



KITTEN CARE-General information and recommendations

VACCINATIONS

Kittens receive protective antibodies from their mother through the placenta and via the colostrum which provide a temporary immunity against bacteria and viruses. These antibodies wear off between 8 and 14 weeks of age. If the maternal antibodies are high enough when a vaccine is given, they will neutralize the vaccination virus and render it ineffective. Vaccinations do not give immediate immunity, instead they stimulate the kitten's immune system to produce antibodies to protect against disease. To insure that the kitten develops proper immunity as soon as possible, we recommend a series of vaccinations that begin at six to eight weeks and continue until 14 to 16 weeks of age.

FVRCP is a four-in-one vaccination that includes Rhinotracheitis, Calici virus, and Panleukopenia. Panleukopenia, also called feline distemper, causes severe vomiting and diarrhea and is often fatal. Fortunately, widespread use of vaccinations in cats has made this disease rare today. The other three infectious agents are common and affect the upper respiratory tract. They cause fever, sneezing, discharge from the eyes and nose, and may lead to more severe problems such as pneumonia. Depending on the age when started, kittens should receive 2-3 vaccinations for these diseases one month apart and then every 1-3 years.

Feline Leukemia Virus: Also called Felv, it is common in cats and affects them much as the HIV virus, which causes AIDS, affects people. Kittens may be born with the virus if their mother was a Felv carrier and may appear to be healthy for many months. Felv is also transmitted through saliva from infected cats so if your kitten will be exposed to other cats it may be at risk. The Felv vaccine is not 100% effective in protecting every cat, but, because of the severity of the disease and the high incidence in Yolo County, we recommend it if your kitten will be exposed to other cats. We recommend having your kitten tested for the leukemia virus before starting the vaccine series. Two vaccinations starting at nine weeks of age should be given three weeks apart and boosted yearly.

Rabies is transmitted through a bite from an infected animal. In California the primary sources of infection are skunks and bats. Rabies can infect man as well and is always fatal, so it is a good idea to vaccinate all cats, even if they will be indoors. The vaccine should be given at four months of age, and boosted every year.

PARASITES



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In Yolo County, we commonly see several different types of parasites. These parasites include roundworms, coccidia, tapeworms and giardia. It is very important to have your kitten's stool checked with repeated fecal examinations so that we can treat with the appropriate medications.

Roundworms are the most commonly seen worms in kittens. This is because they are transmitted via the placenta and through the mother's milk. The mother often harbors the roundworm larvae in a dormant state and has no side effects from them. When she becomes pregnant the larvae come out of their dormancy, develop and can infect the fetuses and newly born kittens. As a result, about 85% of the kittens we see have roundworms. These parasites can cause diarrhea, vomiting, weight loss and a dry, dull hair coat, or sometimes no signs at all. Usually we recommend prophylactic deworming even if the fecal is negative as the roundworm lifecycle has a tissue phase that will not be present in fecal examination. The most recent recommendations from the Center for Disease Control include deworming at 4, 6, 8, and 10 weeks of age. The roundworm parasite can rarely infect humans and has been reported most often in children because of the closer contact and increased chance of fecal-oral transmission. We also advise keeping fecal material cleaned up as much as possible.

Coccidia is a bacterial parasite that infects the intestinal tract. Symptoms include diarrhea, malaise, vomiting, and occasional loss of appetite. The diarrhea is often light colored and contains mucous and blood streaks. This parasite is diagnosed with a fecal examination and treated with medication. This is very common in kittens.

Tapeworms are perhaps the most common parasite seen and can potentially be transmitted to humans. The common tapeworm, Dipylidium caninum, is transmitted to cats via the ingestion of fleas. Therefore it is very important to keep fleas under control to prevent this parasite. The owner most often sees the parasite as little "rice" grains crawling out of the rectum or on the stool. Treatment is by injection or tablet medication. This parasite has a very short life cycle and the animal can be re-infected in as little as three weeks if flea control is not done at the same time as treatment. People become infected with this disease by accidentally eating fleas, so it is not a good idea to squash fleas between your fingernails and then go eat a sandwich without thorough hand washing. We recommend a flea comb and killing the live fleas in isopropyl alcohol or with flea spray.

