



# New Kitten Recommendations

Congratulations on the new addition to your family! Owning a cat can be an extremely rewarding experience, but is also carries quite a bit of responsibility. Hopefully this guide will give you the most important information needed to make educated decisions regarding your kitten.

## Introducing Kitten to Your House, and to Other Pets

Firstly, before bringing a new kitten home, and especially if you have other pets, a clean bill of health by a veterinarian is extremely important in preventing the spread of any viruses, parasites, fleas, or other diseases. Once the doctor deems your kitten healthy to bring home, the transition can begin.



To make your kitten's transition as smooth and comfortable as possible, it's best to confine her to one room initially, such as a small bedroom. Before you bring Kitten home, you should have a litterbox, food and water bowls, cozy bedding, scratching post, and toys already in the room for her. This will allow her to familiarize herself with one room of the house, and get used to the new smells without feeling too overwhelmed or scared. She will come to think of this room as her safe haven when you start letting her have access to other parts of the house, and she'll be able to retreat to this comfort zone if she gets too scared. If she will be the only pet in the house, you can start introducing her to other rooms of the house and letting her explore (always while supervised) within the first 1-3 days.

If you have any other pets at home, such as another cat or dog, the introduction process will probably take longer. Still confine Kitten to her room as described above, and let her stay there for 2-3 days and get comfortable. The other animals will smell her and know that she's there. They may even try to smell each other under the door. After Kitten becomes comfortable in her room, you'll want to swap rooms – this means, you will let Kitten out into the rest of the house to explore, while putting the other pets in Kitten's room, still keeping everyone separated. This will allow Kitten to explore the rest of the house without being bothered by the other pets. It will also allow the other pets to smell Kitten's bedding and the room she's been in, so they can get more used to the idea of having another animal in the house. After a day or two of this, you may start introducing the animals to each other – only while supervised. Let them sniff each other or touch noses. Hissing or growling is perfectly normal when introducing two cats to each other. As long as there is no actual attacking, continue to watch them closely. Keep the encounters short, and gradually let them spend more and more time together. You'll need to use your judgment and “play it by ear” during this introduction. If the cats are attacking each other, take a step back and keep them separated for a few days again, then start the process over. Usually, the cats won't attack each other, but hissing and growling is normal – this will subside with time. You'll know that the cats are comfortable with each other when they can sleep in the same room as the other cat.

## Food Recommendations

It used to be the common understanding that dry food was better for cats' teeth than canned food. However, more studies have been done recently that show that it doesn't help as much as we once thought.



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Cats' teeth are designed for ripping and tearing flesh, not chewing and grinding food. Most cats chew their food very minimally. You may hear some crunching at the food bowl, but if you've ever seen a cat regurgitate undigested dry food, you'll see that most of the kibble is completely intact – they swallow most of their food whole. Therefore, it's not doing much for their teeth if they're not chewing it.

Studies have shown that a mixed diet of both canned and dry food is ideal for cats. Canned food has a lot of moisture in it (about 75% water), so cats will feel fuller on a canned diet and will be less likely to overeat and gain excess weight. Also, cats don't drink as much as dogs do, so it's important to try to encourage as much fluid intake as possible.

Dry food is very energy-dense and calorie-packed. Therefore, cats fed an all-dry food diet are more likely to become overweight than cats who are fed a mixed diet. Even though they are reaching their caloric needs, they don't feel full and are more likely to snack and overeat.

We recommend a high quality dry and canned food diet such as Hill's Science Diet, Iams or Eukanuba. These foods are properly balanced based on the cat's age and lifestyle, and the manufacturers do many studies and food trials to make sure your cat receives the very best nutrition possible.

For more information regarding diet, food, and exercise, please see The Cat Practice's Obesity Guide, available on our website: [www.thecatpracticepc.com](http://www.thecatpracticepc.com).

