

TIPS FOR RAISING A HAPPY HEALTHY KITTEN

The First Day

If your new kitten seems frightened at first, keep it confined to one room for a few days until it adjusts. Make sure it has food, water and a litter box within easy reach. Some shy cats may hide under the bed for as long as a week, while others will be ready to come out into the house and go exploring after just a day. The important thing is to let the kitten emerge whenever it feels ready.



You should spend as much time as possible in the room with the cat, but never try to force it out of hiding. The kitten will let you know when it is ready to begin exploring more of the house. Try to keep any children in the home quiet and seated on these visits, so they do not frighten the kitten. If the kitten is friendly and approaches, have them offer an outstretched hand to sniff. If the kitten accepts this, they can gently pet her. As the kitten becomes familiar with the child, they may play with a cat toy on a string or stick. NEVER let your children encourage a kitten to pounce on their fingers (or yours, for that matter). It may seem cute at first, but a full grown cat jumping on and biting a hand in play can be very painful or cause bleeding. Teach your children how to properly hold a cat: with one hand under the rump and one hand on the back, held up against their bodies. And don't leave small children unsupervised with your cat.

Choosing a name

Sometimes the perfect name just pops into mind, and sometimes you need a little inspiration. There are many sites on the internet that list hundreds of possibilities. Short names are easier for your kitten to learn. Keep it as simple as possible and easy to use. Teach the name by using it when your kitten is in your lap purring, eating, or being cuddled. This way the kitten will associate its name with something pleasant.



Food

Food and water dishes should be ceramic or stainless steel as they are easy to clean. Cats do not need canned food. A good quality dry food can be left out at all times and does not smell or attract flies. Dry food is also better for the teeth. Avoid giving your kitten "people food" such as cow's milk, tuna or chocolate, which can lead to diarrhea, upset stomach or serious illness. Most cats are lactose intolerant because they lose the digestive enzyme needed to digest milk when they stop nursing. Drinking milk usually gives them diarrhea.

It is not a good idea to feed table scraps. It is not a balanced diet for cats, and it encourages them to become a major nuisance when you are eating.



Litter box

Kittens are naturally litter box trained. As soon as they are big enough to tumble into the litter box, they are old enough to use it. It takes no effort on anybody's part to litter box train a kitten. They do it themselves. However, when you bring a new kitten home, make sure the litter box is located where the kitten can easily find it. Later, when the kitten knows its way around your home, you can move it to a permanent location more diplomatically placed out of sight. Litter box materials come in a wide variety of types and styles. Place the box in a quiet low-traffic corner with easy access. The box should be scooped every day. Cats are naturally very clean, and if for some reason you find your cat unwilling to use the litter straining, dark colored urine, distress calls and excessive grooming near the groin area can be signs of a urinary tract disease.



Exercise

Between catnaps, kittens are always on the go. Regular exercise helps prevent obesity and its associated health risks. It also helps prevent undesirable behavior. This is particularly important for indoor cats with limited options for physical or intellectual stimulation. Peak activity for cats and kittens occurs in the early morning and in the evening. Play with your kitten before you go to bed so your kitten will be ready to sleep when you are.



Cats love high places, so the kitchen counter strikes them as a great place to watch the world go by. If your cat also finds food up there, they've just had major reinforcement for this bad habit. Best solution: find another spot in the kitchen where it's ok for your cat to hang out from on high, like the top of the refrigerator. Then persistently move your kitty there every time she jumps on the counter. Repetition and consistency are key here, but eventually your cat will get the idea.

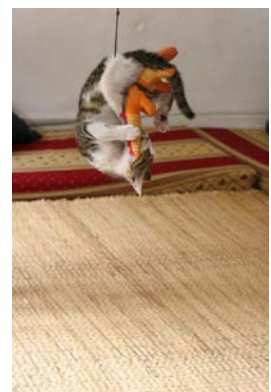


Toys are fun, but interactive play is also entertaining and one of the best ways to keep your kitten healthy and responsive to you. Solitary cats may play more roughly with their owners. Your single kitten has only you to play with and needs to learn to control playful nips and scratches.

