

KITTEN GUIDE

AGE:

Ideally, kittens should go to their new homes at about 7 to 10 weeks of age. If kittens are taken on when over 10 weeks of age ensure they have been properly socialised with human company.

FEEDING:

- ❑ Kittens should have been introduced to solid foods well before being weaned and passed on to their new owners. Sudden changes to new food types will result in digestive problems, so be sure to find what has previously been fed. Change feed types by slow transition.
- ❑ 6 – 8 week old kittens will need 3 or 4 small meals daily. The number of meals daily may be steadily reduced until as an adult cat should receive only once daily feeding.
- ❑ Simple assessment of the kitten's condition and the amount of food left (if any) may determine meal size.
- ❑ Each meal may be identical, as long as it is of a moist consistency and balanced in its nutrients. Beware feeding such "favourites" as liver and heart as cats will become "addicted", and not eat anything else- and they are grossly imbalanced in nutrients, Variety from time to time is good as it prevents fussiness.
- ❑ If proprietary cat foods are fed, the essential nutrients will be in balance. Home-prepared foods are unlikely to be properly balanced no matter how wholesome they may appear to you. This may be compensated for by including a wide variety of ingredients.
- ❑ Calcium is the most common deficiency in home based diets. Many believe that milk will provide essential calcium, but it takes over 100 litres of milk to balance 1 kg of meat! Calcium may be supplemented by simply adding 1 teaspoon of calcium carbonate powder per 500 grams of meat/vegetables.

HOUSING:

Housing for your kitten should be warm and secure. Remember that the kitten has probably come from a litter, with plenty of company. A kitten cannot be expected to settle by itself for some days. A ticking clock or similar object is often all it takes for them to feel content.

TRAINING/DISIPLINE:

Kittens are naturally "clean", so toilet training is not difficult. The most likely problem is convincing them that sandpits and pot plants are not toilets. Early training with a litter tray is good practice. Pot plants etc may be made less favoured spots by using a sprinkling of

white pepper. Clawing furniture etc is a natural, but undesirable trait – claw sharpening and territorial marking. Constant vigilance and a water pistol can stop the practice. Clipping the claws is the worst possible idea, as the first thing a cat will do is attempt to sharpen them again!

HEALTH MATTERS:

BASIC HYGIENE: Cats, while seemingly clean animals, are in fact a natural reservoir of a number of very dangerous infectious agents. Always remember that a clean cat got that way by licking itself – all manner of bacteria etc are always present in any cat's mouth. Cats pick up a number of infectious agents from the prey they catch – birds, frogs, mice etc.

TOXOPLASMA: Toxoplasma gondii is a protozoan parasite that occasionally causes disease in cats, but is far more important as a threat to humans. It is both shed in the faeces and can be found on the fur and mouth of the cat (in lesser numbers). Toxoplasma is most dangerous to the developing human foetus, and can cause damage to the developing nervous system – resulting in blindness, hydrocephalus (water brain) and even death - miscarriage. Damage is also possible in young children, or in immunosuppressed adults. Pregnant women and young children should NEVER handle litter trays or garden without gloves. Always wash your hands after handling cats and never allow children to kiss etc any pet. There is no preventative for “toxo”.

RINGWORM: Ringworm is actually a fungal infection of the skin, and is a vastly overrated disease in terms of its importance (unless there is an immunosuppressed person in the household). It is readily treated, in both cats and humans. Look out for itchy or hairless spots on both kitten and children. Remember that YOUR kitten might not be the culprit in a case of ringworm – it might have come from daycare, kindy or school!

WORMS: The common cat roundworm, Toxoscaris leonina will be present in all unwormed kittens. It is easily treated, but rarely has been treated. Roundworms are capable of causing problems if they cross infect into young humans, so treatment is doubly important. Tapeworms are common in cats as their life cycle involves their being eaten while residing in an “intermediate host” such as a flea, mouse, bird or frog. Cats, being hunters rapidly accumulate tapeworm infections. Cats do not carry the hydatid tapeworm.

Product notes :

Roundworms: Most preparations are satisfactory for most roundworms, with the following exceptions. Droncit® is solely a tapeworm treatment. Any products with piperazine as their active ingredient are not reliable. Be sure to use an “expensive” wormer at least once yearly.

