

## CATS

### **A brief introduction to basic feline care**

\*Special instructions for kittens at the end

Included are a few tips to make sure that you and your cat start out on the right foot (paw)! This is a brief overview of cat care. Please invest in a comprehensive cat care book that will have more in depth information, and consult your veterinarian if you have any questions. This handout is not intended to be a replacement for veterinary care. All information provided is for informational purposes only. Any links to websites are provided for informational purposes only.

### **Getting Ready for a New Cat**

- Cat proof your home: conceal any wires, cords, rubber bands, hair ties, etc. These can be enticing chew toys. Cords can be sprayed with bitter apple (found at pet stores) or hot pepper sauce to make them unpalatable to cats. Make sure that your blind cords are separated vs. looped, as that may be a strangulation hazard especially for curious kittens.
- Verify that all house plants are non-toxic: <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/poison-control/plants/>. For safe plants, cats do not like the smell of hot pepper or citrus and some people have used these on plants as deterrents.
- Designate a single room for your new cat to adjust in during the first few days to a week. This is especially important if other pets are living in the house.
- Pick a primary veterinarian and emergency clinic before getting your cat and put those phone numbers/addresses in an easily accessible location. If an emergency arises, you won't have the added stress of frantically searching the internet or phonebooks.

### **Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Cat or Other Pets**

- Most cats enjoy the companionship of other pets in a house, but it can take time for them to accept each other. Never rush an introduction. Some pets can take just one week while others take months before they fully accept a new animal into their home. Patience is key.
- Keep the new cat isolated from other pets in a room for about one week. It is recommended that your new cat be seen by a veterinarian before being introduced to the resident cats. Switch bedding and toys between the new cat and resident pets so they become familiar with the new smells. Place feeding bowls on either side of the door, so eating and new smells are associated with each other in a positive way.
- Initial introductions should be done with the door opened just an inch, so they can see each other. If this is successful after a few days, the door can be opened for full interaction. Allow 10-15 minutes of supervised "free time", and then separate again. Repeat this many times a day until you are confident they are comfortable with each other and can be trusted on their own.
- If excessive hissing, growling, chasing, or fighting occurs, separate them immediately and move back a step.
- Sometimes it can help to distract or reward good behavior with toys or treats, but be careful with aggressive or territorial personalities. If the cats are tolerant but cautious, you can also try a string toy between the two cats to engage them in mutual play.
- Pheromone sprays, such as Feliway (Comfort Zone), can help to calm the cats and reduce stress. Consider using this when a new cat comes into your home. It can be found at most pet specialty shops and online. Feliway also comes in a plug-in dispenser. Pheromone collars can also be helpful since they are right on the cat and keep it calm and mellow. These items are found at the pet store.

## **Litter Boxes**

- The litter box should be 1.5 times the length of the cat from head to tail. There should be one litter box per cat in the house plus one additional, and there should be one litter box on each level of the home, if possible. Keep them in a quiet location (away from washing machines, furnaces, etc). Covered boxes are often threatening in a multi-cat household.
- Most cats prefer unscented litter that is scooped every day. Cats tend to avoid dirty boxes.
- If your cat normally uses the litterbox and suddenly starts eliminating outside of it, call your veterinarian! Your cat is saying that something objectionable is happening in its environment. It could be a physical problem with the cat, or an environmental problem.
- Litterbox problems that require an immediate call to the veterinarian include inability to urinate (extreme emergency), straining to urinate or defecate, vocalizing while urinating, and bloody urine. Diarrhea can also warrant a visit to the vet. Be prepared to take a stool sample with you.

## **Food**

- Feeding both dry and canned food as part of your cat's daily diet is recommended. Including wet food in your cat's diet may help to prevent urinary crystal formation and blockage, and will help your cat to stay well-hydrated.
- Provide access to a fresh water supply at all times.
- Obesity in domestic cats is a common problem that can be dangerous to their health but easily prevented. Some cats are able to self regulate, but most cats are not this easy and should be fed measured meals. Beware of recommendations on pet food bags that want you to feed more than the average cat needs! If your cat is currently overweight, consult with your veterinarian before starting a weight-loss plan.
- The first ingredient on the food's list should be a specific type of meat (chicken, turkey, rabbit, etc). Ingredients are listed by percentage of dry weight in the food, with the highest percentage listed first. Some food companies "split" the ingredient listings so that meat will be highest on the list, but if you add up the other ingredients you may find that meat actually makes up a small percentage of the overall food weight.
- There are many sources of good information about nutrition, including veterinarians, pet store employees and the internet.
- Use ceramic or stainless steel bowls – plastic bowls may cause skin irritation in cats and can also harbor bacteria more easily than ceramic or stainless steel bowls. Wash bowls frequently.

