

Caring for Your Kitten

To the proud new “parent”

Congratulations on the arrival of your new kitten. Owning a kitten is a big responsibility. We are trained in all aspects of caring for kittens, and would like you to think of us as your best source of advice. We are here to help, and answer any questions that you may have.

These notes outline the basics of how to care for your kitten. Health care issues including vaccination, intestinal worming, heartworm, flea control and desexing are all discussed. Other things such as diet, socialisation and training are also very important. If you would like more information on any of the topics in these notes, we have a range of more detailed information sheets on various topics – available as handouts or on our web site. If you have other questions don't hesitate to give us a call, or make a list and ask us at your next visit.

The first year of your kitten's life will be a lot of fun for you both – so enjoy it!

From the Vets and Nursing staff of Macarthur Veterinary Group



Vaccination:

Vaccinations are essential to protect your kitten from a variety of serious viral diseases. *Cat flu* (*rhinotracheitis* and *calicivirus*) causes sneezing, discharge from the eyes and nose, fever, mouth ulceration and inappetance. Early infection can lead to life-long snuffling and resurfacing of the virus during times of stress. *Enteritis* (*panleucopaenia*) is highly contagious, causing severe vomiting and diarrhoea. It is often fatal. *Feline Immunodeficiency Virus* (*FIV - Feline AIDS*) is spread through breeding and fighting and can cause a variety of symptoms resulting from a poor immune system. *Feline Leukaemia Virus* also affects the immune system and increases the risk of developing life threatening leukaemia and other cancers. Feline leukaemia is spread through sharing food bowls and mutual grooming.

Vaccination is essential, as it's the only way to protect your kitten against these diseases. We routinely vaccinate all cats with an F3 + FIV vaccination.

Your kitten requires a series of four (4) vaccinations to build his/her immunity

- 1st at 8 weeks F3
- 2nd at 12 weeks F3 + FIV
- 3rd at 14 weeks FIV
- 4th at 16 weeks F3 + FIV

An FIV vaccine is not essential for cats that will be confined indoors 100% of the time.

An additional Feline Leukaemia vaccination may be recommended for cats in high risk situations (breeding catteries or those cats sharing a household with an infected cat).

It is advised not to allow your kitten outside until at least two (2) weeks after the final vaccination, as full immunity is not gained until this stage.

Heartworm:

Heartworm infection is a serious disease causing damage to your cat's heart and lungs. Whilst cats may be less likely to develop adult heartworm compared to dogs, they are far more sensitive to infection and it is more difficult to diagnose. Infection with larval stages of heartworm causes severe inflammation in the lungs resulting in coughing, asthma and sometimes death.

Heartworm is spread by mosquitoes, so **your cat could become infected without even leaving the house.**

The most effective way to prevent heartworm is with a convenient once-a-month treatment applied to the back of the neck, for life. We recommend **Advocate** which also controls fleas and most intestinal worms. Advocate kills immature heartworm before they reach your cat's heart and lungs.

Intestinal Worms:

Young kittens are very prone to intestinal worms - most kittens are born with them, and they'll pick up more from eggs contaminating the ground. The major intestinal worms are roundworm, hookworm, and tapeworm. These must be controlled to prevent problems such as vomiting, diarrhoea, weight loss and anaemia. Some intestinal worms can be transmitted to people, and can even cause blindness in children.

If you are already using **Advocate** monthly, alternate this with a **Milbemax** tablet until 12 weeks of age then simply use a tapeworm product (such as **Popantel**) every 3 months for life.

If not using **Advocate** we recommend that kittens be given a worming paste when very young (such as **Felax Paste**) or an allwormer tablet (such as **Milbemax**)

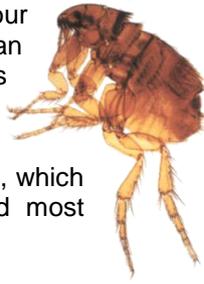
- every two (2) weeks until 12 weeks of age, then
- monthly until six (6) months of age, then
- every three (3) months for the rest of its life.

Always weigh your kitten prior to worming and be sure to give the correct dose.

Flea Control:

Fleas cause irritation, skin allergies and in large numbers can suck enough blood to make your kitten anaemic. Good flea control requires an integrated approach, not just killing the fleas on your kitten, but in the environment too.

We recommend **Advocate** – an easy to apply spot-on liquid on the back of the neck, which also protects cats against heartworm and most intestinal worms – except tapeworm.