Tapeworms: Most tapeworms are treated by the wormers listed below in “allwormers”. There is one troublesome worm known as the “zipper worm” due to it's appearance – it looks like a zip fastener – that is hard to kill. It is found in cats that hunt around waterholes. It requires a double dose of praziquantel, found only in Droncit®, Drontal® (also sold under license by Exelpet in supermarkets) or Popantel®.

Allwormers: Ambex®, Closasole® and Popantel®.

BACTERIA: Cats claws and mouths are a “microbiologists dream”. All bites should be regarded as infected, and not just “possibly infected”. Cat scratch fever of humans is a serious disease sometimes resulting from a simple scratch. These do not relate to how “nice and clean” your cat looks.

VIRAL DISEASES & VACCINATIONS :

CAT FLU: Causative agents feline Rhinotracheitis virus & Feline Calicivirus. “FR & FC”. Very common – if not vaccinated, all cats will get it. These agents produce a variety of symptoms to varying degrees. Snuffles, sneezing and weepy red eyes are standard. Ulceration of the tongue with anorexia, diarrhoea etc is possible. The disease affects oriental breeds (any age), kittens and old cats severely. Some cats become carriers after infection. Nb Feline Calicivirus is the feline version of Calicivirus, found in rabbits. It has been present in cats for decades (longer?) and not crossed species.

FELINE ENTERITIS: “FE”- the feline version of canine Parvovirus (or visa versa). Uncommon but deadly.

FELINE LEUKAEMIA VIRUS: a disease causing leukemia in cats, able to be vaccinated against. We do not currently see it in this area.

VACCINATIONS: Provide protection to the various diseases by “teaching” the kitten’s body to be able to “recognise” the virus. The body is then able to attack that virus before it can cause disease. This “teaching” takes some time, so at least 10 days must pass before the vaccine takes any effect. In the first year, the “teaching” must be repeated to ensure “recognition”. i.e. multiple vaccinations are required in the first year.

Our recommendations

At 6 – 8 weeks – FE, FR & FC – called F3

At 12 – 14 weeks – F3

At 16 – 18 weeks (4 weeks after the last one) F3

If an older cat commences vaccinations for the first time, two F3 shots 4 weeks apart are necessary.

Then repeat F3 annually.

FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS: Cat Aids

FIV is a viral disease spread by saliva – typically into a bite wound during catfights. It produces signs in cats, much like AIDS does in humans. Immune suppression results in chronic infections that will not clear up. There is no cure once infected so prevention is important. Vaccination is a similar program to the F3 described above. If starting vaccination in an older cat, one that seems unwell, or is often involved in fights, an FIV detection test should be performed to check status prior to vaccination. It is not transmissible to other species.

FLEAS : There are so many different flea treatment methods available it requires talking to us directly. Many dog treatments are lethal in cats. **DO NOT** use adult flea treatments on kittens without consulting us first.

BATHING: Yes, it can be done, and some cats even like it! If it becomes necessary due to an oil stain for example, ensure you have good protection – heavy long sleeves.

COLLARS: Stretch vs Non stretch - many cat owners do not like collars, but while some cats really do resent them, many owners are put off because they have previously fitted a collar poorly. A collar should be **FIRM** not loose – it should be difficult to get two fingers under the collar. Most times when cats are “hung up”, or get a paw caught, it is due to either too loose a collar or a stretch collar.

CATS & THE CURRENT SOCIAL CLIMATE

If you own a cat, or live in a township, you would be aware that there is much concern regarding cats in Australia. It has been conclusively proven that cats do hunt native wildlife. Cats do not respect property boundaries, and a neighbour with a native garden to encourage native birds can not be expected to welcome your moggie on a hunting expedition! Cats do most of their hunting and exploring at night, so the most sensible thing is to lock them up at night. This will prolong your cat’s life in any event, as this is when they would meet the neighbourhood Tom infected with AIDS!

Whatever else you may do, cats should be properly identified, as an unidentified cat can under certain circumstances be destroyed, legally. Any cat venturing into a National Park may be put down.

THE KITTEN TIMETABLE

Age in weeks	Procedure
2	Allwormer
4	Allwormer
6	Allwormer and consider 1st vaccine
8	Allwormer and consider 1st vaccine, off to new home
10	Allwormer
12	Allwormer, 2nd Vaccination
16 – 18	3 rd Vaccination

THEREAFTER

Frequency	Procedure
3 months	Allwormer
Annually	Vaccination