and that all products are compatible if used together. Cats die every year due to being treated improperly with flea and tick control products. Consult your veterinarian. There are several new methods of flea and tick control.

### **Medicines and Poisons**

Tylenol is FATAL and aspirin can also be FATAL to a cat! Only use medications prescribed by your veterinarian. Keep rat poison or other rodenticides away from your cat. Call your veterinarian or The ASPCA National Animal Poison Control Center (ASPCA/APCC) for 24-hour animal poison information if you suspect your animal has ingested a poisonous substance. The numbers are: (888) 4ANI-HELP (888-426- 4435), or (900) 680-0000. A consultation fee applies.

### **Neutering**

Females should be spayed and males neutered by six months of age. Neutering a male (removing the testicles) can prevent urine spraying, decrease the urge to escape outside and look for a mate, and reduce fighting between males. Spaying a female (removing the ovaries and uterus) helps

prevent breast cancer, which can be fatal 90 percent of the time, and pyometra (uterus infection), a very serious problem in older females that must be treated with surgery and intensive medical care. Since cats can breed up to 3 times per year, it is vital that your female feline be spayed to protect her from having unwanted litters.

### **Claws**

Cats need to scratch. When a cat scratches, the old outer nail sheath is pulled off and the sharp smooth claws underneath are exposed. Cutting your cat's nails every 2 to 3 weeks will keep the nails relatively blunt and less likely to harm the arms of both humans and furniture.

### **Vaccinations**

- Vaccines protect animals and people from specific viral and bacterial infections. They are not a treatment. If your companion cat gets sick because he is not properly vaccinated, the vaccinations should be given after your pet recovers.
- Kittens should be vaccinated with a combination vaccine (called a 3 in 1) at 2, 3 and 4 months of age and then annually. This vaccine protects cats from panleukopenia (also called feline distemper), calicivirus and rhinotracheitis (flu-like viruses). If you have an unvaccinated cat older than 4 months of age, he needs a series of two vaccinations given 2 to 3 weeks apart, followed by a yearly vaccination.
- There is a vaccine available for feline leukemia virus (FeLV). This is one of the two immune system viruses (retroviruses) that infect cats. The other is feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). There is no vaccine available for FIV. Cats can be infected with either virus for months to years without any indication that they are carrying a fatal virus. You cannot look at cats or kittens and know if they are infected—a blood test is necessary. All cats should be tested for these viruses. Infections can be transmitted at birth from the mother or by being bitten by an infected cat. Neither virus can infect humans. Many outdoor and stray cats and kittens carry this infection. Because of the fatal nature of these diseases, you should not expose the cats already living in your home by taking in untested cats or kittens. To be safe, keep your cat indoors, but if your cat does go outside, he should be vaccinated against feline leukemia virus. No vaccine is 100 percent effective.

### **Worms**

Kittens and cats can be infected with several types of worms. A microscopic fecal examination can detect if these worms are present. If deworming is necessary, it should be done under a veterinarian's direction.

### **Additional Information:**

- The average life span of an indoor cat is 13 to 17 years.
- Many houseplants and garden shrubs are poisonous to cats. For a list of these dangers, please write to: The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, 1717 South Philo Road, Suite 36, Urbana, IL. 61802. The cost of a reference guide is \$15.
- Keep antifreeze safely stored and away from your cat. If you suspect that your cat has been poisoned, call your veterinarian at once or the ASPCA/APCC (see HEALTH, Medicines and Poisons).
- For more information, search the cat care section on our web site: [www.aspc.org](http://www.aspc.org).
- Write to ASPCA Animal Sciences at 424 East 92nd St., New York, NY 10128 for a list of free behavioral literature.

### **Recommended Reading:**

- "ASPCA Complete Cat Care Manual"
- "ASPCA Complete Guide to Cats"

- “ASPCA Pet Care Guide for Kids— Kitten” You can order these above books by calling The ASPCA Humane Education Department at (212) 876-7700, ext. 4410.
- “Cat Love,” Pam Johnson, Storey Publishing
- “Cornell Book of Cats,” edited by Mordecai Siegal, Villard
- “From the Cat’s Point of View,” Gwen Bohnenkamp, Perfect Paws, Inc.

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