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Congratulations on your new companion!

The Feline Owner's Handbook



Congratulations!

Congratulations on your new addition to the family!

Feline companionship is one of life's greatest gifts. This feline ownership handbook contains important information that will help you provide the best health care for your pet so you can enjoy many years together.

Your veterinarian is your partner in ensuring your pet's health is optimum. Regular examinations and a focus on preventive care will help detect and manage various health concerns.

This handbook will serve as a useful guide for general pet health. Your veterinarian will provide advice specific to your pet's unique health needs.

Preparing for your new pet

Getting a new kitten is exciting. However, it also comes with some stress as it is your kitten's first time away from their mother and littermates. Below are some things you can do to make the transition as smooth as possible.

CHECKLIST

- Nutritious food
- Fresh water bowl
- Toys
 - Felted toys or Small plush toys – You're kitten will love to pretend its prey
 - Cardboard cat scratchers
 - No Yarn or string -They are often swallowed by kittens and can lead to gastrointestinal blockages.
 - No Feather Toys – May wind up swallowed and lodged in the throat or stomach.
- Safe sleeping place (crate or other bedding)
- Cat tree/ scratching post
- Cat crate/travel carrier bag



The Importance of Regular Check Ups

1) Early disease detection

Regular check-ups provide an opportunity to detect disease/abnormalities early or prevent them. Unfortunately, pets often may appear healthy even though they have underlying illness. Heart murmurs, hernias, and dental disease are examples of ailments that are often undetected by owners but identified during a doctor's exam.

2) Nutrition counseling

Obesity is one of the most common ailments affecting pets today. Overweight pets are predisposed to other illnesses such as diabetes and joint disease. During regular check ups your veterinarian will discuss diet and your pet's body condition to ensure your pet is receiving important nutrients and their weight is optimal. Sometimes a specific weight control diet as well as regular weight checks ups are recommended.

3) Behavioural counseling

Poor pet behaviour is one of the leading causes of pet surrender. During check ups your veterinarian will ask you about any behavioural concerns and provide useful resources to assist in tackling behavioural challenges.

What happens during a wellness exam?

At the beginning of the appointment your veterinarian will ask you some questions about your pet's health. This is important to help determine if there are signs of disease present or if there are things that can be done to improve your pet's health.

The physical exam

- Your veterinarian will perform a complete nose to tail examination of your pet, including the following body systems:
 - Heart and lungs
 - Skin, haircoat, and nails
 - Eyes and ears
 - Musculoskeletal (muscle, bones, joints)
 - Nervous system
 - Abdominal palpation
 - Lymph nodes
 - Oral health assessment
 - Perineal exam (anal, rectal assessment)

Preventive screening is an important part of assessing your pet's internal health. Because many diseases only show up clinically in the later stages, screening tests can help to

identify these diseases earlier and allow for more effective management. Your veterinarian may recommend a blood, urine, and fecal sample for preventive screening.

Wellness Appointment Checklist

- Know your pet's diet (brand name of pet food and the amount fed per day)
- Bring a fresh fecal sample to the appointment for parasite testing.
- Write down your concerns or questions to ask.

How often should my pet be examined?

Cats less than 7 years of age should be examined a minimum of once per year (annually)

Cats 7 years and older should be examined every 6 months

Remember, a cat's life span is much shorter than a human and so a lot can change in 6 months time.

Vaccination Protocol

At each vaccination visit, the Veterinarian will examine your new kitten. An exam is required before any vaccines are given to ensure your kitten is in good health. This decreases the likelihood of complication or vaccine reactions. Kittens grow very quickly, and new problems can arise rapidly.



Ideally the first vaccination should be given at **8 weeks** of age. It can be given between 6-10 weeks. This vaccine will be given 2 more times to help prevent 4 harmful viruses. Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia and Chlamydia (FVRCCP)

The second vaccinations should be given at **12 weeks** of age. This is a booster of the first vaccine (FVRCCP) as well as a Feline Leukemia vaccination (if your cat will be at higher risk; multi cat household or going outdoors).

The third and last vaccinations should be given at **16 weeks** of age. This is a booster for FVRCCP and Feline Leukemia. The rabies vaccination is also given.