Giardia is a protozoan parasite that cats get by ingesting infected water. This parasite can cause intestinal gas and watery, light-colored stool that often has a strong odor. Kittens can show vomiting, diarrhea and lethargy. We see this parasite frequently in Yolo County and believe that many of the lakes and waterways are infected. This parasite may be contagious to humans, so we encourage frequent hand washing after handling your kitten or cleaning the litter box. This parasite is often quite difficult to diagnose and we need to do repeated fecal examinations to check for it. It is essential to have a very fresh fecal sample to diagnose this parasite.



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Occasionally, we will perform a rectal swab to identify giardia. Treatment with medication usually clears the infection but sometimes needs to be repeated.

DIET

Kittens should be fed a kitten food until they are full-grown, usually about nine months of age. The best quality cat foods such as Science Diet, Iams (Eukanuba), or Nature's Recipe are available through veterinarians, pet stores or feed stores. These foods are more expensive, but are made with higher quality ingredients, are more digestible, and are formulated to have the optimal balance of nutrients. If you do feed a grocery store brand food, choose a name brand name food that has a label certifying it has met AAFCO standards. Many cats are prone to urinary tract problems that may be caused by diets with a high level of magnesium. Feeding higher quality diets helps reduce the chance of your cat ever developing this problem. Cats should eat at least some dry food regularly to help reduce tartar build-up on their teeth. Some cats may maintain their optimal weight having food available to them at all times, while others will gain weight readily and need to have food rationed by their owner. Use the guidelines on the package for how much to feed but beware that many of them suggest too much. Changing diets very often may produce a finicky eater and may cause digestive upset so it is best to stay with the same diet all the time. Many kittens do not digest cow's milk well and may develop diarrhea from it so we do not recommend it.

SPAYING AND NEUTERING

We feel the best time to spay or neuter a cat is between five and eight months of age. Young animals tolerate the procedure very well and it has the most effect at eliminating the undesirable behaviors associated with intact cats. There are many good reasons to spay or neuter. It helps to control overpopulation by preventing unwanted pregnancies. It reduces urine marking and spraying, especially in male cats. It also helps to reduce fighting and roaming which can lead to bite wounds, abscesses and injuries such as being hit by a car. Spaying eliminates heat behavior in the female including crying, vocalizing and posturing.

IDENTIFICATION

If your cat will be going outside, it should wear some type of identification. Collars with a tag may get caught on something so it is best to use the breakaway type or a collar with an ID plate riveted onto it.

Another option is permanent identification provided by a tiny microchip implanted in your cat. The microchip, approximately the size of a grain of rice (2 X 11 mm), is programmed with a unique, unalterable code that can be identified with a hand-held scanner. These scanners are in use at thousands of veterinarian's offices, animal shelters, and animal-control agencies around the country. We use the HomeAgain microchip.



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When your lost pet is brought to one of these locations, the HomeAgain identification number is retrieved and called in to the AKC Companion Animal Recovery Program. This database is accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, through a central 800 number. You are contacted immediately, and every possible step will be taken to reunite you and your pet.

GROOMING

We recommend that you start with basic grooming between six and nine weeks of age. Get your kitten used to being brushed or combed and make it an enjoyable experience for both of you.

If your kitten has long hair it helps to start combing or brushing at a young age. Long hair can be prone to matting into tight knots, especially behind the ears, on their underside, and around the hind end. Cats that groom themselves a lot may be prone to hairballs which are wads of hair that form in their stomach and lead to retching or vomiting. Combing out loose hair and giving a hairball medication such as Laxatone or Petlax once or twice weekly can help reduce hairball problems.

