General Kitten Care

Have you recently added a feline friend to your family? Congratulations! We know you’ll be thrilled to have your new kitten in your home. If you are considering adopting a kitten, please visit your local shelter. We encourage you to browse our directory of adoptable kittens in your area or use our shelter finder to start your search.

Read on for useful tips for new kitten parents, and for those looking to brush up on their pet care skills.

Handling

To pick up your kitten, place one hand behind the front legs and another under the hindquarters. Lift gently. Never pick up a kitten by the scruff of the neck or by the front legs.

Housing

Your pet should have her own clean, dry place in your home to sleep and rest. Line your kitten's bed with a soft, warm blanket or towel. Be sure to wash the bedding often. Please keep your kitten indoors. Outdoor kittens do not live as long as indoor kittens. Outdoor kittens are at risk of trauma from cars, or from fights with other kittens, raccoons and free-roaming dogs. Coyotes are known to eat kittens. Outdoor kittens are more likely to become infested with fleas or ticks, as well as contract infectious diseases.

Feeding

We recommend purchasing high-quality, brand-name kitten or kitten food. Your veterinarian will be able to assess your new kitten or kitten and determine the best diet. Factors such as age, activity level and health make a difference in what and how much a kitten should eat.

Kittens require taurine, an essential amino acid, for heart and eye health. The food you choose should be balanced for the life stage of your kitten or kitten. Properly balanced foods will contain taurine.

You will need to provide fresh, clean water at all times, and wash and refill your kitten’s water bowls daily.

Treats should be no more than 5-10% of the diet.

Many people feed baby food to a kitten or kitten who is refusing food or not feeling well. Please read labels carefully: If the baby food contains onion or garlic powder, your pet could be poisoned.

Take your pet to your veterinarian if signs of anorexia, diarrhea, vomiting or lethargy continue for more than two days.

Please visit our People Foods to Avoid Feeding Your Pets page for a list of off-limits items, as well as our Kitten Nutrition Tips page for more information.

Grooming

Most kittens stay relatively clean and rarely need a bath, but you should brush or comb your kitten regularly. Frequent brushing helps keep your kitten's coat clean, reduces the amount of shedding and cuts down on the incidence of hairballs. Please visit our Kitten Grooming Tips page for more information.

Identification

If allowed outdoors, your kitten must wear a safety collar and an ID tag. A safety collar with an elastic panel will allow your kitten to break loose if the collar gets caught on something. And for both indoor and outdoor kittens, an ID tag or an implanted microchip can help ensure that your kitten is returned if he or she becomes lost.

Litter Box

All indoor kittens need a litter box, which should be placed in a quiet, accessible location. In a multi-level home, one box per floor is recommended. Avoid moving the box unless absolutely necessary, but if you must do so, move the box just a few inches per day. Keep in mind that kittens won't use a messy, smelly litter box, so scoop solid wastes out of the box at least once a day. Dump everything, wash with a mild detergent and refill at least once a week; you can do this less frequently if using clumping litter. Don't use ammonia, deodorants or scents, especially lemon, when cleaning the litter box. If your kitten will not use a litterbox, please consult with your veterinarian. Sometimes refusal to use a litter box is based on a medical condition that required treatment. Please visit our Litter Box Problems page for more information.

Medicines and Poisons

Never give your kitten medication that has not been prescribed by a veterinarian. If you suspect that your animal has ingested a poisonous substance, call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center for 24-hour animal poison information at (888) 426-4435.

Scratching

Kittens need to scratch! When a kitten scratches, the old outer nail sheath is pulled off and the sharp, smooth claws underneath are exposed. Cutting your kitten’s nails every two to three weeks will keep them relatively blunt and less likely to harm the arms of both humans and furniture. Provide your kitten with a sturdy scratching post, at least three feet high. The post should also be stable enough that it won't wobble during use, and should be covered with rough material such as sisal, burlap or tree bark. Many kittens also like scratching pads.

Health

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

Spaying and Neutering

Female kittens should be spayed and male kittens neutered by five months of age. Please visit our Spay/Neuter Your Pet page to learn more.

Vaccinations

Your veterinarian will make recommendations based on your kitten's age and health. Please visit our Pet Vaccinations page to learn more.

Kitten Supply Checklist

Premium-brand kitten food

Food dish

Water bowl

Interactive toys

Brush

Comb

Safety kitten collar with ID tag

Scratching post or scratching pad

Litter box and litter

Kitten carrier

Kitten bed or box with warm blanket or towel