All vaccinations should be assessed yearly. The vaccine schedule will vary with the lifestyle/exposure of your cat.

Diseases and why we vaccinate against them

Feline Distemper or Panleukopenia (Viral Disease)

- What does it affect? Intestinal tract and Bone marrow.
- How is it spread? Airborne. Contact with an infected animal or places where the infected animal has been
- Symptoms: Diarrhea, vomiting, severe dehydration, fever and death.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) (Viral Infection)

- What does it affect? Weakens cat's immune system. Similar in nature to HIV in humans
- How is it Spread? Present in bodily fluids, typically passed by direct biting. FIV positive kittens may be born of infected mothers.
- Symptoms: Swollen glands, fever, depression, loss of appetite, weight loss, mouth sores and recurrent infections.

Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) (Viral Disease)

- What does it affect? Interacts with kitten's immune system
- How is it Spread? Most common route of infection is oronasal. Kittens may be infected before birth.
- Symptoms: Rough haircoat, fever, loss of appetite, neurological signs, laboured breathing, or distended abdomen. Infected cats may not show any signs for a lengthy period of time and then suddenly turn ill.

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) (Viral Infection)

- What does it affect? Inhibits the immune system. Results in various types of cancer and other chronic diseases. Can be a fatal infection.
- How is it Spread? Present in bodily fluids. Typically passed by direct contact through licking, biting, sneezing.
- Symptoms: Depression, Fever, loss of appetite, anemia, swollen neck glands and recurring infections. Can be infected for long periods of time before showing symptoms.

Rabies

- What does it affect? Infection of the central nervous system. Always fatal.
- How is it Spread? Through the bite of an infected animal. Humans can be affected.
- Symptoms: Two phases of disease:
 - Excitatory phase/furious rabies: restless, irritable, unprovoked biting, sensitivity to noise.
 - Paralytic phase/dumb rabies: Paralysis, cramps and swallowing difficulties.

Upper Respiratory Disease (Including rhinotracheitis, pneumonitis and calicivirus)

- What does it affect? Respiratory system

- How is it Spread? Airborne
- Symptoms: Flu-like symptoms, nasal and ocular discharges. Ulcers in the mouth, on the tongue or in the throat.

Why must my cat be examined before vaccinations?

When we vaccinate, we rely on the animal to mount an immune response that provides sufficient antibody levels to protect against the disease we are vaccinating against.

If an animal is suffering from an illness or receiving certain medications, their immune system may not be able to mount an effective response and the vaccine will be ineffective. There is also increased risk that your pet could become ill from the vaccine if they are not healthy. For this reason, a medical history and physical examination is performed to ensure your pet is fit for vaccination.

How common are vaccine reactions?

Vaccine reactions are relatively uncommon and can range from mild to severe.

- Mild signs may include:
 - Discomfort at the injection site
 - Lethargy
 - Loss of appetite
 - Mild facial swelling or hives
- Severe signs may include:
 - Severe swelling or hives (on the face or at the injection site)
 - Extreme lethargy
 - Fever
 - Anaphylaxis
 - Gastrointestinal signs

If your pet has reacted to a vaccine in the past, inform your veterinarian before another vaccine is administered.



Spaying and Neutering

What is a neuter?

Neutering is an operation done under general anesthesia to remove both testicles in male animals.

Neutering can be done any time after 4 months. Recommended at **6 months** of age. If they have any retained deciduous (baby) teeth, they can be removed at that time (see Dental section).

Neutering reduces sexual and aggressive behaviours as well as other undesirable behaviours such as urinary marking.

Not neutering your pet can lead to physical problems in the future such as diseases of the prostate and testicles. Talk to the veterinarian for more information.

What is a spay?

A spay or ovariectomy is an operation performed under general anesthesia to remove the uterus and ovaries of female animals. It is a permanent form of birth control and will result in a pet that does not go through heat cycles and can not get pregnant.

It's recommended to spay your cat at **6 months** of age, if any deciduous (baby) teeth need to be removed, it can be done at the same time of the procedure.

Cats that are left intact are also at increased risk of bladder infections and developing mammary cancer.

