

Information you can use to keep your companion feline happy and healthy.

Tigers, lions, bobcats, mountain lions and domestic cats are all related to your companion feline. Cats have been domesticated for more than 5,000 years, ever since human beings began to farm and needed cats to control rodents at home and in grain storage areas.

Before You Bring Your Cat Home

You will need high-quality cat or kitten food, a food dish, water bowl, interactive toys, brush, comb, safety cat collar, scratching post, litter and litter box.

Feeding

An adult cat should be fed one large or two or three smaller meals each day. Kittens from 6 to 12 weeks must eat four times a day. Kittens from three to six months need to be fed three times a day. You can feed your adult cat specific meals, throwing away any leftover canned food after 30 minutes, or keep dry food available at all times. Provide fresh, clean water at all times. Wash and refill water bowls daily. Please note that cow's milk is not necessary and can cause diarrhea in kittens and cats.

If your kitten is refusing food or isn't eating enough, try soaking her kitten food in warm water. If that doesn't work, kittens can be fed human baby food for a short time. Use turkey or chicken baby food made for children six months and older. Gradually mix with cat food.

Grooming

Most cats stay relatively clean and rarely need a bath, but you should brush or comb your pet regularly. Frequent brushing helps keep your cat's coat clean, reduces the amount of shedding and cuts down on hairballs.

Handling

To pick up your cat, place one hand behind the front legs and another under the hindquarters. Lift gently. Never pick up a cat by the scruff of the neck or by the front legs.

Housing

Cats should have a clean, cozy place of their own in the house. Line your cat's bed with a soft, warm blanket or towel. Be sure to wash the bedding often. Please keep your cat indoors. If your companion animal is allowed outside, he can contract diseases, get ticks or other parasites, become lost or get hit by a car, hurt in a fight or poisoned. Also, cats prey on native wildlife.

Identification

If allowed outdoors (again, we caution against it!), your cat must wear a safety collar and an ID tag. A safety collar with an elastic panel will allow your cat to break loose if the collar gets caught on something. And if your cat is indoors-only, an ID tag or an implanted microchip can help insure that he is returned if he escapes and becomes lost.

Litter Box

All indoor cats need a litter box, which should be placed in a quiet, accessible location. A bathroom or utility room is a good place for your cat's box. In a multilevel home, one box per floor is recommended. Avoid moving the box unless absolutely necessary. Then do so gradually, a few inches a day. Cats won't use a messy, smelly litter box, so scoop solids out of the box at least once a day. Dump everything and wash with a mild detergent and refill at least once a week; you can do this less frequently if using clumping litter. Don't use deodorants or scents, especially lemon, when cleaning the litter box.

Play

Cats delight in stalking imaginary prey. The best toys are those that can be made to jump and dance around and look alive. Your cat will act out her predator role by pouncing on toys instead of people's ankles. Don't use your hands or fingers as play objects with kittens. This type of rough play may cause biting and scratching behaviors to develop as your kitten matures.

Scratching

Provide your cat with a sturdy scratching post, at least 3 feet high, which allows her to stretch completely when scratching, and is stable enough that it won't wobble during use. It should be covered with rough material, such as sisal, burlap or tree bark, to further prevent household destruction. Cats also like scratching pads. To train a cat to use a post or pad, rub your hands on the scratching surface and then gently rub the kitty's paws on the surface. If your cat starts to scratch furniture or rugs, gently say no and lure her over to the scratching post. Praise your cat for using the scratching post or pad. Sprinkle it with catnip once or twice a month to keep her interested in it.

HEALTH

Your cat should see the veterinarian at least once a year for an examination and annual shots, and immediately if she is sick or injured.

Ear Mites

These tiny parasites are a common problem that can be transmitted from cat to cat. If your cat is scratching at his ears or shaking his head, he may be infested with ear mites. You will need to call for a veterinary appointment, as the cat's ears will need to be thoroughly cleaned before medication is dispensed.

Feline Urological Syndrome (FUS)

Both males and females can develop lower urinary tract inflammation, which is also called Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD). Signs of FUS include frequent trips to the litter box, crying, blood in the urine and straining to urinate. If your male cat looks "constipated," he may have a urethral obstruction and can't urinate. This can be fatal if not treated quickly. Urethral blockages are rare in females. About 5 percent of cats are affected with FUS. Special diets may help prevent this condition.