Never hit your kitten. Instead interrupt annoying behavior with a firm "NO!", and toss a ball to chase instead.

If your kitten does something wrong, rather than reaching out to reprimand her, try hissing. Kittens find this a "species appropriate" reprimand and usually will stop their behavior.

Cats do not need to roam outdoors to live happy and healthy lives. The average life expectancy of an outdoor cat is six years. The average life expectancy of an indoor cat is about 18 years. Cars, coyotes and other predators, poisons, or infections from other animals all put the outdoor cat at risk.



Toys

Cat toys do not need to be expensive. Often a paper bag, cardboard box, or a crumpled piece of paper can supply hours of fun and entertainment. Plastic bags are *not* a good idea, as many cats like to chew and may ingest the plastic.



inside, are interesting.

Round plastic shower curtain rings are fun either as a single ring to bat around, hide, or carry, or when linked together or hung in an enticing spot. Plastic balls, with or without bells

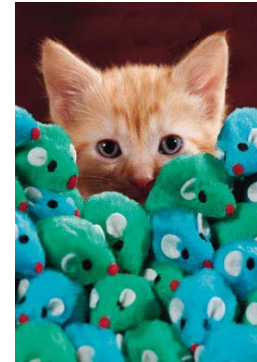


Try putting ping-pong balls in a dry bathtub, as the captive ball is much more fun than one that escapes under the sofa. You'll probably want to remove the balls from the bathtub before bedtime, or you may lose some sleep, as two o'clock in the morning seems to be a prime time for this game.

Empty cardboard tubes from toilet paper and paper towels can be made even more fun if you unwind the cardboard just a bit to get them started. Blow bubbles. Cats love them. Use any bubble solution from a toy or variety store or SmartyKat™ BubbleNip™, which contain catnip to entice your cat to pounce on the bubbles as they float slowly to the ground.



Though your cat's imagination knows no bounds when it comes to inventing games with household objects, there are several things you should keep out of bounds. Loose string, elastic, and ribbon can tangle in the intestines if swallowed. Plastic bags can suffocate a small cat, or cause blockage if pieces are torn off and swallowed. Rubber bands, paper clips, thumb tacks, and any other small, similar items are choking hazards. Medication, vitamins and pill bottles should be kept out of reach.



Cat carriers



Cat carriers are a must for safe and comfortable transport away from home. Cats usually do not enjoy a change of environment and trying to hold onto a stressed-out cat who is leaving skid marks on your flesh while trying to flee is not a happy experience. Keep the carrier familiar as a place to store toys, or as a cozy place to nap. This way, taking the carrier out of storage won't trigger unpleasant memories.

Kitten Proofing Your Home

Like other intelligent and playful babies, kittens investigate objects by touching, chewing and tasting. Growing kittens love to explore but need protection from potentially hazardous household items that are dangerous if swallowed.



Get covered trash cans for your kitchen and bathroom.
Keep kitchen countertops clear to make them less tempting.
Store household chemicals and poisons in a locked cabinet.
Keep toilet lids down, so your kitten can't fall in.
Keep electrical cords and wires out of sight, secured to the wall or tucked behind furniture
Be aware of hazardous plants.

Hazardous plants

Houseplants appeal to feline curiosity because branches or leaves droop, sway, or have interesting textures.



Some common plants toxic to pets include:

- philodendron
- mistletoe
- poinsettia
- lily
- azalea
- daffodil
- tomato
- foxglove
- yew
- hydrangea

You can ask your veterinarian for a complete list of plants that could be harmful to your cat. The internet is also a good research tool to find a complete list. It is probably normal for cats to ingest small amounts of vegetation. Consider planting timothy grass or fresh catnip indoors to entice your pet's palate and safeguard your ornamental plants.

