

**small door**

VETERINARY

# CAT PARENTING 101

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Everything you need to know about  
caring for your new cat.

# CONGRATULATIONS!

Welcoming a new cat into your family is one of the most rewarding experiences in life, and we're so excited for you to get to know your new furry family member over the coming days and weeks. As a new cat owner, there's a lot to learn, so we've put together this comprehensive guide to help you navigate cat parenthood.

Remember – as a Small Door member, you can contact us 24/7 via the app for advice or if you ever have any concerns about your new kitty. Best of luck, and we can't wait to meet you both at the practice soon!



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# THE ESSENTIALS, ON ONE PAGE

## PREPARING YOUR HOME

Make sure you've got all the essentials before you bring your new cat home. As well as the usual supplies, ensure you have:

- A litter box and the litter brand they are used to
- A few toys and treats
- A scratching post
- Consider a cat pheromone diffuser, like [Feliway](#)

## SOCIALIZATION

Socialization involves getting your cat used to new sights, sounds, smells and experiences. As soon as you bring them home, get them used to being handled; gently touch their paws, ears, belly and tail frequently. Slowly introduce them to other friendly humans, and cat-friendly cats, if possible. You can also play recordings to expose them to new sounds.

## NUTRITION

- Begin by feeding your cat the food they are used to. If you want to change brands, do so slowly over the course of a week or so by slowly providing less of the previous food and more of the new food.
- Make sure your pet's food contains an AAFCO statement of nutritional adequacy for your cat's life stage.
- Check out our list of recommended food brands on page 20.
- Don't go overboard with treats; they should make up no more than 10% of your cat's calorie intake to ensure they're getting the right nutrient balance.

## TRAINING

- While training is traditionally associated with cats, it's equally important to work on instilling good behaviors in a new cat to help them remain well-mannered as they grow older.
- Use positive reinforcement techniques (praise and reward for good behavior) rather than punishing bad behavior. Positive reinforcement training is proven to be more effective, and helps develop the bond between you and your cat.
- Check out our tips on page 14 for litter box training, and page 12 for discouraging common unwanted behaviors

## WELLNESS

Playtime and mental stimulation are crucial for the wellbeing of your cat. Provide toys and play games that mentally stimulate your cat and ensure they're getting enough exercise. The [Indoor Hunting Feeder by Doc and Phoebe](#) is a great option to keep your cat busy while you're out.

## MEDICAL CARE

- At your first appointment, we'll go over your cat's personalized wellness care schedule, including vaccine due dates, as well as discussing nutrition, lifestyle and other wellness factors specific to your cat.
- Remember to administer flea, tick and heartworm preventatives every month. Even indoor cats can be susceptible to these nasty parasites.
- We strongly recommend you consider pet insurance, to help plan for the unexpected.

# BRINGING YOUR NEW CAT HOME

## PREPARING YOUR HOME

Before you bring your new cat home, there are a few things you should do to prepare.

### 1. Ensure you're fully equipped

Make sure you've got all the necessary essentials to help your cat settle in. You'll need:

- Food and water bowls
- Food and treats (ideally the food that they're used to, to avoid an upset stomach)
- A few toys (check out our suggestions on page 8)
- A scratching post
- A 'safe space' for your cat to hide away. This could be a corner of a quiet room, somewhere they won't be disturbed, where you place their bed, litter tray, food and water
- A 'breakaway' type collar & ID tag with their name, your name and contact information
- Litter tray and the brand of litter they're familiar with
- Cleaning essentials for accidents – cleaning sprays specifically for cat messes can help to eliminate scents and reduce the likelihood of your cat doing their business outside the litter box again

### 2. Cat-proof your home

Make sure any breakables and important items are safely hidden away or out of reach of your cat, to save them from being chewed or knocked over. Keep garbage cans out of reach, and stow cleaning products and medicines up high, away from inquisitive noses.

Also check that none of your houseplants could be toxic for cats – lilies are particularly dangerous. Check out the [ASPCA's website for a full list of](#)

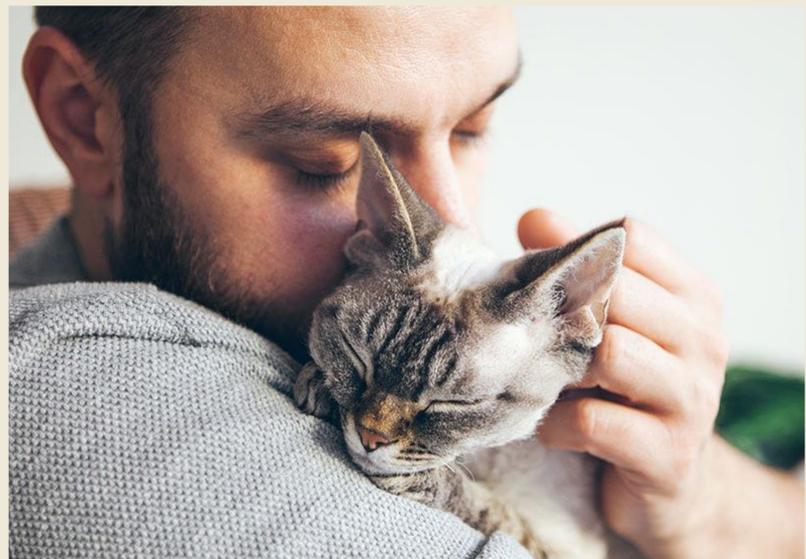
[plants toxic to cats](#). Attach cables to the wall and ensure anything ribbon- or rope-like is safely stowed away; cats love to play with these types of items, but they can be fatal if ingested.

