

*Caring for...*

# **Cats & Kittens**





<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<i>Is a cat the right pet for you?</i>	2
<i>The right choice</i>	2
<i>Finding a cat or kitten</i>	3
<i>Making a good home</i>	3
<i>Toilet Training</i>	4
<i>Feeding well</i>	4
<i>Care for coats</i>	6
<i>On the move</i>	6
<i>Accidental pregnancy</i>	8
<i>Finding a vet</i>	9
<i>Diseases</i>	9
<i>Other diseases and complaints</i>	10
<i>A kind end</i>	12



## IS A CAT THE RIGHT PET FOR YOU?

**Just answer yes or no to the following questions and find out...**

### **Cat can do's**

- *Can you afford up to £5 a week on cat food?*
- *Can you give your cat safe access to a garden or somewhere safe outside?*
- *Can you be at home for at least part of the day every day?*
- *Can you put up with your cat possibly damaging the furniture?*
- *Can you afford your cat's regular vaccinations against feline infectious enteritis and feline influenza and feline leukaemia? These could add up to £70.*
- *Can you afford the £30 – £50 it will cost to neuter your pet?*
- *Can you afford to board your cat when you go on holiday or do you have reliable and caring neighbours who will look after your pet for you?*

If you can answer a definite **YES** to all these questions then a cat could be the right pet for you. Read on!

**If you can't honestly answer yes to these questions, but still want a cat think about this: Every year the USPCA rehomes many cats who have been abandoned or badly treated by owners who didn't think carefully before taking their pet on.**

## THE RIGHT CHOICE

### **Cat or kitten?**

Kittens look cute and cuddly, but they may not be the best choice for all cat owners-to-be: They need house training, can be very destructive and are really not ideal for families which have elderly people or very young children about. Kittens may make an elderly person trip or fall or could be handled roughly or trodden on by a young child. An adult cat is probably the best choice for people in these situations.

### **Male or female?**

The sex of your cat is up to you, but always keep neutering in mind, when choosing your new pet. Neutering reduces the large number of unwanted kittens which come into the world and have to be destroyed. It also makes your cat far more pleasant to live with.

### **Neutering is best**

Unneutered males may fight, wander off for days and spray an unattractive scent all over the place. Unneutered female cats come into season every two or three weeks for about eight months of the year. They can also become pregnant up to three times a year and have five or six kittens in each litter. The owner of an unneutered female cat must also be prepared for the legions of loud cat calling suitors their pet will attract.

Male and female cats can be neutered from five or six months old. Neutering is a simple operation carried out under a general anaesthetic. Female cats are 'spayed'. This involves removing the womb and the ovaries. In a male cat the testicles are removed and this is known as castration.



## FINDING A CAT OR KITTEN

### Look for...

#### 1. A nicely rounded animal.

Kittens should be plump and at least eight weeks old before they leave their mother. Avoid skinny cats or kittens. Also avoid kittens with bloated tummies as they are quite likely to have intestinal worms.

#### 2. Bright clear eyes.

Don't be tempted to take kittens with runny eyes or sneezing noses. Avoid coughing kittens too.

#### 3. A dry, clean tail.

Reject any kitten or cat with a sore anus, wet tail or diarrhoea indicated by yellow stains on the fur.

#### 4. A healthy coat.

Do a quick check for fleas ñ many kittens have them. A few can be dealt with quite easily, see page 6 to find out how. Check to see if the coat is long or short. A fluffy kitten will probably grow up to be a long haired cat which needs daily brushing and grooming to stop hair balls. This takes time – so if you haven't got it go for short haired kittens which are much easier to deal with.

#### 5. Clean ears.

Dry dark grey deposits in the ears are a sign of ear mites. As with fleas they can be treated – your vet will advise.

#### 6. Colour.

That's up to you! But did you know that tortoiseshell kittens are invariably female and that white cats with blue eyes are almost

always deaf? White cats with yellow or green eyes or one of each generally have normal hearing.

### 7. Sex.

Sexing a kitten is easier to illustrate than to describe. The simplest thing to do is to put the kitten on a table, lift the tail and decide which of our two drawings it most resembles. Basically, the distance between the anus and the urinary tract opening is very short in a female and long in a male.

