

Kitten Information

Congratulations on your new addition to the family! Welcome to the practice if we have not seen you before and if we have then welcome back!

We hope that we will have many happy years ahead of us as we help you to look after your new furry friend.

Over the last few decades knowledge of feline behaviour, disease and medicine has improved and we are able to look after our feline patients better than ever before.

Now that you have your kitten we thought we would give you a summary of what your kitten got up to before they went home with you and what normally happens in the first year of life and until they are elderly.

Let's start with the periods of development:

- Neonatal (birth – 2 weeks). During this time your kitten is totally dependent on mum for survival. At this stage life consists of mainly eating and sleeping. They spend about 4 hours of the day suckling, their eyes are closed and their hearing is poor. This means that touch and smell are very important. They shuffle towards warmth and of course the teats will be quite warm compared with the rest of the mother body while she is producing milk. At this stage brain development is immature.
- Transitional (2 – 3 weeks). Rapid physical and behavioural changes occur in this time and they start to become more independent. They can crawl and walk a little, albeit in a wobbly fashion. Their ears and eyes will open too. By three weeks their sense of smell is fully developed and they will start to eat solid food.
- Socialisation (3 – 9 weeks). This stage is very important, there is still much work being done on the socialisation period – also called the sensitive period. This stage is shorter than it is for puppies but it does vary for each individual kitten.

It is during this time that most kittens will be rehomed to new owners, so here we are you have your kitten!

Hearing and vision develop further, they can right themselves by six weeks and maintain their own temperature.

During this period different types of play emerge: social play involves playing with their brothers and sisters and type of play also goes through stages. The kittens start to play with toys or other objects and it is in fact called object play. Locomotor play, which really means moving about more and learning about balance, running and turning increases their skills for hunting later on. Interestingly, kittens that are weaned early at about 4 weeks tend to hunt more later in life than those kittens who are weaned later at say, 9 weeks of age. These later weaned kittens tend to hunt less.

It is important for kittens to have human contact before 7 weeks of age if they are going to be a social cat. Genetically cats would seem to be either timid and afraid or bold and friendly and this is passed on through the fathers genes. This means that some cats may never be confident around humans and we must remember to give those cats more space and time and not force them to be petted and so on. Slowly does it!

Just like puppies it is important to expose kittens to new things gradually and not over expose them. Regular gentle handling between 3 and 9 weeks is very important. Fifteen minutes a day of

stroking, looking at ears and teeth is plenty and will make all the difference – the time can be increased gradually as they become more used to you. If you are lucky enough to have a bold and friendly kitten they will be hanging off the curtains before you know it!

Juvenile (9 weeks to sexual maturity). Sexual maturity occurs from around 4 – 10 months depending on the individual. Movement skills and coordination continue to improve and they become even more independent. You will notice that by 14 weeks play becomes a bit rougher and social fighting will occur. If you have older cats at home introducing kittens early will be much easier. We can give you tips on introducing kittens to older cats if you would like us too.

Adults Cats are seasonal polyoestrus animals. This means that during the breeding season they have several periods of sexual receptivity. Female cats do not ovulate unless they are mated. We call them induced ovulators. Females can mate with several males. Social maturity (think teenagers!) occurs later, normally between 36-48 months of age.

Senior There are some studies underway at the moment assessing senile changes in the cat and we certainly see a number of diseases at this time. Hyperthyroidism and kidney disease are probably the most common problems that we see. It is important to notice any changes in behaviour at this time because if caught early there is much more that we can do for them. Cats get joint pain too so noticing that your cat is moving around less is also important. We all need pain relief at some point.

Vaccinations

Why have your cat vaccinated?

Vaccination is vital throughout your cat's life. Within a few weeks of being born, your kitten will start to lose the natural resistance to disease which it gained from its mother's milk and, sooner or later, it is almost certain to be exposed to infection of one kind or another through grooming, sharing litter trays or feeding bowls, fighting, or numerous other ways that are an everyday part of a cat's life.

With vaccinations you can take the essential first steps in dramatically reducing the risk of your cat becoming seriously ill or even dying from disease. With a regular annual booster after that, you can give it the protection it needs and deserves for the rest of its life.

Feline Viral Infectious Respiratory Disease (Cat Flu)

There are two main viruses which cause what is commonly referred to as 'cat flu'. These are feline rhinotracheitis and feline calici virus and they are present all year round in the United Kingdom cat population. Cat flu spreads very easily by direct and indirect contact between cats. Cats entering shows or being boarded during holidays are particularly at risk because they are placed in close proximity to each other. Signs of the disease are a runny nose, weepy eyes, sneezing, coughing and lethargy. If treated promptly, cat flu is hardly ever fatal, but can make your cat ill for some time and may leave it with snuffles and breathing difficulties for the rest of its life.