Dental Health

Each year at the annual examination, the teeth will be assessed, and recommendations made to keep your pets mouth healthy.

Dental disease is very common and can start at just 6 months of age. Plaque harbors bacteria, which first erode the gums, and then loosen the teeth. This process is called periodontal disease.



Your kitten's baby teeth will fall out between 6-8 months of age, but you should immediately start teaching your kitten to let you brush, even though the baby teeth will fall out.

Preventative care should be started as soon as you get your pet (ex. brushing teeth, water additives, dental diet etc.)

Brushing the teeth is the best way to prevent tartar build up. This can be a pleasant experience for your kitten by using flavoured toothpaste and appropriate brushes. Do not use human products as they are not meant to be swallowed and will cause stomach upset.

Sometimes the baby teeth are in an abnormal position and will prevent the adult teeth from coming into the proper position in the mouth. These teeth need to be removed. For more information, talk to the Veterinarian.

Nutrition

If your new kitten is thriving on his/her previous diet and it is a good quality diet, then it is a good idea to continue the same food. If not, then give us a call we can help recommend a different diet to try.

It is important to feed cat food to cats, never dog food. Cats must be supplemented with the amino acid taurine, which is present in cat food, but not in dog food.

Good nutrition is as important for pets as it is for people. With so many different options available, choosing the right food for your dog can be a challenge. Your veterinarian is your best source of information about pet nutrition.

Due to the stringent safety standards and strong scientific research, we recommend the following manufacturers:

- Royal Canin
- Hill's
- Purina Veterinary and Proplan diets
- Science Diet

Wet or Dry Food?

It is sometimes nice to have a combination of canned and dry foods as this exposes your pet to different textures of foods so that, if in the future your pet must be on a specific type of food, he will accept the change more readily. Dry food is also an excellent way of reducing tartar build up.



Schedules

It is best to offer food at scheduled meals throughout the day rather than leaving it out at all times. Animals look forward to their meals, whereas free access to food is unnaturally easy

and promotes overeating, obesity, and potential disinterest in their food. Feeding at regular times makes it easier to control food intake.

Feed your kitten six times a day until 6 weeks of age, four times a day until 12 weeks, three times until maturity and then twice daily for life. Leave the food down for ten to fifteen minutes, if they have not consumed all of the food within that time period, remove it until the next meal. This will establish a good meal feeding regime.

Litter Boxes

Cats have a natural instinct to bury their waste which helps make litter box training easier. Kittens at a very early age 3-4 weeks will automatically begin to find a place to urinate outside of their sleeping/eating environment. Kittens can be extremely picky about their litter box habits and it's our job to provide for them the right box, litter, location and cleaning schedule.

Make sure your litter box is the appropriate size for your kitten. Remember kittens grow and you may need to buy a bigger box if your cat grows 'fluffier' with age. Covered boxes or those with rims are useful for preventing litter from being kicked over the sides when scratching. Covered boxes do tend to trap odors and need to be cleaned more often. Timid kittens may find the covered boxes scary at first and you may need to leave the lid off for awhile. Never use a covered litter box for a makeshift travel kennel or a place to trap your kitten, he/she may avoid the box and find a new place to urinate.

Litter Type

There are so many options to choose from when picking litter such as clay, sand, newspaper, sawdust, wheat. Many of these options come in different forms such as clumping, non-clumping, and pellets.

Clay: Clay litter is the most common type of litter available and most cats like it. It comes in clumping and non-clumping varieties. The non-clumping requires you to clean them more often than the clumping but tends to track less in the house. Clumping fillers trap the waste into a ball/clump form, making it easy to scoop out of the box. Boxes with clumping litter still needs to be cleaned regularly as the 'clumps' will eventually break down if not cleaned. Some long-haired cats have trouble with clumping litter sticking to their feet so many owners choose not to use it.

Sand: Sandbox sand (fine sand) is commonly used in litter boxes. The fine texture is pleasing to cats, especially for declawed cats who have extra sensitive toes. Since sand does not clump, it should be changed out daily.

Newspaper: Although a cheaper alternative, it isn't very absorbent and can be very messy. It also doesn't absorb odors well and can stain white paws. Despite its drawbacks, newspaper litter is useful for post-surgical use since it will not stick to wounds.