**Your local veterinary surgeon or friends may be able to help. When choosing a kitten make sure you see it with its mother and the rest of the litter – this will give you a good idea of its health and temperament.**

## MAKING A GOOD HOME

### Best bed

Cats and kittens spend a lot of time sleeping and need a warm, dry comfortable place for snoozing. Cardboard boxes especially deep-sided ones which keep out draughts make useful beds. They can be lined with newspaper, which is warm, inexpensive and easily changed. You could however, buy a wicker cat bed or one made from plastic which could be easily cleaned.

Your cat or kitten may well reject the bed you have carefully prepared for one it likes better – possibly yours! Don't worry about this – its just an example of the cat's independent nature. If you don't want your cat to sleep on your bed or any other special place the only thing to do is to keep the door of the appropriate room shut.



## TOILET TRAINING

**House training is the first lesson that every cat or kitten needs to learn. Most cats are instinctively very clean. Your new pet will need a leak-proof litter tray or box (plastic or enamel are best) which should measure 45 x 25 cm (16 x 10in) minimum. Some people find that a large washing up bowl makes a good litter tray as it has deep sides and can be easily scrubbed out. Hooded litter trays are available and are ideal for cats and kittens which like their privacy. Whichever tray you choose, put it in a convenient corner and fill the tray with sand, peat, dry earth – which can be messy – or cat litter readily available from supermarkets or pet shops.**

### ***Litter Trays***

The litter tray must be kept clean and emptied at least once a day, otherwise your cat will refuse to use it and use the carpet instead. When house training a new kitten it's a good idea not to empty the tray completely, but to add a little of the old litter to the fresh until the kitten is fully housetrained.

Don't use bleaches and disinfectants containing coal tar and carbolic derivatives to clean the tray – these are poisonous to cats.

If your cat has one or two accidents a spray of plain soda water can help to remove the smell. There are also several proprietary brands of stain remover available which can deal effectively with cat urine.

### ***In and out***

Cats should have access to the house at all times during the day and night. If they can't get in when they want to they are likely to wander off for long periods, find another home, get involved in fights with other cats

and are at risk of being injured by traffic or even stolen.

A cat door fitted into one of the external doors of the house is useful. Your cat will be able to get in and out easily. The doors measure about 15 cm/6 in square and are burglar proof if fitted correctly – out of reach of security locks. Many can be adjusted so that your cat can come in but not go out again – useful if you do not want your cat to go out at night.

## FEEDING WELL

**You can feed adult cats with either tinned food or a mixture of fresh and prepared food.**

### ***Prepared food***

Most prepared foods contain all necessary vitamins and minerals to provide a balanced diet. Some contain more moisture than others and some have a greater concentration of meat. This method is probably the simplest way of feeding your cat, but make sure that whatever prepared food you use, you follow manufacturers' instructions accordingly.

### ***Mixture of foods***

You may prefer to use a mixture of foods giving fresh fish or rabbit or heart several times a week. You can then fill in with tinned or crunchy dried food which is very good for the teeth. Make sure your cat always has access to lots of fresh clean water.

If you feed your cat fish or chicken make sure it is properly cooked. Raw meats like heart or rabbit should be cut into small squares and fed absolutely fresh. This is because uncooked raw meat can carry bacterial



infections which could be harmful to your cat so any uncooked meat must be scrupulously fresh. Only give your cat liver – cooked or raw – once every two weeks. Too much liver can cause hypervitaminosis – a dangerous surplus of vitamin A.