## Playing Behavior and Toys

Kittens are little balls of energy and are constantly playing, eating or sleeping. You'll want to establish a good bonding experience with your kitten right away. This means setting a few minutes per day aside to play with her. Using appropriate toys is important for the development process – do NOT use your hands/fingers/feet, as this will teach her that's it acceptable to bite and scratch you. Use toys such as small stuffed animals (so she can tackle and bite it like she would a littermate), wands with a feather on the end, balled up pieces of paper, etc. Do not give your kitten string or yarn, as they can (and probably will) eat this, possibly causing a life-threatening blockage in the stomach or intestines.



If you find that your kitten is playing too rough with you, you will need to discourage this behavior right away, quickly and consistently. Do not hit your kitten, but use a loud sound such as a clap of your hands, or saying her name loudly and sharply, to distract her from the bad behavior – then you'll need to replace the bad behavior with what you would like her to do instead. For example, if she's attacking your ankles and sinking her teeth into your skin, make a loud cry (like a littermate would do if she started biting too hard) or a clap to distract her and make her stop. Then direct her to her scratching post, or another toy that she can bite instead. You always need to replace the bad behavior with a good behavior, or your kitten won't understand what you want her to do.

For more detailed information about dealing with and correcting rough play in kittens, please see The Cat Practice's Rough Play in Kittens Guide (available in the resource section of our website: [www.thecatpracticepc.com](http://www.thecatpracticepc.com)).



# New Kitten Recommendations

## Socialization

Kittens, just like young children, have increased learning capacity. If you obtain your kitten before about 14 weeks of age, this is prime time to introduce different situations, people, animals, and handling procedures, as this window of socialization for learning and development is still open.

Allow your kitten to get used to traveling in a cat carrier, introduce her to other people (males, females, children, seniors), other animals (cats, dogs, etc.), and get her used to handling procedures (touching feet, belly, checking ears, lifting tail, brushing, etc.). You'll have much better luck introducing your kitten to these different stimuli as young as possible than if you wait until she's older.



It's still possible to socialize a kitten to the above situations if she is over the age of 14 weeks, but that window of socialization will begin to close after this age. However, this doesn't mean that the kitten cannot become socialized after this period, it just means it may take a bit longer for acceptance. Kittens are very curious and love playing new games and experiencing new things. Older cats, on the contrary, are creatures of habit and have decreased coping skills when it comes to change. That's why it's important to expose your young cat to as many different situations as possible (like going to the vet for regular, routine check-ups) so they are less likely to be very stressed.

People who shelter their cat and do not expose them to different situations, people, or animals, will find themselves with an extremely stressed and possibly fractious cat on their hands when in these situations.

## Nail Trimming, Declawing, and Alternatives

Cats scratch. Period. You cannot train a cat not to scratch, but you can train her to scratch only in appropriate areas, like her scratching post. You'll want to place the post in a high-traffic area in the house, somewhere where she spends a lot of time. Play with her around it and make it a fun place to go. For more information about training your cat to use a scratching post, please see The Cat Practice's Nail Trimming and Scratching Post Guide, available on our website: [www.thecatpracticepc.com](http://www.thecatpracticepc.com).

If you've already decided that you want to declaw your kitten, you'll want to do it sooner rather than later. Kittens that are declawed around 3 lbs., are less painful, heal quicker, and don't need to stay as long in the hospital. Once cats are older, their joints are tighter and there is more weight coming down on the feet, making it more painful with increased healing time, usually requiring more pain management.

## Vaccinations

Your doctor or technician may have already discussed vaccinations with you before you brought your new kitten home. Keep in mind that every hospital, clinic, or shelter has varying vaccine protocols – so if your kitten was previously vaccinated or tested at another clinic, The Cat Practice's recommendations may be different from what was previously done on your kitten.



# New Kitten Recommendations

The Cat Practice recommends two core vaccines for cats and kittens. This includes a distemper (FVRCP) vaccine, and a rabies vaccine. If your kitten will be spending any time outdoors, she may also require a feline leukemia vaccine.

## Distemper (FVRCP) Vaccine

The distemper (FVRCP) vaccine protects against the most serious upper respiratory diseases. It contains protection against 3 different diseases, which includes: feline rhinotracheitis, calici virus, and panleukopenia.

