

TOP 5

TOP 5 KITTEN BEHAVIOR TIPS

Ellen M. Lindell, VMD, DACVB
Veterinary Behavior Consultations
Bethel, Connecticut

Without guidance to owners, kittens can become cats with behavior problems. Most owners do not communicate expectations to their kittens, so they can be surprised and distressed when kittens exhibit undesirable—yet normal—behaviors. Some simple interventions may prevent unwanted behaviors and assure kittens can grow into behaviorally healthy cats.



Most unwanted destructive behaviors can be prevented with thoughtful management.

TOP 5 KITTEN BEHAVIOR TIPS

1. Offer claw counseling.
2. Prevent house soiling.
3. Allot enough time to assure low-stress visits.
4. Encourage appropriate socialization and handling.
5. Educate on environmental enrichment.

1 Offer Claw Counseling.

Many clients erroneously believe that property damage is inevitable as long as kittens have intact claws. Requests for elective or prophylactic declawing were once common, but it is the veterinary team's responsibility to educate clients that declawing surgery is not necessarily standard; neither is it routine, nor should it be undertaken lightly.

Most unwanted destructive behaviors can be prevented with thoughtful management. The main reasons for scratching surfaces are claw care and communication. Kittens need the opportunity to engage in these normal, species-typical behaviors. Appropriate scratching posts should be made readily available.

Scratching posts should be placed near favored resting places, as kittens often scratch after waking up from a nap. To facilitate the placement of communicative scratch marks on suitable surfaces, additional posts should be placed in prominent areas rather than corners.

Until a kitten's preference can be determined, a variety of substrates should be provided. Commonly preferred materials include wood, corrugated cardboard, sisal, and loosely woven carpet. Vertical and horizontal posts should be offered.

Kittens need supervision until they can consistently select appropriate scratching surfaces.

When supervision is not available, kittens should be confined in a cat-proofed area with scratching posts, toys, food, water, and litter box.

Mildly aversive deterrents (eg, double-sided tape) can be used to deter the kitten from scratching on valuable furniture or rugs, but an appropriate post should be placed in the immediate vicinity. Positive reinforcement delivered immediately after the kitten uses the post may strengthen preference for the appropriate surface. Owners should be advised to refrain from using punishment. Cats that are punished (eg, water spraying, verbal reprimand) may become fearful and reluctant to interact with owners.

To avoid incidental damage that can occur during climbing, cat trees and elevated walkways should be provided. Teach owners how to keep kitten claws trimmed or schedule regular trims at the practice. If unwanted destructive behavior occurs despite these preventive measures or if owners observe aggressive behavior in their kittens, a behavior consultation should be scheduled. In most cases, treatment will not require surgical intervention.

2 Prevent House Soiling.

House soiling can be a life-threatening, preventable condition, and it is the major behavioral reason that cats are surrendered to shelters. It is poorly tolerated, yet clients may not mention the behavior unless prompted. Be sure to inquire about litter box use during every appointment.

Provide owners with litter box guidelines:

- Litter boxes must be appealing and accessible. Young kittens do not have a strong location or substrate preference and may not be motivated to search for a little box of sand in a large house. Place boxes in a convenient area on each floor.

- Shy kittens may view dogs, other cats, and/or humans as barriers to the box. In addition, boxes should not be placed near noisy appliances or furnaces, any of which may deter the cat from using the box.
- Litter boxes should be cleaned at least once daily. Many kittens will not use a soiled box and will search for a clean, absorbent surface. Comforters and piles of clothing are frequently targeted, as these substrates absorb urine. Empty bags or boxes are also popular targets.

If a kitten is already eliminating inappropriately, early intervention may be curative. First consider a medical cause, particularly if the frequency of urination or defecation is abnormal or if the kitten demonstrates diarrhea. In most cases, however, house soiling in kittens is related to an inadequacy in litter boxes.

Review hygiene, location, and substrate to address all inadequacies. Until litter boxes are used consistently, kittens should be supervised or restricted to a cat-proofed area with a litter box.

3 Allot Enough Time to Assure Low-Stress Visits.

Young kittens are sensitive and primed to learn. Even 1 frightening encounter at the veterinary hospital can plant the seed for a lifetime of stressful veterinary visits for all parties involved.

Take time with new kittens, and make every effort to offer a positive experience. Use minimal restraint during the examination. Be prepared with treats, toys, and a towel. If a blood draw is needed, try using a 3-person team. One person can gently restrain the kitten in his or her lap using a towel wrap, another team member can distract the kitten with an interesting snack or toy, and the third team member can collect the sample. If the kitten is distressed during a noncritical

procedure, reschedule when sedation would be safe and available.

4 Encourage Appropriate Socialization and Handling.

Even if owners do not bring their cats to other people's homes or to cat-friendly public spaces, every cat will eventually encounter another human as well as likely share a home with another pet. Encourage clients to introduce their kittens to adults and children; if available, introduce kittens to cat-friendly dogs and healthy, social kittens and cats. If a cat is to be let outside for supervised play or leash walks, introduce it to a leash and collar.