## ***Greens please***

**All cats and kittens need to be able to eat grass – this helps them maintain their natural digestive balance. If your cat is unable to go outside for any length of time – a week or so – put some grass in a pot and keep it inside by the water bowl.**

## ***Kitten food***

- 1. You can use tinned food – giving four or five small meals a day (about one tablespoon of food for each meal) until 12 weeks. Some manufacturers make special kitten food.**
- 2. You can make your own using finely ground fresh meat, rabbit or fish. If you do this you may need to give a daily yeast tablet or balanced vitamin supplement as well – ask your vet for advice.**
- 3. After about 12 weeks your kitten can go down to four meals a day and by the age of six or seven months two meals are quite sufficient. As it gets older and has fewer meals you will need to increase the quantities given.**

## ***Drink up***

Give your cat or kitten lots of fresh water, but don't give them too much milk. It can give kittens diarrhoea and sometimes causes stomach problems in adult cats. Cats and kittens don't need to have milk and some simply don't like it. If you think your cat is not drinking enough it may be because it doesn't

like the chemicals which are present in our tap water. Try clean rain water or bottled still water instead. It is even more important that cats, which eat dried crunchy food, drink lots of water otherwise urinary tract infections result.

## ***Be careful***

1. Make sure that all bones are removed from cooked fish, rabbit and chicken as these can easily get caught in your cat's throat, pierce the intestines and cause your pet's death.
2. Don't feed your cat dogfood – it doesn't have all the vitamins that your cat or kitten needs.
3. Don't try and make your cat or kitten a vegetarian. Cats simply cannot get all of the protein they need from non-meat sources.
4. Don't feed your cat from soiled dishes – wash dishes in hot water with detergent, rinse well and allow to drain dry.



## CARE FOR COATS

### Grooming

Long-haired cats cannot groom themselves properly. They need to be combed every day to avoid tangled and matted fur and the skin problems which result from neglected coats. Each combing needs to be followed by a brush. You will need to get your long-haired kitten used to grooming from a very early age.

Short-haired cats also need the occasional grooming session especially at moulting time. Otherwise like long-haired cats they can swallow hairs which ball up in the stomach and can cause serious illness.

To groom your short-haired cat you can use a soft brush. However a damp wash leather is also a useful way of removing loose hair quickly and effectively. Just hold it in both hands and draw it over the cat from head to tail.

### Fighting fleas

**Most cats will get fleas at some point – when this happens take the following courses of action quickly.**

1. Ask your veterinary surgeon for advice as there are many different anti-flea 'programmes' available. Not all flea sprays and powders that you buy in shops are effective. Follow your vet's instructions carefully. Don't use an aerosol on a young kitten without first consulting your vet. Never spray your pet in the face. Some cats are also terrified by the noise of an aerosol, so be sure to hold your cat firmly as you spray. The sound of water running from a tap will create a distraction. Another less distressing method is to spray a piece of cotton wool and then rub it on the cat's coat against the lie of the fur.

2. De-flea bedding, carpets and corners – otherwise your cat will just get re-infested. Vacuum chairs, skirting boards, carpets, crevices and undisturbed, dusty corners of the house. These are all favourite living spots for fleas. Your vet can also provide you with a surface flea spray. This is NOT for use on you cat but on surfaces like floors and skirting boards. Follow the instructions carefully.

### Flea collars

**Some people like to use flea collars, but the USPCA doesn't recommend them. Flea collars are not always effective and – most important of all – can be dangerous. Your cat could be trapped or even strangled by the collar. Skin problems can also develop around the collar area.**

## ON THE MOVE

Whenever you take your cat anywhere by car it should be confined in a suitable, comfortable carrier. An unconfined cat can be a hazard when driving and may run off when the car door is opened. You can buy travelling baskets from your local pet shop. These range in quality from the cheapest cardboard carrier to the more expensive wicker or wire variety. Whatever you choose it should measure at least 50 x 28 x 28 cm (20 x 11 x 11 in).

It's often a good idea to let the cat get used to the basket before the journey, but if your cat is obviously terrified by the whole business and you are making a long trip, advice should be sought from your veterinary surgeon. Some form of tranquillisation may be provided. **NEVER** be tempted to use tranquillisers other than those obtained from your vet – some cats react violently to, for



example, dog tranquillisers. But a noisy and protesting cat does not necessarily mean that it needs tranquillising. Indignation and terror are not the same thing. It is also a good idea not to feed the cat immediately before you start a journey – cats can get car sick too.