Sawdust: Sawdust litter is very messy and easily gets tracked around the house. It also can cause asthma in animals.

Wheat: It's becoming more common, cats like the texture. It's biodegradable so it can be composted. It is also easily digested if your kitten eats it.

Litter Box Location

Don't put litter boxes too close to where your kitten eats or sleeps. It should be in a quiet area away from the normal daily traffic, but not too far away for the kitten to get to. Kittens should be shown where the box is located and occasionally brought to the box until you are sure that they know where it is. Try to keep the box in the same location routinely and if moving put the box in a similar location in the new home.

How Many Boxes Do I Need?

Cats can become protective of their boxes and may not like sharing them with other cats in the home. The litterbox rule is one box for every cat, plus one extra. These boxes should be placed in every cat's personal quiet time location.

Cleaning Schedule

A clean, odorless litter box is the most important issue for young kittens. Kittens will eliminate in other areas of the home if their litter box isn't clean enough to their liking. Routinely wash the pan using a mild cleaner. Cats are sensitive to smell so ammonia-based products or strong disinfectants should be avoided.

Waste removal should be done at least every 2 days if not daily.



Pet Identification

Reliable identification for your cat is an important way to keep them safe in the event they are lost. The most reliable and global pet identification system is the microchip. This is a very small, thin device that is inserted under your pet's skin. A microchip scanning device is then used to identify your pet's unique microchip number and connect this back to the pet owner's contact information.

The implanting procedure is very easy, fast, and can be performed without sedation. The most common time to perform a microchip implant is at the time of spay or neuter, however it can be done during any veterinary appointment.

Traveling With Your Pet

In the car, your cat should always be in the back. Cat carriers are highly recommended as they reduce the risk of injury if you should stop suddenly or are involved in an accident.

When travelling by plane or train, contact the transport company to find out what their regulations are. Contact your hotel to ensure they offer pet friendly accommodations. If you plan to travel outside of North America, contact the embassy of the country to be visited. You will need to know about restrictions such as mandatory vaccinations and parasite prevention. Some vaccines must be administered up to 6 months ahead of time and Rabies titres may need to be checked.

For travel into the United States a Rabies certificate and a valid certificate of health may need to be obtained (varies from state to state) and dated within 10 days of travel. Rabies certificates are required for entry into Canada.



Pet Insurance

While pets bring great joy and companionship, owning a pet is also a financial responsibility. Pet insurance is a great, affordable way to ensure your pet gets access to the health care it needs, when it needs it.

Not only can pet insurance assist with routine health care costs, but it can also be an enormous advantage when your pet suffers from a serious illness or injury that requires medical or surgical intervention.

Pet insurance companies to explore:

- Trupanion
- Petsecure
- Pets + Us
- Petplan
- 24 Pet Watch

Useful resource: <https://www.petinsurancereview.com/canada/dog-insurance>

Is My Pet Having An Emergency?

When to call a vet!

If your pet has any of the following symptoms, call your veterinarian immediately:

- Difficult or labored breathing
- Unable to stand or walk (collapse)
- Painful or bloated abdomen
- Seizure or muscle tremors
- Known (or suspected) toxin ingestion
- Known (or suspected) foreign body ingestion (ex: clothing, toy, bone)
- Hyperthermia (over-heating)
- Vomiting/diarrhea
- Unproductive retching (trying to vomit)
- Difficulty urinating
- Swelling of the face/neck
- Major trauma (hit by car, fall from a height, etc.)
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Weakness or lethargy

This is NOT a complete list of reasons to contact your veterinarian. If you are concerned about your pet for *any* reason, you should always contact your veterinary clinic to seek advice. If you are concerned about your pet after business hours, contact one of the local emergency clinics listed below.

Local emergency clinics:

- **Fish Creek Pet Hospital**
15311 Bannister Road S.E. Calgary, AB
(403) 873-1700
- **Southern Alberta Veterinary Emergency (SAVE) – 24 Hours**
322233 15TH Street East
Okotoks, Alberta
403-995-3270

- VCA CARE Centre – 24 Hours
7140 – 12 Street S.E. Calgary, AB
(403) 520-8387