Feeding:

A high-quality balanced diet is very important, especially for a growing kitten. Your kitten has different nutritional requirements than an adult cat, including extra protein for muscle development and calcium for bone growth. We recommend **Royal Canin Growth** Diets - a premium range of kitten food – with a money-back guarantee!

Kittens should be fed 3-4 small meals a day until 4 months of age, then twice daily until fully grown. At least 75% of your kitten's diet should come from a complete balanced commercial diet. With a proper balanced diet, calcium and vitamin supplements are unnecessary and we advise against using them. Make sure that your kitten always has access to clean water and change it daily. Kittens do not need to drink milk. However if you wish to provide milk in addition to water, please use a special pet milk. Cow's milk contains too much lactose for cats and can cause diarrhoea.

Dental Health is also very important. *Royal Canin* foods reduce the risk of dental disease, but even that may not be enough. The best preventative is to brush your cat's teeth every day – but this may not always be practical. Another option is feed *Greenies* twice a day, or give raw bones 2-3 times per week. Raw chicken necks are an ideal choice for most cats.

What NOT to feed: Due to an improper balance of nutrients it is not recommended to feed human food ONLY diets to cats (up to 50 ingredients are required to make a nutritionally balanced diet derived from human food alone). Meat ONLY diets are also imbalanced and severely lacking in calcium (essential for healthy bone development). Commercial cat foods are deficient in taurine. Large quantities of preserved "pet meats" (such as kangaroo meat) can result in vitamin deficiencies and cooked bones can cause intestinal obstructions.

Zoonotic Diseases:

Zoonoses are those diseases potentially transmitted from animals to people. Children are particularly susceptible. Common zoonotic diseases include roundworm, hookworm, ringworm, mites, fleas, toxoplasmosis, cat scratch fever and infections from bite wounds. To reduce the risks it is important to worm and flea your cat regularly (simply worming your family won't help!), and practice good basic hygiene - wash hands after handling pets especially before eating, don't allow cats to lick your face or open wounds, wear gloves when disposing of faeces, clean litter trays daily, don't feed your cat raw meat (especially pork) or allow it to hunt, cover sandpits to prevent cats using them as a litter tray, wear gloves when gardening and handle fractious cats with care. Ask us for more info, or visit the *Zoonoses* page under *General Pet Care* on our website.

Microchip and Registration:

Microchips are a safe and permanent way of identifying your cat. A very small electronic chip is implanted (through a needle) under the skin in the back of your cat's neck/shoulders. The microchip contains a series of numbers which are linked, via a central computer registry, to your personal details. If your cat is ever lost or injured, then a vet or council pound will be able to scan the cat and contact you. Microchip identification and lifetime registration is compulsory in NSW. Microchip implantation must be done by 12 weeks of age (or before the kitten is sold or changes owners – whichever comes first). Registration is handled by the council and must be done by 6 months of age. You'll save money by desexing your cat before registration. It is important that whenever your address or contact details change to notify council as soon as possible.

Desexing:

Unless you're serious about breeding, then all cats, both males and females, should be desexed at 5-6 months of age. As well as stopping unwanted breeding, it makes them happier, healthier pets. There is no maximum age at which a cat can be desexed, but there are definite medical and behavioural advantages in performing the surgery early. Desexing reduces urine spraying, fighting, calling and other territorial and mating behaviours. The risk of cat fight abscesses and infectious diseases such as *Feline AIDS* is also greatly reduced.

Socialisation & Training:

Training begins as soon as you get your kitten home. Gently stroke and handle your kitten every day, including the paws, mouth and teeth. Toilet training and basic commands can be taught at an early age.

Kittens have a sensitive period of development called the socialisation period. It occurs from 3 - 14 weeks of age. It's very important to socialise your kitten with other cats and expose them to a wide variety of sights, sounds and experiences during this time. But you must also protect your kitten from exposure to contagious diseases. Ask us for more information on training.

Pet Insurance:

Veterinary bills sometimes seem high compared to bills from our doctor, dentist or pharmacist. But we rarely pay full price for our own treatment since our fees are substantially subsidised by our healthcare system.

You can also get subsidies on your pet's veterinary bills! Pet health cover can start from 30 cents a day, and can pay up to 80% of your vet bills if your pet should become sick or injured. Ask us for a brochure.