## **Holiday home**

### **How to make sure your cat is well looked after on holiday.**

- Take your cat with you. But this may not be the best idea as cats are not generally good travellers and yours could get lost while you are at your holiday home. Or it might try to get back to your permanent home.
- Arrange for your cat to stay at a boarding cattery. This is a good plan providing you visit the cattery in advance and make sure it really is a suitable place. Your vet, local council or the USPCA can advise. Local councils have a list of all registered boarding kennels and catteries in the area.
- When checking out the cattery, ask to see a diet sheet and inspect the facilities. Find out what the health requirements are for boarding cats. Good catteries will insist that boarders are fully vaccinated and will ask to see certificates. Make sure also that the place is never left unattended. Most cats will accept a cattery quite well – just make sure you book early.
- Leave your cat at home to be looked after by a friend or neighbour. Your cat may be happier if it's left at home but not necessarily safer. Make sure that a responsible friend or neighbour will visit twice a day to feed and water it. Ideally invite a relation or friend to stay in your home while you are away and leave them with details of your vet's telephone number.

## **New House**

**If moving house seems traumatic to you, imagine what it feels like for your cat. Your new home will seem very foreign and your cat's instinct may well be to leave to find a place that feels like home.**

## **To stop this happening**

1. Don't let your cat out of the basket until you've got one room straight, along with familiar objects where you can safely put it.
2. Close the windows and doors before you release your cat. Give it a meal, a litter tray and then let it roam about the room to get acclimatised. Make a big fuss of your cat – this is very reassuring.
3. Leave your cat inside overnight. If the house is fairly quiet let it explore the rest of the place as long as the doors and windows are closed. Don't let it outside yet.
4. When you feel your cat has settled – this could take two days or even a week – you can slowly start introducing it to the outside world. Do this by preparing your cat's food at its usual meal time and make sure it knows what you are doing. Don't feed it right away but encourage it to follow you outside for a short walk. The minute you get back in give it some food. If you are worried that your cat may run away if you take it into the garden, you could put it on a lead (proper harness) first before you take it for a stroll.
5. Make sure your cat is microchipped – your vet will be able to provide details, but this is one of the best ways to prevent loss. The microchip which is no bigger than a grain of rice contains all ownership details, is linked to a central computer, and can be inserted painlessly under skin. Local authorities, dog wardens, veterinary



surgeons and USPCA animal centres all hold scanners which can be passed over lost animals revealing ownership and even medical details in seconds.

You may also, for the first week or so, like your cat to wear a collar giving your name, new address and phone number. Any collar used should be made either wholly or partly of elastic 2.5 to 4 cm (1-1.5 in) wide that will stretch enough for the cat to slip its head through if it ever becomes caught up on a branch or railing. But sadly, even the elastic precaution may not be enough – a cat caught in a tree by its own collar may struggle until the collar twists into a figure eight shape, becomes a noose and strangles it.

## Settling down

**Some cats adjust very quickly to a new home, while others may take up to three weeks to settle down. The important thing to remember is that cats are most likely to get lost or will make an effort to get back to their old home if they've been frightened and are in a panic. As long as they're given time to get their bearings all should be well.**

## ACCIDENTAL PREGNANCY

The USPCA strongly recommends that both male and female cats be neutered – see page 5 – to prevent unwanted kittens coming into the world. If you think your cat may be pregnant and are uncertain about finding good homes for her kittens, seek advice from your veterinary surgeon. S/he will tell you if it's still all right to spay her. All adopters of animals from the USPCA must agree to have them neutered.

If the pregnancy goes ahead make sure that you treat her even more gently than usual. Pregnancy lasts 65 days, but during the last three weeks a cat is especially sensitive. Don't let anyone pull your pregnant cat about or squeeze her no matter how affectionately.

The same rules apply to picking up a pregnant cat as to a non pregnant one. The hindquarters always need supporting, so you have to use two hands.

Pregnant cats need plenty of nourishing food and possibly a vitamin supplement – check with your vet. She will also need a bed in a quiet corner – away from people and dogs – which she can get to easily and it should be lined with newspaper.

Cats usually give birth quite well without human intervention. But if you are at all worried it might well be sensible to take her in to see your veterinary surgeon a couple of weeks in advance of the expected due date for some veterinary advice. S/he may also be able to help you find good homes. Kittens should not be re-homed until they are at least eight weeks old.