The most sensitive period for feline socialization ends at about 7 weeks of age. Beyond that age, kittens may be less flexible; it is particularly important that all socialization experiences are done gently. Counsel clients that socialization should be fun, or at least neutral, and never scary. Kittens should interact eagerly, without hiding or hissing, and should not be overwhelmed.

While kittens are young and at their most adaptable, prepare them for future handling. Daily examinations can be practiced at home. Kittens can earn treats for cooperating with being touched, being gently bundled into a towel, having their claws clipped, and receiving medication.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT TECHNIQUES
FOR TOWEL RESTRAINT OF CATS AT
brief.vet/towel-restraint-tips**

Suggest keeping a carrier out and accessible at all times and invite clients to periodically hide toys and treats inside. To reduce future stress associated with veterinary visits, invite clients to bring their kittens to the practice for tabletop play. Weekly car trips that end at pleasant destinations should be encouraged as well.

5 Educate on Environmental Enrichment.

A rich environment is essential for healthy development. Increase the size of the indoor world with vertical spaces in the form of shelves, perches, and catwalks. If it can be arranged safely, provide an outdoor enclosure. Offer kittens an opportunity to hunt by hiding food and toys in tunnels and boxes. Portions of meals can be placed into food-filled toys.

Play is important for communication and bonding. Even if there are other cats in the home, owners should play with the kitten daily. Discourage chasing or batting at hands and feet by redirecting

kittens toward an appropriate interactive toy. Spraying kittens with water is not an appropriate remedy. Punishment elicits fear, can disrupt a kitten's bond with the owner, and can potentially lead to aggressive behavior.

Reward-based training provides enrichment for kittens while strengthening the relationship between kittens and owners. Clicker training is enjoyable, and just a few minutes of daily training can improve communication and increase predictability.

All veterinary team members can get on board to help kittens develop into well-adjusted cats. Consider offering kitten socialization classes where tips can be shared and young patients can get off to a great start.

Suggested Reading

The CATalyst Council. <http://www.catalystcouncil.org>. Accessed January 2016.

Turner DC, Bateson P. *The Domestic Cat: the Biology of its Behavior*, 3rd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Seksel K. Preventing behavior problems in puppies and kittens. *Vet Clin North Am Small Anim Pract*. 2008;38(5):971-982.

Play is important for communication and bonding.

TRIFEXIS® (spinosad + milbemycin oxime) Chewable Tablets

Caution: Federal (USA) law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.
Before using TRIFEXIS chewable tablets, please consult the product insert, a summary of which follows:

Indications:

TRIFEXIS is indicated for the prevention of heartworm disease (*Dirofilaria immitis*), TRIFEXIS kills fleas and is indicated for the prevention and treatment of flea infestations (*Ctenocephalides felis*), and the treatment and control of adult hookworm (*Ancylostoma caninum*), adult roundworm (*Toxocara canis* and *Toxascaris leonina*) and adult whipworm (*Trichuris vulpis*) infections in dogs and puppies 8 weeks of age or older and 5 pounds of body weight or greater.

Dosage and Administration:

TRIFEXIS is given orally, once a month at the minimum dosage of 13.5 mg/lb (30 mg/kg) spinosad and 0.2 mg/lb (0.5 mg/kg) milbemycin oxime body weight. For heartworm prevention, give once monthly for at least 3 months after exposure to mosquitoes (see **EFFECTIVENESS**).

Contraindications:

There are no known contraindications to the use of TRIFEXIS.

Warnings:

Not for human use. Keep this and all drugs out of the reach of children. Serious adverse reactions have been reported following concomitant extra-label use of ivermectin with spinosad alone, a component of TRIFEXIS (see **ADVERSE REACTIONS**).

Precautions:

Treatment with fewer than 3 monthly doses after the last exposure to mosquitoes may not provide complete heartworm prevention (see **EFFECTIVENESS**).

Prior to administration of TRIFEXIS, dogs should be tested for existing heartworm infection. At the discretion of the veterinarian, infected dogs should be treated with an adulticide to remove adult heartworms. TRIFEXIS is not effective against adult *D. immitis*. While the number of circulating microfilariae may decrease following treatment, TRIFEXIS is not indicated for microfilariae clearance. Mild, transient hypersensitivity reactions manifested as labored respiration, vomiting, salivation and lethargy, have been noted in some dogs treated with milbemycin oxime carrying a high number of circulating microfilariae. These reactions are presumably caused by release of protein from dead or dying microfilariae.

Use with caution in breeding females. The safe use of TRIFEXIS in breeding males has not been evaluated.

Use with caution in dogs with pre-existing epilepsy (see **ADVERSE REACTIONS**). Puppies less than 14 weeks of age may experience a higher rate of vomiting.