It is also recommended that you check your kitten's mouth, ears and claws weekly. Getting your kitten used to having its teeth brushed with a small soft toothbrush will help to prevent dental problems in later years. If your kitten's ears appear dirty, we can clean the ears and test for ear mites. Kittens often develop ear mite infestations that are treatable with medication. We can show you how to trim your kitten's sharp little toenails and recommend you do it weekly to prevent scratches on you and your furniture.

Congratulations on your new kitten! If you have any questions or problems please feel free to discuss them during the office call or phone Acorn Veterinary Clinic at 753-7580.

Thank you for letting us care for your new kitten!

**Help, My Cat is Destroying my Furniture!
Tips and Options to Keep You and Your Cat Happy**



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Scratching is as natural for cats as eating and sleeping. A cat will scratch to keep its claws clean and sharp. Unfortunately, your cat doesn't know the difference between your custom-made couch and its scratching post unless you teach your cat! It's best to begin this training while your cat is still a kitten, but don't despair if your adult cat is the culprit – there are many options and alternative.

Scratching Posts and other Cat Furniture

The first step is to determine what your cat's favorite items to scratch. Is it your prize Oriental carpet? Your brand new couch? Note the type of material your cat prefers – wood, carpet, velour, leather, cardboard, etc. Also note if your cat prefers to scratch on horizontal or vertical surfaces. You need this information in order to provide alternative scratching spots for your cat.

Once you know what your cat likes, it's time for a visit to your local pet store. Look for scratching alternatives that may appeal to your cat – posts if your cat likes vertical spots, flat scratchers if your cat prefers horizontal. Most scratching posts are carpet-covered, but some have rope or other substances on part. If you choose a scratching post, be sure to get one sturdy enough to support your cat's vigorous scratching. Your cat will very quickly learn not to use the post if it falls over! Most pet stores also have flat, cardboard scratchers with catnip added. These are inexpensive, disposable, and appeal to many cats. If you're really feeling generous, you can get a kitty tower with scratching spots, swings, and many ledges for your cat to climb. These are great for multi-cat households.

After seeing the alternatives, you may choose to custom-build a scratching spot for your cat. Use what you've learned about your cat's preferred scratching substrates to make this ideal for your pet. You may simply obtain a hunk of wood with the bark still attached. Or you could make an elaborate kitty tower using lumber scraps and old carpeting. Many cats actually prefer the backside of carpeting, so be creative! As with the pre-manufactured items, make sure your homemade scratcher is sturdy and safe for your cat.

What about cost? Remember that even the most expensive, elaborate kitty tower probably costs less than a new couch. Consider this an investment for the lifetime of your cat – you can always replace carpeting on the scratching post with cheap scraps, but what about the carpet in your living room? You are more likely to be successful if you choose your purchases based on your cat's preferences, not the price tag. Also, consider the alternatives: more pets end up in animal shelters for behavioral problems than any other reason.





Once you purchase a collection of scratching alternatives, the fun begins! Scatter these throughout your house. The best locations are where your pet already is scratching – in the living room next to the couch, on top of your cat’s favorite corner of Oriental carpet. But what if this location ruins your decorating theme? So will your cat’s inappropriate scratching! Your cat will continue to return to locations it has scratched in the past, so by letting your cat choose the location of the scratching alternative, you maximize your chances for success. You may be able to gradually move the scratcher to a hidden corner after you get your cat trained. You can also put an alternative in other locations you cat frequents.

Now you must train your cat to use the appropriate scratching alternative and to leave your furniture alone. First, make the alternative appealing. If you cat likes catnip, sprinkle it over the scratcher. You can put cat treats on the scratcher to catch your cat’s interest. Also, reward any attention your cat pays to this new toy, even if your cat doesn’t begin scratching yet. It’s probably best not to take your cat’s paws and “scratch” for your pet since this may upset some cats. What if your cat completely ignores the new alternative? You can encourage your cat to notice it by doing some favorite activity next to or on top of the scratcher – brushing if your cat likes to be brushed, food treats, or attention time.