If the entire litter is born dead, move the mother into another room immediately and give her a fresh bed to help her forget. Call the vet at once as it may be necessary to dry up any milk present and to check for any retained afterbirth.



## FINDING A VET

Even the very best kept and healthiest animals need veterinary attention. One of your first tasks should therefore be to register your cat or kitten with a veterinary surgeon. Never let the thought of having to pay for veterinary treatment stop you from making sure a sick or injured animal has the best of care.

To find a vet ask your friends for recommendations or look in your local Yellow Pages which will have the addresses of all local veterinary practices.

If you really can't pay the full cost of veterinary treatment in one payment be honest with your vet as s/he may be able to suggest a way to help.

### ***Insurance – the best policy***

**The USPCA recommends that you take out insurance for any accident or illness that could happen to your cat. For information ask your vet.**

## DISEASES

**Three of the most serious cat illnesses – feline infectious enteritis, feline influenza and feline leukaemia can all be prevented by vaccination.**

### ***Don't leave it too late!***

#### ***Feline infectious enteritis***

Spreads so quickly through a neighbourhood, leaving so many cats dead that people often think that there has been widespread poisoning. Young cats are particularly vulnerable and the disease is

at its worse in the summer. The symptoms – a sudden rise in temperature, abdominal pain, vomiting, blood-stained motions and collapse. Death can occur within 24 hours.

#### ***Feline influenza***

The symptoms of cat flu are runny eyes and nose, sneezing, excessive salivation and later congestion of the lungs. The cat should be kept quiet and warm and veterinary help should be sought at once. Cats can die of this disease, so rapid treatment and careful nursing are essential.

Cats of all ages can get cat flu but it is most likely to occur in catteries or pet shops where animals are crowded together. For this reason it is best not to buy kittens from pet shops. Once a cat has had cat flu it will carry the virus which lies in the lining of its nose for the rest of its life. Occasionally the virus will reactivate without symptoms making the cat a cat flu carrier.

#### ***Feline leukaemia***

The most common infectious cause of death in cats. It is caused by a virus FeLV and is mainly spread by saliva, but also by urine and faeces. This slow acting virus attacks the cat's natural defences and allows other serious diseases to develop. These include severe anaemia tumours of lymph nodes, severe gum infection, kidney failure. The infection can be fatal. A vaccine is now available.

#### ***Vaccinate***

**Fortunately vaccinations can now protect your animal against these diseases. Cat flu and enteritis injections may be started in a young kitten from eight, ten or 12 weeks – depending on the make and then booster shots given regularly on the vet's advice. The**



**boosters are usually given annually or every two years. Your vet will advise on the feline leukaemia vaccine.**

**The USPCA believes that all cats and kittens should be vaccinated against these highly contagious and potentially fatal diseases.**

## OTHER DISEASES AND COMPLAINTS

### ***Chlamydial disease***

Severely inflamed and discharging eyes. The infection is contagious and needs prolonged antibiotic treatment. There is a vaccine available – your vet can advise.

### ***Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)***

Inflammation of the lining of the abdomen has a variety of causes. It is a serious condition for which there is no known cure.

### ***Feline immuno-deficiency virus***

Occurs mainly in uncastrated tom cats. The virus is nearly always spread by the saliva through bite wounds. Affected cats are chronically ill and debilitated and often there is gingivitis (inflammation of the gums). There is no known cure and veterinary advice should be sought. The risk of contracting the virus is reduced if your cat is neutered.

### ***Digestive complaints***

Cats will try to make themselves better by eating grass. So town or indoor cats should be given their own patch or pot of grass. Constipation can be helped by giving your

cat a tablespoon of medicinal paraffin which can be repeated twice daily for two days. More serious digestive upsets like persistent vomiting and diarrhoea require rapid veterinary attention.

### ***Ear problems***

A number of irritants can cause cats to scratch persistently at their ears. It could be ear mites (for which your vet can supply drops), a small seed which has worked its way into the ear or an abscessed wound inflicted by another cat. Cats ears are very delicate and vulnerable so seek help from the vet rather than attempting to solve the problem yourself.