This is a series vaccine when it's first given, which means that your kitten will receive the first vaccine, and will need to be re-vaccinated in 3-4 weeks. This is due to the kitten's immune system and the maternal antibodies it has from the mother. Kittens still retain some antibodies from the mother cat, which will neutralize the first vaccine given. The second vaccine of the series is then given to actually create the kitten's own immune response once the maternal antibodies have diminished, and create long-term immunity to the disease. The booster after the initial FVRCP vaccine will be good for 1 year, then she will stay protected for 3 years thereafter.

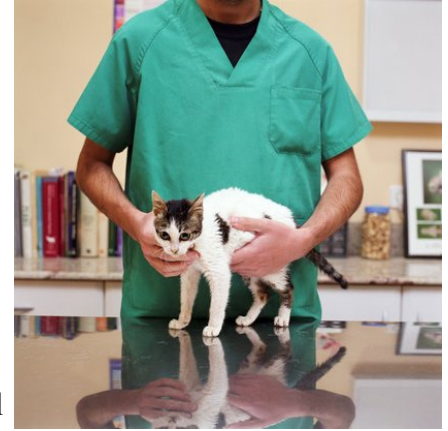
The Cat Practice utilizes an intranasal vaccine which means that a few drops are applied to each nostril, so there is no injection involved. Most cats and kittens don't mind this route of vaccination – and some even like it! Since upper respiratory viruses enter through the nose, the vaccine is applied directly to that area. You may notice some sneezing after your kitten receives the intranasal FVRCP vaccine – it should be a clear, wet sneeze that may last up to 7 days. Please notify your doctor if you notice any green or yellow discharge, inappetence, or the sneezing does not resolve within a week.

## Rabies Vaccine

The rabies vaccine is recommended due to laws set by the State of Michigan and individual city ordinances. Since rabies is a serious human health risk, it's important to keep your cat up to date to cover the legal aspects of a possible problem, since most human cases of rabies come from domestic animals and pets. An indoor-only cat may be exposed to rabies by a mouse or a bat – which we have documented cases of this happening in our area, which is another good reason to keep your cat or kitten up to date on the vaccine. If a cat that is overdue for a rabies vaccine bites someone, by law a police report needs to be filed, and the cat must be quarantined at a shelter or vet clinic for 10 days to observe the animal for signs of rabies. Due to the legal ramifications of the rabies virus in pets and the human health risk, it's important to protect yourself from any liabilities.

The Cat Practice utilizes a new rabies vaccine called the PureVax® feline rabies vaccine. This vaccine has been proven to be much safer for cats due to the absence of certain additives called adjuvants, which increase the immune response in killed vaccines. Adjuvants have been linked to vaccine-associated sarcomas (cancer tumors) at the vaccine site in cats in about 1 in 10,000 vaccinated cats. The PureVax® vaccine uses new biochemical engineering which makes the use of adjuvants unnecessary, which means the chances of vaccine-related tumors is dramatically decreased. This injectable vaccine is given annually in the right rear leg, just under the skin. A small lump under the skin may be observed for a few weeks, but should not persist past 2 – 3 months. The risk of the rabies virus far outweighs any complications that could possibly arise from the vaccine, therefore you and your kitten will greatly benefit from staying up to date on this important vaccine.

For more detailed information about the PureVax feline rabies vaccine, please see the information available on our website: [www.thecatpracticepc.com](http://www.thecatpracticepc.com).





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## Feline Leukemia (FeLV) Vaccine

The feline leukemia (FeLV) vaccine is strongly recommended for any cats who spend any time outdoors. The FeLV virus can survive readily outside the body and in the environment. A cat could be exposed to FeLV by walking in grass that an infected cat has urinated on, and then grooming itself; by sharing food bowls or litterboxes, or by bite wounds. Cats under the age of 10 years old are at increased risk of picking up the virus. Older cats are less likely to become infected, because of their retained immunity.

The first time it's given to a cat, the cat will need to be re-vaccinated 3 – 4 weeks later, just like the FVRCP vaccine. Then the FeLV vaccine is given annually thereafter. And any cat that receives the annual FeLV vaccine, should be tested yearly for the virus.