Cat Nip

Catnip sensitivity begins in most kittens around four months of age, although a few cats remain insensitive to it. Some cats may become relaxed, some very playful, and some may become over-stimulated to the point of aggressive play. Catnip-filled soft toys are fun to kick, carry, and rub. Catnip is not addictive and is perfectly safe for cats to roll in, rub in, or eat. Plain catnip can be crushed and sprinkled on the carpet. Catnip sprays rarely have enough power to be attractive to cats. Look for labels that say "catnip-filled" to be sure the toy actually has catnip in it. Catnip

lasts about one year from harvest when stored airtight, so storing your catnip toys properly will make it last longer than if you just leave it out. When you can no longer smell the catnip, it's time to toss it out. The best way to keep your cat interested in catnip toys is to only have them out during playtime. Cats can become habituated to the sensation and smell of catnip toys if they are left lying around. They can get too much of a good thing. Give them a toy to play with, then pick it up and put it away. When you take the toy out again, scrunch it up a bit to bruise the catnip leaves and release more aromatic oils.



Declawing

Before you decide to declaw your cat, there are some important facts you need to know. Declawing is a serious surgery. Your cat's claw is not a toenail. It is closely adhered to the bone. So closely adhered that to remove the claw, the last bone of each toe must be amputated. This is a painful surgery, with a painful recovery period. During recuperation your cat will still have to use its feet to walk, jump, and scratch in its litter box regardless of the pain.



On rare occasions declawing may lead to secondary contracture of the tendons. This makes it uncomfortable for the cat to walk. Since the last joints of their front paws are missing, they compensate by placing more of their weight to the hind quarters, causing them to be out of balance. This shift of weight to the hind quarters may lead to atrophy of the muscles of their front quarters.

In addition to being an intrinsic part of a cat's normal conformation, its front claws are a cat's primary defense. Once declawed, there is no regrowth of the claws. You may think, "My cat never goes outside." But what if your cat accidentally gets outside and you can't find her? She is now defenseless in a potentially hostile environment.

Deprived of its front claws a cat may become insecure and distressed. I can assure you that if your cat becomes emotionally distressed, you will too. A display of distress tends to take such forms as urinating in and on inappropriate places. Feeling defenseless without its claws, a cat may become hostile to people (including you), and to other cats and become more apt to bite.

Some cats develop an aversion to their litter box because of the pain associated with scratching in the litter after a declawing procedure. If your cat doesn't go in the box, it will find a more comfortable and most likely inappropriate place to do her business. These habits are often hard to break.

Three procedures to help discourage inappropriate scratching :

- trim the nails
- provide a scratching post
- discourage inappropriate scratching

Trimming your cat's nails

Though you should never declaw, you may defray some of your cat's potential for destruction by carefully trimming the razor-sharp tips of her claws. Prepare your kitten for nail trimming by making sure to handle her toes often while petting her. If touching her toes and toe nails is a common procedure, she will not freak out when it is time for a trim.



Gently hold the paw in one hand and with your thumb on top of the paw and forefinger on the pad gently squeeze your thumb and finger together. This will push the claw clear of the fur so it can easily be seen. You will notice that the inside of the claw is pink near its base. This is living tissue that you do not want to cut. *Trim only the clear tip of the nail.* Do *not* clip the area where pink tissue is visible nor the slightly opaque region that outlines the pink tissue. This will avoid cutting into areas that would be painful or bleed. The desired effect is simply to blunt the claw tip. Try <http://partnersah.vet.cornell.edu/node/300> for an excellent video from Cornell on trimming cats' nails.

Scratching

You can not keep your cat from scratching. Scratching is a natural behavior for cats. What you can do is stop the cat from scratching those items you value. You can not make a cat do anything it does not want to do. And getting a cat to stop something it enjoys is very difficult. You have to think smart and re-channel its desires.

Cats don't understand physical punishment. In addition to it being wrong to hit your cat, punishment simply doesn't work and is likely to make your situation worse. Clever though your cat may be about many things, she won't understand that you're punishing her for scratching the couch. She will only compute that sometimes for unknown reasons she is treated badly. This may make her insecure and stimulate her to scratch more or develop other undesirable behavior problems. Eventually you will break the trust and security that is the basis for your cat's relationship with you, and you will find it very difficult to catch her for any reason at all. Cats have excellent memories and hold serious grudges.