### ***Eye problems***

If you think that your cat has any sort of eye problem or injury you must take it to your vet immediately. Quick action could save your pet's sight.

### ***Hair balls***

Long-haired cats, if not groomed well will suffer from hair balls from time to time. By ingesting their own hair in the course of grooming themselves a clot of matted hair will form in the gut. Usually a cat will solve the problem by chewing grass, but severe cases may even need an operation. Your vet may suggest a regular dose of Katolax during moulting.

### ***Skin diseases***

Skin problems could be a sign of mange, ringworm, allergies to fleas, lice or perhaps due to an internal complaint like kidney disease. Because there are so many different causes for similar looking conditions veterinary help should always be sought. Medication – ointment – should never be applied without veterinary advice because



the cat could be poisoned when it tries to lick it off.

## **Stings**

Cats often play with bees and wasps until they get their first sting. This usually teaches them to keep away from buzzing insects in future. A single sting is painful, but not dangerous unless it is inside the mouth or in the throat. Remove the sting if present and apply a cold water compress or ice pack if possible. If the swelling does not go down in a few hours, consult your veterinary surgeon.

## **Teeth**

Some cats are more prone than others to the build up of tartar around the base of their teeth. Left unchecked this can lead to gum disease (gingivitis) and the premature loss of teeth. Bad breath and difficulty eating are warning signs. If tartar build up is present your vet will need to scrape the tartar – which is extremely hard – off and cats don't like having their teeth cleaned. Giving your cat biscuity cat treats will help to prevent a build up occurring.

## **Worms**

If your cat starts 'staring' with wide eyes and its coat becomes coarse and harsh and it is licking its anal area more than usual then it may well have worms.

Cats can be infected by two sorts of worms – round and flat. Roundworms are pinky white and curled like a thin coiled rope. They can measure from 5 to 15 cm long. Kittens can be infected with roundworm while in the womb and can fall sick and die as a result. Kittens should be treated against roundworm from the age to two weeks.

Tapeworms are long strips made up of flat segments filled with eggs which break off from the worm in the body. Segments can

come out one at a time so you could miss them. The most common sign is small dried egg sacs like rice grains in the hair around the anus. Segments can also twitch and move. Tapeworms cannot be caught from other cats but from intermediate hosts like fleas or small rodents like voles and shrews. To keep your cat in good health it should be wormed regularly. Your vet will be able to give you advice on the correct treatment.

## **Zoonoses**

These are diseases which can spread between animals and humans. Fortunately there are not that many of them. The most deadly is rabies which is controlled in the United Kingdom by quarantine laws.

## **Toxoplasmosis**

Toxoplasmosis is a serious zoonosis caused by a microscopic organism called *Toxoplasma* which affects many animals. Cats, however, spread the disease through their faeces and although they will show no symptoms, the parasite can cause congenital defects in unborn children if the mother becomes infected. For this reason pregnant women should avoid changing cat litter trays. The normal way to prevent toxoplasmosis in the cat is to feed only heat processed and well-cooked meat and to try and ensure that the cat does not catch or eat wild prey.

## **Ringworm**

Ringworm is a fungus infection which may cause characteristic lesions on the skin. Cats with ringworm should be taken for veterinary examination and be treated immediately because it is readily transmissible to man. Children should not be allowed any contact with cats with ringworm because children are most at risk from cross infection.



## A KIND END

Well cared for cats can live to a good age – sometimes 20 years or more. But if a cat is beginning to show signs of painful disability, has an incurable illness or severe injury, it should be gently put to sleep. This can be a very difficult decision to make, but it is one of the kindest things that an owner can do for a suffering animal.

Try not to blame yourself for your pet's health. If you gave it care and attention throughout its life and took it to your veterinary surgeon when it was ill, then you did all you could. Don't be afraid to show how upset you are in front of your vet – he or she will understand your feelings. And don't rush into getting another cat or kitten to replace the one you have lost unless you really feel ready – give yourself time to grieve.

If you find a severely injured cat – a road accident case – for example, call the USPCA Information Helpline on 028 9081 4242 or a local veterinary surgeon.

No untrained person should ever try to put a cat to sleep and it is an offence to kill an animal by improper means.