The Cat Practice does not over-vaccinate our patients, so we will discuss you and your cat's lifestyle before making a decision about vaccinating for feline leukemia. The Cat Practice also utilizes the PureVax® feline leukemia vaccine (like the PureVax® rabies vaccine described above), which is a very safe product. Also, the FeLV vaccine is not given by injection – it is delivered through a device that shoots the vaccine under the skin by a puff of air, which means that no needle and syringe are necessary. The device makes a loud popping sound as the vaccine is delivered, so some cats may react to the noise, but it is no more painful than receiving an injection. This route of administration is becoming more and more popular, especially in humane medicine, to make vaccines safer to give.

For more information about the feline leukemia and FIV viruses, please see The Cat Practice's Feline Leukemia and FIV Guide, available on our website: [www.thecatpracticepc.com](http://www.thecatpracticepc.com).

## Parasitism and Deworming

Intestinal parasites are very common in kittens. Most kittens are infected soon after birth, through the queen's milk. It's a complex process, but even if the mother cat was negative for intestinal parasites before becoming pregnant, the dormant and encysted eggs become active on the 42nd day of pregnancy, reinfecting the mother, and then infecting the kittens through the milk. So it is assumed that every kitten has some type of intestinal parasite, even if none are seen in a stool sample.

The most common type of intestinal parasite we see in kittens and cats is roundworms. These worms look like white spaghetti noodles and can vary in length. When worms die, they can sometimes be seen in the stool, or may also be observed in vomit. However, you may not see any actual worms in the stool or vomit, but that doesn't mean the kitten isn't infected. Roundworm eggs are microscopic and must therefore be visualized using a microscope. Kittens with roundworms usually have a bloated, round belly, and a dull hair coat. Roundworms aren't usually fatal in an otherwise healthy adult cat, but they can strip a small kitten of the nutrients it needs to grow and develop properly.

A general dewormer is given by mouth usually in a tablet form. This will cover most types of intestinal parasites and kills the adult worms. A second deworming should be done 3 – 4 weeks later, since the parasite eggs that weren't killed before will now have become adults. A stool sample should be brought in to be checked for additional parasites that the dewormer may not cover, such as specific protozoa. A different type of medication will need to be given if your kitten has anything that isn't covered by the general dewormer.



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We recommend checking a stool sample on all cats (even indoor-only cats) annually. Cats may be infected by dirt that is tracked into the house that contains the parasite eggs, or by ingesting a flea (which produces tapeworms, a different type of intestinal parasite). Any cats that spend any time outdoors or hunting prey should be dewormed every 4 – 6 months. Cats can pick up roundworms or hookworms through infected soil, and tapeworms from fleas or eating mice.



Some of these parasites can be transferred to humans, including roundworms and hookworms. Households with small children (who may accidentally get into the litterbox) should be especially diligent about preventative deworming and stool samples. Be sure to scoop the litterbox at least once a day, as this will reduce the likelihood of any possible parasite eggs becoming active in the litterbox, and possibly re-infecting the host, another cat, or a person.

## Spaying and Neutering

The advantages of spaying and neutering far outweighs the disadvantages. The only disadvantage being that the cat is unable to reproduce. The advantages are the cat makes a better housepet, and will be at less risk for certain diseases and conditions.

Males can be neutered as soon as both testicles are descended into the scrotum. Females should be spayed at around 5 months old, before their first heat cycle. Female cats start going into heat at around 6 months of age. If allowed to have a heat cycle before spaying, she will be at much greater risk for mammary cancer later on in life. There is no truth to the idea about letting your cat have a litter of kittens before she is spayed, or that your male cat will lose his “sense of manhood” as a result of neutering.

Spaying and neutering is one of the most important aspects of responsible pet ownership.

For more detailed information, please refer to the The Cat Practice’s Spaying and Neutering Guide, available on our website: [www.thecatpracticepc.com](http://www.thecatpracticepc.com).

In closing, congratulations on the newest addition to your family! We hope this Guide answered some of your most common questions regarding kittens, but please feel free to contact your veterinarian or technician with any additional questions or concerns you may have.

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