Understanding your cat's need to scratch is the key to channeling its efforts to more acceptable areas.

Scratching is a territorial instinct by which cats place their mark and establish their turf. Through scratching, cats mark their domains with more than just visible signs of claw marks. Cat's paws also have scent glands that leave their own special scent on their territory. It's a cat's way of adding its own personal touch to your (and the cat's) home.

Scratching also serves to keep your cat in shape. The act of scratching stretches and works the muscles of a cat's front quarters - a cross between a feline gym workout and kitty Yoga. When all is said and done – it just *feels good* to scratch.

Give up the idea of reforming your cat's desire to scratch. Rechannel the cat into scratching where you want it to. You'll both be happier.

The scratching post must be tall enough for the cat to fully extend its body, and most important, it must be secure. If it topples over even once, the cat won't go back to it. Sisal scratching posts are ideal for releasing a cat's primal urges. This material can be shredded to pieces with great satisfaction. Sisal material has a perfect texture and grain for a cat to shred, and that is what they want to do. (Studies have shown most cats prefer to mark their territory with vertical shredding marks, sisal textile provides the perfect surface for this behavior.) Be sure not to throw it away when it is shredded, since that's when it's broken in satisfactorily, and the cat will not appreciate your tidiness.

To encourage your kitten's interest in the scratching post remember that an important part of scratching is a cat's desire to mark territory, so a scratching post should be in an area that's used by the family, not hidden in a back corner. After a while you can move the post away to the periphery of the room, but you'll need to do this gradually. Initially, put the post where your cat goes to scratch. This may be by a sofa, a chair or wherever she has chosen as her territory, and you may need more than one post to cover her favorite spots.

Encourage your cat to use the post with clever enticements. Feed and play with the kitten by the post. Rub dried catnip leaves or powder into it. Make all the associations with the post pleasurable. Give a reward with a favorite treat when the kitten uses it. Have the kitten chase a string or a toy around the post or attach toys to it, which will result in the kitten digging its claws into it. Eventually the kitten will learn to love it and regard it as its own.

If at first the cat is reluctant to give up the old scratching areas, there are means you can use to discourage it. Covering the area with aluminum foil or double-sided tape is a great deterrent. These surfaces don't have a texture that feels good to scratch.

Remember too that your cat has marked its favorite spots with its scent as well as its claws. You may need to remove the scent from the areas you want to distract the cat away from. Cats have an aversion to citrus odors. Use lemon-scented sprays or a potpourri of lemon and orange peels to make the former scratching sites less agreeable. You can also find pet odor removers in pet stores and many supermarkets as well.

If your cat still persists in scratching the furniture, try squirting with a water gun or a spray bottle set on stream. Another option is a loud whistle or other noise maker. You must employ these deterrents while the cat is scratching for them to be effective. The point is to establish an aversion to the spot you don't want the cat to scratch.

Grooming

Grooming does not necessarily mean giving it a bath. Brushing or combing your cat's coat should be a comfortable routine that helps you and the kitten bond with each other. Grooming also helps prevent matting, helps collect the hair so it isn't flying about the house, and helps eliminate vomiting caused by hairballs. Don't try to groom a kitten who is in high gear. Wait for a relaxed mood. Cats rarely need a bath because they groom themselves so thoroughly. Make sure to handle the toes and claws when grooming, to help make it easier to trim the nails when necessary.



Shedding

All cats shed. Some shed more than others, but there is no such thing as a shed-free cat. It's not true that longhaired cats are worse shedders than shorthaired varieties, although longer hair is often more noticeable because it may come out in tufts. During the hair-growing season, your cat's coat will grow about a third of an inch each month.