Feline Panleucopaenia

This disease, more commonly known as 'enteritis', occurs as an epidemic every few years. It is highly contagious and can affect cats of any age but is most common and severe in kittens. It causes acute depression, vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration and in many cases death. The few cats that do

survive the disease tend to suffer from other diseases due to the damage caused to the immune system.

This virus which causes feline enteritis can remain active in the environment for a very long time and spreads easily via contact with infected cats or their saliva, urine or faeces.

Feline Leukaemia

Feline leukaemia is a very serious, incurable disease which can take months or even years to fully develop and which is currently considered to be the single most significant infectious cause of death among the cat population in the western world.

Cats of any age, but particularly those up to 3 years of age, can be affected. The symptoms vary widely and range from damage to the immune system (making your cat much less able to fight off other infections) through to persistent anaemia and cancer.

Once the symptoms have appeared, your cat will almost certainly die, but even those which appear healthy can harbour the leukaemia virus and spread the infection to others when they share food or water bowls or when they suffer bites during fights. If a pregnant cat has the virus, her kittens will usually be infected when they are born.

Rabies

This disease is not seen in the UK but vaccination is compulsory for cats travelling abroad on the 'Pet Passport' or for export. Cats have to be microchipped before receiving a rabies vaccination. Please ask for more information at reception if you wish to travel with your cat. . If you are planning to travel with your dog be sure to look at the DEFRA website before you start the scheme.

Chlamydia

This organism causes a conjunctivitis which may be recurrent and severe. A vaccine is available but the incidence of the disease can vary greatly. Please ask your vet for more information.

Flea and worm treatment

There are now many different flea and worm treatments available. We will mention a few popular ones here.

Advocate

This is a broad spectrum protection against common internal and external parasites in cats. It is a spot on application required every four weeks to treat and prevent against fleas, flea larvae, gastrointestinal worms including hook and roundworms, ear mites and lice.

Prinovox

Prinovox is the same as advocate. There are four pipettes instead of three. This is also a treatment that should be applied every four weeks.

Stronghold

Is similar to Advocate.

Frontline Combo

This is a broad spectrum spot on application required every four weeks to treat and prevent fleas, flea larvae and ticks.

Broadline

This is a new treatment on the market. It treats and prevents against fleas, gastrointestinal worms including tapeworm and roundworm. The applicator has been specifically designed to make application on to the cat easier.

All of these product packets contain a number of pipettes. Please read the packet instructions carefully. If you are new to these products please feel free to ask us how to apply the pipette to your cat.

Important

Please be aware that some flea treatments contain a substance called Permethrin.

Permethrin is TOXIC to cats and is more often than not fatal. We do see these very sad cases!

The products above do not contain permethrin but some pet shop products do. The most common scenario that we see is when a dog product containing permethrin is applied to cats by mistake.

Worm treatments

Again there are many products available. If you are using a spot on application it maybe that some intestinal parasites are already being treated. We can advise you on the type of worming product that you will need depending on which flea product you use to treat your cat.

Cats that are good hunters will need more worming than cats that don't hunt.

Wormers that we use regularly are:

- Milbemax – multiwormer
- Drontal – multiwormer
- Droncit – tapeworms

We can also, if you find it easier, provide you with a topical wormer that is applied in pipette form.

Tapewormer is advised every six months if you are using a monthly spot on that treats intestinal worms.

Microchipping

We can microchip your kitten/cat at any time. Many people opt for microchipping at the time of neutering so they are asleep under an anaesthetic when the chip is injected. Many kittens/cats do seem to tolerate this procedure when they are awake so let us know if you would like this done at any time.

Please make sure that you register your kitten straight away and particularly remember that if you move house these details will need updating.

Neutering

Cat Spay

We routinely only spay cats that are at least 6 months old. We don't routinely spay obviously pregnant animals.

Cats with a pointed coat eg. Siamese/Balinese/Ragdolls/Birmans which have darker a colour on the ears and tail may develop darker hair in the shaved areas. If appropriate you will be offered a mid-line spay rather than on their side. Where this does occur it is temporary. Avoiding the flank is normally only necessary for show cats and must be discussed at admission.

Why spay a cat?

- Cats can have 2-3 litters each year of upto 6 kittens in each litter. They can start breeding from 2.5kg of weight (usually 6 months).
- Your cat will have a season roughly every 3 weeks, lasting 1 week, from the spring time until autumn.
- During a season your cat may be very noisy meowing for a mate and also show strange behavioural signs of rolling and lifting her bottom. These behaviour signs will disappear once spayed.
- During a season your cat will be desperate to get outside and there is a great increase in the risk of becoming lost or involved in a road traffic accident.
- Spaying a cat removes chances of further problems of ovarian or uterine disease

Potential side effects/ complications of spaying

- Anaesthetic/ surgical risks are very low in healthy animals.
- Occasional wound infections or self trauma may occur about the wound (rare). All cat spays will be sent home with a buster collar to help prevent self trauma.