Fleas and Ticks

Fleas are a problem that should be taken seriously. These tiny parasites feed off of your pet, transmit tapeworms and irri-

tate the skin. Carefully check your cat once a week for fleas and ticks. If there are fleas on your cat, there will be fleas in your house. You may need to use flea bombs or premise-control sprays, and be sure to treat all animals in your house. Take care that any sprays, powders or shampoos you use are safe for cats and that all products are compatible if used together. Cats die every year from improper treatment with pest control products. You may want to ask your vet about new methods of flea and tick control.

Medicines and Poisons

Never give your cat medication that has not been prescribed by your veterinarian. For example, did you know that Tylenol is FATAL—and aspirin can also be FATAL—to a cat? Keep rat poison or other rodenticides away from your cat. If you suspect your animal has ingested a poisonous substance, call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center 24-hour help line at (888) 4ANI-HELP (888-426-4435). A consultation fee applies.

Neutering

Females should be spayed and males neutered by six months of age. Neutering a male (removing the testicles) can prevent urine spraying, decrease the urge to escape and look for a mate, and reduce fighting between males. Spaying a female (removing the ovaries and uterus) helps prevent breast cancer, which can be fatal 90 percent of the time, and pyometra (uterus infection), a very serious problem in older females that must be treated with surgery and intensive medical care. Since cats can breed up to three times a year, it is vital that your female feline be spayed to prevent her from having unwanted litters.

Claws

Cats need to scratch. When a cat scratches, the old outer nail sheath is pulled off and the sharp, smooth claws underneath are exposed. Cutting your cat's nails every 2 to 3 weeks will keep them relatively

blunt and less likely to harm the arms of both humans and furniture.

Vaccinations

- Kittens should be vaccinated with a combination vaccine (called a 3-in-1) at 2, 3 and 4 months of age and then annually. This vaccine protects cats from panleukopenia (also called feline distemper), calicivirus and rhinotracheitis (flu-like viruses). If you have an unvaccinated cat older than four months of age, he needs a series of two vaccinations given two to three weeks apart, followed by a yearly vaccination.
- There is a vaccine available for feline leukemia virus (FeLV). This is one of two immune system viruses (retroviruses) that infect cats. The other is feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). There is no vaccine available for FIV. Cats can be infected with either virus for months to years without any indication that they are carrying a fatal virus. You cannot look at cats or kittens and know if they are infected—a blood test is necessary. Infections can be transmitted at birth from the mother or by being bitten by an infected cat. Neither virus can infect humans. Many outdoor and stray cats and kittens carry this infection. All cats should be tested for these viruses. Because of the fatal nature of these diseases, you should not expose the cats already living in your home by taking in untested cats or kittens. To be safe, keep your cat indoors, but if your cat does go outside, he should be vaccinated against feline leukemia virus. And remember that no vaccine is 100-percent effective.

Vaccines protect your cat from specific viral and bacterial infections. They are not a treatment. If your companion cat gets sick because he is not properly vaccinated, the vaccinations should be given after your pet recovers.

Worms

Kittens and cats can be infected with several types of worms. A microscopic fecal examination can provide a correct diagno-

sis. If deworming is necessary, it should be done under a veterinarian's direction.

Additional Information:

- The average life span of an indoor cat is 13 to 17 years.
- Many houseplants and garden shrubs are poisonous to cats. For a list of these dangers, write to: The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, 1717 South Philo Road, Suite 36, Urbana, IL 61802. The cost of a reference guide is \$15.
- For more information, search the cat care section on our web site: www.aspc.org.
- For a list of free behavioral literature, contact ASPCA Public Information, 424 East 92nd St., New York, NY 10128; (212) 876-7700, ext. 4650. For questions about animal behavior, call (212) 876-7700, ext. 4423.

Recommended Reading:

- "ASPCA Complete Cat Care Manual"
- "ASPCA Complete Guide to Cats"
- "ASPCA Pet Care Guide for Kids—Kitten" You can order the books above by calling the ASPCA Humane Education Department at (212) 876-7700, ext. 4410.
- "Cat Love," Pam Johnson, Storey Publishing
- "Cornell Book of Cats," edited by Mordecai Siegal, Villard
- "From the Cat's Point of View," Gwen Bohnenkamp, Perfect Paws, Inc.