Normal shedding is a seasonal event. Shedding also can be caused by stress and illness, so if your cat suddenly begins shedding more than usual, a trip to the vet may be warranted. Because shedding is a natural process, it is not possible to eliminate it. However, faithful combing and brushing will remove the hair before it lands on your sofa. Proper amounts of fatty acids in the diet also help to keep your cat's skin and coat in tip-top shape.

Hairballs

Hairballs are formed when a cat grooms itself and swallows the hair. Normally most of this hair is expelled in the litter box. However, if the hair does not pass through, it can cause vomiting, loss of appetite or constipation. Products on the market for hairball control are usually composed of non-digestible oil-type ingredients that are flavored so a cat will readily accept them. They work by lubricating the digestive tract to help the hair pass more easily.

When to see the vet

Taking your new kitten to the veterinarian for a health check, vaccinations, and spaying or neutering will help ensure a long and healthy life. Your kitten will have received its first vaccinations before you brought it home. The booster shots should be given within three or four weeks after that. Spaying or neutering should be done between six and eight months of age.

Signs that you need to take your cat to a vet include

- Obvious wounds or injuries
- Persistent meowing, crying, hissing or growling (signs of pain)
- Reluctant to eat or drink
- Coughing, sneezing, rapid breathing, panting or gasping
- Diarrhea, constipation or vomiting
- Discharge from the nose, eyes or mouth
- No urine, too much urine, blood in urine, or straining to urinate
- Urinating in unusual places such as the bathtub or sink
- Behavior that is not typical for that cat, which can include listlessness, irritability, incoordination, stumbling, limping,

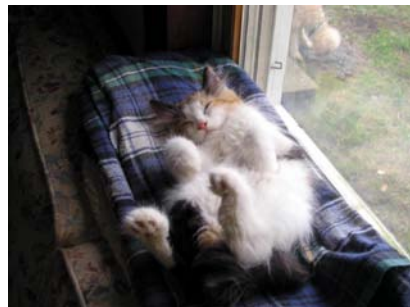


Spaying and Neutering

Research shows that spaying and neutering greatly increases the lifespan of companion animals and increases quality of life as well. Spayed or neutered pets have reduced risks of a variety of health problems, including certain types of cancer. Your cat might gain weight after surgical sterilization because of slight changes in metabolism, and because activity level normally declines with maturity. Between six and eight months of age is a good time to do the procedure – before the cat reaches puberty.

Fleas

If you see evidence of fleas on your cat, make sure to use cat-approved products. Cats are extremely sensitive to insecticides and could die from improper flea control. Do not use flea collars with dips, powders or sprays, unless approved by your veterinarian. There are several top spot type products for cats that are very effective, like Advantage or Bravecto. You apply a few drops of the product to the skin by the shoulder blades (so they can't reach it to lick it off) and it dissipates throughout the skin to kill and repel fleas and ticks.



Teach your cat not to go out the door



The life expectancy of an outdoor cat is heartbreakingly short. They get run over by cars, eaten by coyotes or fisher cats, or just plain disappear. If you love your cat, you will keep him indoors. If your cat starts to show interest in going out the door, get an empty plastic milk jug. Open the door just a few inches. The cat will be focused on the door and not you. Drop the jug right in front of his nose. He will think the sky is falling, and spook back into the safety of the house. Don't open the door very wide because you don't want to spook him out the door. Some cats will never try to go out after one spook. Some may need to be "milk juggled" several times. Cats can be very happy indoors. Our cats enjoy sitting on the windowsill watching all the activity around the bird feeders. If you decide to teach your cat to walk on a leash, in order to take him outside for walks, never let him walk through the door on his own. Carry him out in your arms.

How old is your cat? from Cat Fancy Oct 2009

cat age	human age	cat age	human age
6 months	15 years	10 years	60 years
1 year	24 years	11 years	64 years
2 years	28 years	12 years	68 years
3 years	32 years	13 years	72 years
4 years	36 years	14 years	76 years
5 years	40 years	15 years	80 years
6 years	44 years	16 years	84 years
7 years	48 years	17 years	88 years
8 years	52 years	18 years	92 years
9 years	56 years	19 years	96 years
20 years	100 years		

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