Adverse Reactions:

In a well-controlled US field study, which included a total of 352 dogs (176 treated with TRIFEXIS and 176 treated with an active control), no serious adverse reactions were attributed to administration of TRIFEXIS. All reactions were regarded as mild.

Over the 180-day study period, all observations of potential adverse reactions were recorded. Reactions that occurred at an incidence >1% (average monthly rate) within any of the 6 months of observation are presented in the following table. The most frequently reported adverse reaction in dogs in the TRIFEXIS group was vomiting.

Average Monthly Rate (%) of Dogs With Adverse Reactions

Adverse Reaction	TRIFEXIS Chewable Tablets*	Active Control Tablets*
Vomiting	6.13	3.08
Pruritus	4.00	4.91
Lethargy	2.63	1.54
Diarrhea	2.25	1.54
Dermatitis	1.47	1.45
Skin Reddening	1.37	1.26
Decreased appetite	1.27	1.35
Pinnal Reddening	1.18	0.87

*n=176 dogs

In the US field study, one dog administered TRIFEXIS experienced a single mild seizure 2 1/2 hours after receiving the second monthly dose. The dog remained enrolled and received four additional monthly doses after the event and completed the study without further incident.

Following concomitant extra-label use of ivermectin with spinosad alone, a component of TRIFEXIS, some dogs have experienced the following clinical signs: trembling/twitching, salivation/drooling, seizures, ataxia, mydriasis, blindness and disorientation. Spinosad alone has been shown to be safe when administered concurrently with heartworm preventatives at label directions.

In US and European field studies, no dogs experienced seizures when dosed with spinosad alone at the therapeutic dose range of 13.5-27.3 mg/lb (30-60 mg/kg), including 4 dogs with pre-existing epilepsy. Four epileptic dogs that received higher than the maximum recommended dose of 27.3 mg/lb (60 mg/kg) experienced at least one seizure within the week following the second dose of spinosad, but no seizures following the first and third doses. The cause of the seizures observed in the field studies could not be determined.

For technical assistance or to report suspected adverse drug events, contact Elanco Animal Health at 1-888-545-5973. For additional information about adverse drug experience reporting for animal drugs, contact FDA at 1-888-FDA-VETS or <http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth>.

Post Approval Experience (Mar 2012):

The following adverse reactions are based on post-approval adverse drug event reporting. The adverse reactions are listed in decreasing order of frequency: vomiting, depression/lethargy, pruritus, anorexia, diarrhea, trembling/shaking, ataxia, seizures, hypersalivation, and skin reddening.

Effectiveness:

Heartworm Prevention:

In a well-controlled laboratory study, TRIFEXIS was 100% effective against induced heartworm infections when administered for 3 consecutive monthly doses. Two consecutive monthly doses did not provide 100% effectiveness against heartworm infection. In another well-controlled laboratory study, a single dose of TRIFEXIS was 100% effective against induced heartworm infections.

In a well-controlled six-month US field study conducted with TRIFEXIS, no dogs were positive for heartworm infection as determined by heartworm antigen testing performed at the end of the study and again three months later.

Flea Treatment and Prevention:

In a well-controlled laboratory study, TRIFEXIS demonstrated 100% effectiveness on the first day following treatment and 100% effectiveness on Day 30.

In a well-controlled laboratory study, spinosad, a component of TRIFEXIS, began to kill fleas 30 minutes after administration and demonstrated 100% effectiveness within 4 hours. Spinosad, a component of TRIFEXIS, kills fleas before they can lay eggs. If a severe environmental infestation exists, fleas may persist for a period of time after dose administration due to the emergence of adult fleas from pupae already in the environment. In field studies conducted in households with existing flea infestations of varying severity, flea reductions of 95.0% to 98.8% were observed over the course of 3 months following treatment with spinosad alone. Dogs with signs of flea allergy dermatitis showed improvement in erythema, papules, scaling, alopecia, dermatitis/pyodermitis and pruritus as a direct result of eliminating the fleas.

Treatment and Control of Intestinal Nematode Infections:

In well-controlled laboratory studies, TRIFEXIS was > 90% effective in removing naturally and experimentally induced adult roundworm, whipworm and hookworm infections.

Palatability:

TRIFEXIS is a flavored chewable tablet. In a field study of client-owned dogs where 175 dogs were each offered TRIFEXIS once a month for 6 months, dogs voluntarily consumed 54% of the doses when offered plain as if a treat, and 33% of the doses when offered in or on food. The remaining 13% of doses were administered like other tablet medications.

NADA 141-321, Approved by the FDA

Manufactured by Elanco Animal Health, A Division of Eli Lilly & Company Indianapolis, IN 46285
www.trifexis.com

Elanco, Trifexis and the diagonal bar are trademarks owned or licensed by Eli Lilly and Company, its subsidiaries or affiliates.

Sep 2014 03B049_Mk44