Now that the alternative scratching sites are in place, you can make the inappropriate sites unappealing. There are many ways to do this. If possible, you can block your cat’s access by covering the site with the new scratcher or with an old towel or sheet. Some cats are persistent, however, so you may need to be more creative. Some ideas to cover the inappropriate site: carpet runners with the pointy feet turned upward, double-sided tape, aluminum foil, or “scat” mats (available at pet stores, these deliver a mild shock when touched). You can also try mechanical ways to deter your cat – a stack of empty soda cans in front of the area, a child’s toy that will move or make noise when disturbed. It’s best to choose a deterrent that is not dependent on you, since your cat will quickly learn it can only scratch when you’re gone!

Nail Trims

You can also trim your cat’s nails to minimize damage done. It’s easiest to train a kitten to accept having their feet handled and nails trimmed, but you can teach your adult cat as well. If you’re concerned about trying this on your own, your veterinarian or groomer can schedule a time to teach you. Remember, take your time and never do more than your cat will tolerate. Begin by teaching your cat to have its feet handled. When your cat is relaxed and happy, stroke its feet. If this is acceptable, begin to pick up its feet and press on the tops of the toes to extend the claws. If you sense that your cat is losing patience, stop and reward its good behavior with a special food treat or lots of love and petting. Only spend one or two minutes on these activities each session. Once your cat is used to you handling its feet on a regular basis, extend the claw and look closely. Most cat claws are clear and curved, with a pink line close to the paw. When you cut the nail, just take off the tip of the claw. You may notice nail material peeling off the sides of the nail. This is normal; when your cat scratches, it actually removes this dead nail tissue. Avoid the pink area since this is where the blood vessels and nerves are located. If you cut into this area, your cat will bleed and it will hurt! If you do cut into this area, you can use





direct pressure, corn starch, or Kwik-Stop (styptic powder) to stop the bleeding. You can buy special nail trimmers for cats, or simply use a pair of human nail trimmers. Again, go slowly and stop before your cat's patience runs out. Don't be surprised if at first you can only trim 1 nail each session. Always reward your cat's good behavior!

Nail Caps

What about those cats that just will not leave the Oriental carpet alone? You've tried several different types of scratching alternatives with no success. You trim your cat's nails. You've tried to make the carpet unappealing. If none of these works for your cat, a product called Soft Paws is available. These are clear or colored nail caps that are glued onto your cat's nails. We carry this product at Acorn and can sell you a kit to take home, teach you to apply the caps, or do it for you. These do have to be changed every 2-3 months as your cat's nails grow. Some cats will remove the caps before this time is up; you can simply reapply the caps as your cat removes them and most cats learn to accept the caps. Nail caps do take some time for your cat to get used to, so we do recommend using them for at least 2 months to determine if they will work for your pet. They won't stop your cat from scratching, but instead of a sharp point, your cat will have a smooth plastic tip to its claws. We do recommend that cats wearing Soft Paws become indoor-only cats, since they cannot defend themselves with their claws or easily climb away from danger.

Declawing

This is the surgical removal of the first digit of the toe and should only be considered in extreme circumstances. It is permanent and nonreversible. The recovery process is painful. A declawed cat must be an indoor cat, since it cannot defend itself or climb trees without nails. Some cats may begin to bite more frequently since they cannot defend themselves with their claws. Your cat will continue to show scratching behavior, but won't have claws to do damage. We view this surgery as a last resort.

The key to success is to pay attention to your cat's preferences. Remember that there are no overnight cures to inappropriate scratching, but with patience, most cats can be taught alternatives. If you have just adopted a new kitten, you can teach your cat appropriate scratching behavior from day one. If you have an older cat, be patient and persistent. Good luck!



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