Cat Castration

We routinely castrate cats from 5 ½ to 6 months of age.

Why castrate a cat?

- An uncastrated cat is more likely to spray (urine mark its territory) in the house. Castration after this has started is not as effective at stopping spraying as earlier castration is at preventing it.
- Uncastrated cats are more likely to get into fights for territory and need regular visits to vets due to cat bite abscesses. The cost of treatment for an abscess is likely to be more than the cost of castration.
- Cats are more likely to become infected with FIV ('Feline AIDS') through bite wounds if uncastrated.
- Entire male cats stray further in search of female company
- Cats are more likely to get hit by a car if uncastrated as they will stray further.
- Uncastrated cats can be a social nuisance, fighting with other neighbourhood cats and fathering many unwanted litters.

Post-op care

Female cats that have been spayed will need to have a post operative check three days after the surgery to check the wound is healing as expected. We recommend that female cats stay indoors at least a week after the surgery and the buster collar has been removed.

Male cats that have been castrated do not generally need to be seen after the operation, there are no stitches. We recommend that male cats be kept indoors 24 hours after surgery.

Nutrition

Kittens are different from adult cats, and so are their nutritional needs. The energy needed to support a growing kitten is greater than the energy requirements for an adult cat so it's important to choose the right food for this life stage. Kitten foods are specially formulated to ensure kittens get all the nutrition they need to grow healthy and strong.

After the first four weeks of mother's milk, a kitten gradually transitions to kitten food, and is completely weaned at about eight weeks. Here's what you need to know once you've brought your kitten home.

The best way to determine how much to feed is to first estimate the kitten's energy needs for the given age and then calculate the amount of kitten food that must be fed to meet that need. Another way to determine the amount to feed is to use guidelines included on the commercial pet food label. These guidelines usually provide estimates of the quantity to feed for several different ranges in body size.

Such instructions provide only a rough estimate that can be used as a starting point when first feeding a particular brand food. Growing kittens have a very steep growth curve, and their total daily energy needs do increase as they grow.

Free-choice feeding methods should be used for underweight and slow-growing kittens. Free-choice feeding is often preferred because it reduces the marked gastric distention that sometimes accompanies rapid meal feeding in young kittens. However, providing unlimited food for free-choice intake is inappropriate for overweight and obese kittens. A defined food quantity should be measured using a measuring cup and then offered as meals or fed free choice until gone. Neutering increases the risk for obesity; therefore, free-choice feeding to neutered kittens should be done very cautiously.

The feeding frequency should be 3 – 4 times daily for meal-fed kittens less than 6 months old. By 6 months of age, most kittens tolerate twice daily feeding. In general, transition to an adult diet should be done in 12 months.

Remember that your cat will become an adult at 1 year of age. At that time, your cat is ready to switch to an adult food that supplies just the right balance of nutrients during this lifestage. We recommend you gradually transition your cat from her kitten food to an adult maintenance lifestage food over a period of seven days.

Insurance

At White Cliffs Vets we strongly support the idea of pet insurance. Since there is no NHS for pets, pet insurance makes sure that you can always afford the best treatment for your pet to get the quickest and fullest recovery from illness or injury. Please bring valid details of your pet insurance policy with you each and every time you use our services. It is advisable to register all policy

details with our reception staff and confirm them every time you visit one of our surgeries. This will greatly assist both you and us when your pet requires treatment.

For the price of a daily newspaper it will cover unexpected accidents or illness and third party claims, such as if your dog causes an accident.

We strongly advise that all pets have health insurance. However, we obviously do not make it compulsory for you to take this insurance. Please note it is your responsibility to settle your account with us and reclaim your fees from your insurance company.

We are happy to assist you in identifying suitable insurance cover and explain how claims are processed. Whenever you have a claim, it should be passed on to our reception staff. If you require any assistance or further information, we will be pleased to help.

Two out of three pets require veterinary care each year and treatment can account for up to 30% of the cost of owning a pet. So, it really does pay to have the very best in healthcare insurance for your pet.

There is a wealth of information about insuring your pet on our website www.whitecliffsvets.co.uk

Please ask us if you require any additional information.

Behaviour

If you would like any information about the behaviour of your kitten please ask us at the surgery.

Some behaviour is completely normal and some behaviour is not. If you are concerned we can help you. The most common problems that we encounter are:

- Reluctance using a litter tray
- Multi cat household problems and introducing kittens to existing cats (or dogs)
- Going off food
- Vomiting or diarrhoea

Anything your pet does is a behaviour! Please try to notice any differences in behaviour during the lifetime of your pet, they may not be a problem but sometimes a small change in behaviour can give an indication that something is wrong.¹

¹ Information correct at 1.7.17