## **Veterinary Care**

- Your cat should visit the veterinarian at least once a year, regardless of age and health status. Problems can be detected sooner and oftentimes while they are still treatable. Dental care is also important for your cat. Your vet will examine your cat's teeth during a checkup and may recommend a cleaning.
- Most cities require that cats be current on their rabies vaccine. The other core cat vaccine is the FVRCP vaccine, also called the "distemper combo" vaccine. It helps to protect against feline distemper virus (panleukopenia or viral rhinotracheitis) and two upper respiratory viruses, (feline herpesvirus and feline calicivirus). You may also want to discuss the feline leukemia virus vaccine with your vet, if the cat goes outdoors and may interact with other cats. Of these diseases, only rabies can infect people.
- Never hesitate to call your veterinarian with questions, even if you may think them trivial. Be cautious of online resources, as false information is posted freely every day.
- As your cat gets older, routine blood or urine tests are usually recommended to screen for age-related diseases. With proper care and nutrition, cats can often live beyond 20 years!

- You should have no problem finding a vet with whom you and your cat can have a happy relationship for many years to come.

### **A Bored Cat – equals a destructive cat!**

- Toys are important to help satisfy your cat’s hunting and killing instincts. Rotate different toys every few weeks to keep them interested.
- Keep toys with long ropes or strings in a safe place when you are not supervising to prevent accidental strangulation or ingestion. Ingested yarn or string can lead to expensive and painful surgery! NEVER allow cats to play unsupervised with these toys!
- Cats like to climb and perch in high places. Increase your cat’s area by investing in a cat tree.

### **Scratching and Declawing**

- Cats use their claws for a variety of reasons, including defense, play, balance, stretching and marking their scent. The declaw procedure involves amputating each toe from the last joint down. When their claws are removed, they may feel vulnerable and can become aggressive or timid and resort to biting. Some declawed cats have litterbox problems due to associating the box with painful paws after surgery.
- One alternative to declawing is to provide proper scratching devices. A good scratching post should allow the cat to stretch fully (three feet usually), should be stable, and should consist of sisal rope or natural wood (carpet also works but frays easily and is less attractive to cats). Some cats also enjoy the horizontal cardboard scratch pads. Rubbing the devices with catnip helps draw them in. You can also use soft paws nail clips ([www.softpaws.com](http://www.softpaws.com) or [www.softclaws.com](http://www.softclaws.com)) or clip your cat's claws. Clipping or soft paw application can also be done at the vet clinic.
- When your cat is scratching at furniture, simply redirect them to the designated device. NEVER hit a cat as punishment. People have had success at deterring stubborn furniture scratchers by using double-sided scotch tape or tin foil, which cats usually avoid.

### **Indoor vs. Outdoor**

- The risks of letting your cat outside unsupervised are numerous. The list includes, but is not limited to, cars, parasites, predators, communicable diseases and injuries from other cats, chemicals/poisons, and harm done by unkind people.
- Supervised time with a harness and leash can be successful, but never tie them up unsupervised as this can lead to strangulation. Check out the internet for cat fencing or cat enclosures for your back yard, but even with a fence, the cat must be supervised.
- For “door divers”, keep a supply of treats by the door. As you are about to open the door, throw a treat to another part of the room in order to redirect them.
- A microchip is recommended for all cats. It will increase their chances of being returned to you in the event they become lost. Consult with your veterinarian about having a microchip implanted.

### **Licensing/Laws**

- Please check your municipality’s regulations. If you choose to use a collar on your cat, make sure they can break out of it easily if they become trapped.
- If a cat bites a person, the cat must be quarantined for 10 days and observed by a veterinarian for signs of rabies. Cat bites can lead to serious infections; a person who has been bitten should consult with their physician.

## **KITTENS!**

**Litterboxes** – use NON-clumping litter for kittens under 4 months. They are less careful about grooming and ingest too much litter, which in turn can clump in their digestive tract and lead to serious problems. Use shallow boxes (or a box with a low entry side) so they can easily enter and exit.

**Food** – allow unlimited access to fresh water and food, both canned and dry, until they have reached 7 months. Then determine the best way to feed your cat based on body size, activity level, and food drive, with help from your veterinarian.

**Toys** – everything is a toy in a kitten’s eye. Be sure to kitten-proof your house! Conceal wires, cords from blinds/shades, hair-ties, rubber bands, shoelaces, plants, etc. The list goes on and changes with every cat. Provide them with safe toys that supply an outlet for destructive behavior.

## **IMPORTANT CONTACTS**

### *Emergency Clinics in Madison/Middleton:*

Veterinary Emergency Service	608-831-1101
UW Veterinary Care Emergency Service	608-263-7600
Madison Veterinary Specialists	608-274-7772

Your Veterinarian

ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center 1-888-426-4435

Madison Animal Control	-Dispatch	608-255-2345
	-Office	608-267-1989

## **RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- Wisconsin Cat Resource Page [www.wicatinfo.weebly.com](http://www.wicatinfo.weebly.com) – resources for cat care, behavior, low cost spay neuter, rehoming, trap neuter return, cat fencing and more!
- <https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/cat-care/common-cat-behavior-issues> - cat behavior resource library
- American Red Cross – Disaster preparedness <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/pets>