



***Shepherd Veterinary Clinic***  
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**KITTEN TALES**  
*Care of your new Kitten*

**1. FEEDING**

Young kittens have small stomachs and high metabolic rates, so they must be fed several times a day. While dry cat food is economical and may help your cat's teeth, it is sometimes difficult for very young kittens to chew and also is high in carbohydrates. Cats are obligate carnivores and need diets with high protein and moderate fat. This is best supplied in canned food. Feed canned food at room temperature, never hot or cold, then cover the opened can and keep it in the refrigerator. Always feed a high quality brand name cat food.

**2. LITTER BOX**

Kittens are ready for litter box training at an early age. Put a litter box in an easy-to-reach, private spot and begin placing your kitten in the box frequently. Usually when your kitten first wakes up, has eaten a meal or has been exercising then is a good time to place it in the litter box. A kitten will crouch and raise its tail when it is ready to relieve itself. If your kitten has an "accident" do not rub its nose in the urine or feces; be sure and clean up the area so no trace of odor remains. It is important to keep the litter box clean or the kitten will find another place to go. If you have more than one cat there should be as many litter boxes as cats plus one more.

**3. TOYS and SCRATCHING POSTS**

Toys are an excellent way to keep your kitten from being bored and also to provide exercise. Pet stores have many excellent toys for your kitten. Your main concern should be that the toys not come apart and possibly choke the kitten or be swallowed. Avoid toys that have glued-on parts. Golf balls, cardboard boxes and toilet-paper tubes are inexpensive items that can provide hours of fun for your kitten.

Scratching is a normal instinct in all cats; cats must scratch to groom their nails. A scratching post is one of the most effective ways to deal with this deeply ingrained behavior. The ideal scratching post for your kitten is sturdy, covered in a rough surface, and tall enough to let your cat stretch to its full height.

**4. VACCINATIONS**

At eight weeks of age your kitten should receive its first vaccination. This vaccination is repeated in one month, and then one year later. Following the one year booster vaccination, your cat may only need to be vaccinated every three years. This core vaccination protocol will protect your cat from contracting distemper and upper respiratory diseases.

You may also consider vaccinating your kitten against feline leukemia. This vaccination is given after your kitten is ten weeks old and then is repeated 3-4 weeks later. Yearly boosters are required to maintain your cat's protection from the leukemia virus. In vaccinating your pet for leukemia you need to consider the risk of exposure to the disease. Transmission of leukemia virus is by direct contact with infected cats, including shared water and food bowls and litter pans, mutual grooming, and cat bites. Kittens can also contract the disease in utero from their mother. It is important to have your cat, and any cats that will be in contact with your cat, tested for leukemia using a simple blood test. There is no effective treatment for an infected cat and that cat will be an infectious threat to the others

## **VACCINATIONS (continued).**

There is now a vaccine available for feline immunodeficiency virus, commonly called feline AIDS or FIV. This virus is similar to HIV or human immunodeficiency virus, but there is no transmission of FIV to people. FIV is usually transmitted between cats by bites inflicted during cat fights. The minimum age to start vaccines is eight weeks of age, and it is given in a series of three doses, administered 2-3 weeks apart, with a single booster vaccine given yearly. All cats should be tested prior to starting the FIV vaccine series. Once the vaccine is administered the cat will always test positive for FIV.

## **5. INTERNAL PARASITES**

It is important to have your pet checked for potentially life-threatening internal parasites. A fresh stool sample is all that is needed for your veterinarian to detect the following common parasites: coccidia, hookworm, and roundworm.

Another common intestinal parasite is tapeworm. Tapeworm can be detected visually as small, rice-like segments on the stool or on the fur around the tail area. Cats become infected with tapeworm from ingesting fleas or rodents.

All of the above-mentioned parasites have a prescribed method of treatment. Yearly stool checks are recommended for your pet.

Heartworm is another parasite that can infect your cat and severely affect its health, even causing sudden death. It is transmitted by mosquito bites. A once-monthly medication either in chewable or topical form should be given to all cats in Hawaii.

## **6. EXTERNAL PARASITES**

There are several new products that are non-toxic and highly effective in treating fleas. Program is a once-monthly, food additive that keeps fleas from reproducing. Advantage, Revolution, and Frontline are flea adulticides applied topically to the back of the cat's neck once a month.

Ear mites are common in cats and are easily spread. These tiny eight-legged parasites live and breed in the ear canal, causing inflammation and infection of the ear. Symptoms of ear mites include constant shaking and scratching of the ears, along with a large amount of dark brown wax similar in appearance to coffee grounds. You will need to treat your cat's ears with prescription ear drops, or use a topical insecticide like Revolution, Advantage or Frontline.

## **7. DENTAL CARE**

Begin dental care early in your kitten's life. Dental disease is very common in mature cats and causes periodontal infections, tooth loss and even kidney and heart conditions. Begin brushing your kitten's teeth now to prevent the tartar buildup. Special toothpastes are available in a flavor your kitten will enjoy. Never use human toothpaste; it is not meant to be swallowed.

## **8. LICENSING**

Licenses provide important identification for your pet. It is tragic the number of cats and dogs which end up at the animal shelter and are never reunited with their owners. Licenses can be obtained at the Maui Animal Shelter on Mokulele Highway.

A permanent ear tattoo or a microchip is also an excellent form of identification available for your pet.

## **9. SPAYING / NEUTERING**

Spaying or neutering are recommended at four to six months of age. A sterilized animal makes a much better pet and there are several health advantages to spaying and neutering.

Over five thousand cats and one thousand dogs are euthanized at the animal shelter on Maui every year, because there are not enough homes for them. You may be able to find homes for your kittens, but then there are that many less homes for the other animals at the shelter.

If you do breed your pet, be sure it does not have any genetic faults that will be passed on to its offspring. Do not breed animals that are related.

## **10. CARRIERS**

Always bring your cat to the veterinarian in a carrier. Cats feel safer and more secure in an enclosed space. Even the calmest cat may become frantic, injuring itself and/or those handling it while in the unfamiliar settings of the car and veterinarian's office.

## **11. PAIN RELIEF**

Always check with your veterinarian before giving any type of medication, especially over-the-counter pain relievers. Cats are very sensitive to these products, Tylenol (acetaminophen) and Advil (ibuprofen) can actually cause death.