

Caring for your new kitten

Congratulations on the new addition to your family. Owning a kitten is hard work but very rewarding. We hope that by reading the following information, we can help you to give your new kitten the best start towards enjoying a long, healthy and happy life with you.



Why Vaccinate?...

Cats and kittens are at risk of infection by a number of viruses. Not all cats that contract these diseases can be cured, and some of these viruses can be life threatening. A simple vaccination program can protect them from most of these diseases. Vaccinations are a cost effective way of protecting your furry family member, and prevent the high costs involved with the treatment of these diseases. All vaccines used are produced to the highest standards of safety and effectiveness.

DISEASE	SYMPTOMS	SPREAD
Feline Herpes Virus and Feline Calicivirus (Cat Flu)	Sneezing, coughing, fever, ulcers in the mouth, conjunctivitis and swelling around the eyes	Contact with affected or unvaccinated cats. Some cats can be carriers with no apparent symptoms
Feline Enteritis	Diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, neurological problems	Contact with affected or unvaccinated cats
Feline Leukaemia Virus (FLV)	Affects bone marrow, lymphoma, reproductive disorders, anaemia (blood loss)	Multi-cat households where food bowls are shared
Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)	Fever, loss of appetite, diarrhea, lethargy, swollen lymph nodes	A viral disease that lives in the blood of infected cats, infected cats may remain healthy for up to 10 years. Spread primarily through bite wounds and saliva



When can I let my kitten outdoors?...

Please note that kittens are not fully protected until 2 weeks after the final kitten course vaccination, and until then, kittens should be kept indoors at all times. This form of **quarantine** is necessary to protect your new family member. Once your kitten is old enough to go outside, there are a few key recommendations :

- Supervise their first outings. Aim to introduce them to the world for a few minutes per day, close to meal time.
- Train them to walk on a cat harness
- Ensure they have a curfew ie: inside before dark (less fights, less chance of being hit by cars, reduced loss of wildlife)
- Provide “smart” toys for indoor-only cats, or build an outdoor play atrium. A cat scratching post will help save furniture!

Worming...

Kittens should be wormed fortnightly from 2 weeks of age. We recommend a top quality true all wormer suspension specifically for kittens.

Worming medications come in both tablet and liquid form and need to be given orally with food. Please feel free to use our weigh scales to accurately dose your kitten.

Once your kitten reaches 12 weeks of age we recommend worming once a month, due to our climate speeding up the intestinal worm life cycle.

Cats and kittens are wormed against:

- Roundworms** - causing diarrhoea, a potbelly, poor coat condition, and painful tummy
Hookworms - causing blood loss (anaemia), diarrhoea, iron deficiency and low protein
Whipworms - causing blood in stools, mucous diarrhoea, poor body condition and vomiting
Tapeworms - causing irritation around the bottom (encouraging “scooting”) & poor growth, tapeworms can be transmitted by fleas, and by eating lizards and other critters.

Intestinal worm infestations can make your kitten very sick and in some cases (such as hookworm and heavy infestations) are fatal. Intestinal worms can also be spread from your kitten to your family - the only way to protect your family is by encouraging hand washing after handling pets, and by regularly worming your pets.

Heartworm...

Heartworm is a disease spread by a worm called *Dirofilaria immitis*. Immature worm larvae are injected under the cat’s skin by mosquitoes and take 6 months to grow into an adult worm, which lives in the heart and surrounding blood vessels.

Clinical symptoms of heartworm disease are not always evident, and the disease is often only discovered post-mortem (autopsy) after sudden death—prevention is certainly better than cure.

Two products are available to protect cats from heartworm - Revolution, and Advocate. Both are

monthly topspot preparations, which are applied to the skin between the shoulder blades, and protect against fleas, heartworm, intestinal worms and ear mites.

Ticks & Fleas...

Ticks and fleas are a problem in the NT as they love a warm, moist climate. There are a number of treatments available for tick and flea control. Luckily, cats are mostly affected by fleas only.

- Kittens from 2 days of age can safely have Frontline Spray applied.

Kittens and cats over 12 weeks of age have several options:

- Monthly topspot applications (Revolution, Advocate, Frontline)
- Frontline Spray every 8-12 weeks
- Flea collars

The fleas you see on your cat or kitten represent only 5% of the entire flea population in your yard or home. For complete flea control, we also recommend having your yard and house sprayed professionally.



Desexing...

We strongly recommend desexing male cats (castration) and female cats (spay) between 5-6 months of age. There are many reasons why vets recommend desexing.

- **To maximise life span** – desexing helps prevent mammary tumours and pyometra (infected uterus) in female cats, and helps prevent some hormone related diseases.
- **To prevent unwanted pregnancy**
- **To reduce unwanted behaviours** – such as male cats spraying (marking territory with urine), and stops the male “tom cat” smell.
- **To help reduce wandering and roaming** – the life span of an indoor cat versus an outdoor cat that roams is significantly higher due to reduced incidence of motor vehicle and other accidents
- **To reduce the incidence of territorial cat fights** – and therefore the incidence of cat bite wounds and abscesses
- **To help reduce the stray cat population** – helps to reduce the number of animals that have to be put to sleep in shelters.

Please note that there are a few **false** ideas about desexing.

- **Female cats will get fat** (weight gain is actually caused by overfeeding or under exercising)
- **Female cats should have a season or litter before being desexed** (there is no evidence that this benefits the cat)
- **Males will be small** (their size is actually genetically pre-determined)
- **Desexing will change their personality** (your cat will still be the same cat that you love, but some socially unacceptable behaviours may improve)

Microchipping...

We also recommend microchipping at the time of desexing. A microchip is a small, rice grain sized silicon chip inserted under the skin between the shoulder blades. It stores your cat's personalised ID number for life. This number is registered on an Australia wide and international database. When a found cat is scanned by a vet clinic, shelter or council, the microchip number will be linked to personal contact details, enabling a pet to be quickly and effectively returned to its owner. Remember that your cat may still need to be registered with your City Council (depending on local by-laws).



Diet...

When you bring your new kitten home, it is best to feed your kitten the same diet it had prior to adoption for at least a few days. This helps to minimise stress and the chance of diarrhoea and an upset tummy. Any new food should be gradually introduced by mixing it with the original diet. Over the next couple of weeks, gradually increase the amount of new food and reduce the original.

Every cat has its own individual growth rate - feeding a growing cat a premium quality balanced diet, and the correct amount of food for weight and age, is the best way to prevent some health problems later in life. We stock a range of premium quality foods including Royal Canin. Please ask our nurses to assist you in choosing the right food for your kitten.

Ideally, up to the age of 4-6 months, 3-4 meals should be fed each day. Follow the feeding guide on the reverse of the bag or tin, according to weight and age. Meals can then be reduced to 2 per day after 6 months of age.

You can slowly introduce a variety of foods to your kitten, such as lean meat and raw bones. Raw chicken wings are great for your kitten to chew on.

Please **AVOID** certain items in your cat's diet:

- Cooked bones can splinter and cause nasty and painful gut and bowel problems.
- Onions can cause anaemia.
- Chocolate is toxic.
- Weetbix and milk for kittens is a poor nutritional meal – a balanced commercial kitten food is strongly recommended.
- Calcium supplementation in a kitten's diet is not necessary if they are being fed a good quality kitten commercial food
- The lactose in cow's milk can cause tummy upsets – if you would like to feed you kitten milk, go for a special lactose free kitten milk

Above all – enjoy your new kitten and look forward to a long, happy life together. If you have any further questions about caring for your kitten, the vets and nurses at University Avenue Vet Hospital are here to help.