Do not open windows during the first few weeks of having a new cat at home, and when you do, ensure you have safety screens/only open them a crack to prevent your cat falling out. Cats do not have a defined sense of height and can very easily jump or fall out, leading to serious injury or death. Similarly, if you have a balcony, do not let your cat out on it unless it is completely enclosed and your cat is supervised at all times.

If you live in an apartment, always wait until the elevator door is closed before opening your own door. This is especially important if you have a 'door-darter' cat who likes to run in the hall.

### 4. Discuss plans as a family/household

You should discuss plans for your new furry family member together, to ensure everyone is on the same page when it comes to behavioral matters, lifestyle choices and who's responsible for what. Your cat will feel more comfortable and settle in more quickly if everyone is consistent and you tend to follow a routine.



## THE FIRST DAY WITH YOUR NEW CAT

A kitten or cat of any age needs time to adjust and adapt to a new home.

### Meeting the family

Even if your cat has met all the members of their new household before coming home, they may still be anxious on the day, so it's best to take things slow and not overwhelm them.

The best way to introduce a cat to their new home is to allow them to move at their own pace, exploring the house and approaching the humans when they feel ready, rather than everyone approaching the cat.

If your new cat is nervous, ensure they have easy access to their 'safe space' – a quiet, darkened place for them to hide. Cardboard boxes or sheets draped over chairs make ideal hiding spots when you first bring kitty home.

You can help your new cat get to know you by placing a t-shirt or other soft item that smells like you inside or near their safe space.

## INTRODUCING YOUR NEW CAT TO OTHER PETS

While cats tend to be more solitary creatures than our canine friends, they are often found in familial groups in the wild and do enjoy company. It's important to be patient and consistent when introducing a new cat to your feline family.

While some cats may easily befriend a new sibling, others may need more time to acclimate to a multi-pet household. Introductions that happen too quickly can lead to unwanted outcomes like aggression, stress, and even inappropriate behaviors like soiling outside the litter box.

If possible, isolate your new cat in a separate room. Make sure your cat can live there comfortably for a few days, and provide all the essentials in this one room: food, water, bedding, a litter box, a scratching post, and other toys.

This will allow all pets, new and old, to be gradually introduced. Your new cat won't feel overwhelmed or alienated, and your resident cats won't feel territorial. You can't predict how they will react to one another, so it's crucial to prepare them properly.



### **Introduce them from afar and swap places**

Don't let your pets meet face-to-face just yet. Use a common towel, brush, or other item between your pets to help them recognize and get used to each other's scents. Don't be alarmed if your pets smell each other through the door or swipe at the door and show other aggressive behaviors. If destructive actions like these persist, consider blocking the entryway while your cats get used to one another.



Your new cat should explore your household and surroundings with as little stress as possible. This means your other pets should not be present while the newbie gets familiar with the rest of your house. If you can, swap their places. Remove your resident pets for a period of time, or put them in your new cat's room. Your new friend can explore alone, wander your home, and still smell and recognize your other pets.

To make your cat feel at ease, consider using pheromone sprays or diffusers. Use pheromone sprays on bedding, scratching posts, and other common areas; plug the pheromone diffusers into wall outlets around your home and near the litter box. These pheromones can help reduce stress and provide calming effects to your cat. [Feliway](#) is a popular brand that we recommend at Small Door.

### **When it's time to meet**

When your pets are finally ready to meet each other, be prepared for unexpected outcomes – good or bad. When introducing them, have towels, blankets, and a water spray bottle ready if you need to distract them. When introducing your new cat to a dog, make sure your pup is on a leash so you have more control during their interaction.

Start slowly. Gradually increase the duration of their interactions until they have adapted to living in the same space. Continue to introduce and separate your pets until they are coexisting safely. You may need to feed cats in different rooms for a prolonged period of time so that no food aggression arises.

If your pets become aggressive, stressed, or are not reacting well, do not attempt to physically handle them. They may become more distressed and even aggressive towards you. Use distractions like a spray bottle or toys, and make sure you have plenty of enrichment available to all your pets. Provide enough litter boxes, perches, scratching posts, and feeding areas to satisfy everyone.

Be patient with the process and with all your furry friends. Practice positive reinforcement and spend your time and attention equally. It can be a challenge, but if you are consistent and respectful to your pets, they will adjust. Soon you will have a home full of happy, friendly felines.

# SOCIALIZATION

Socialization means ‘learning how to be a part of society’, and while it’s most important during kittenhood, you may find you need to socialize a new adult cat too. Socialization is how cats learn about themselves, other cats, and other species they will interact with. It’s how your kitty will figure out how to communicate with other animals, and understand what’s acceptable and what’s not.

Poorly socialized cats can be fearful, timid, or aggressive later on, so it’s crucial to socialize your cat, especially if you plan on having a multi-pet household.

There is a critical socialization period for kittens (until they reach 14 weeks of age), and during this time, they’re primed to learn all the social skills they need to succeed. Remember that kittens are not fully vaccinated until 16 weeks old. This means they are susceptible to infectious diseases and illnesses during this important socialization period. Be sure to only socialize your kitten with other vaccinated pets, including cat-friendly cats, and as many different people as possible.

Use toys, treats, and other high-value rewards like pets and scratches when your cat socializes with other animals, and with you. You’ll start to notice different noises and vocalizations – cats meow and use different sounds to express their needs and wants, and you’ll learn these as your kitten grows.

## Habituation

Habituation is how a cat gets used to their surroundings and all the sights, sounds, smells, noises, and tastes that come with it. Expose your cat to plenty of new people and experiences so they begin learning and ultimately become less fearful as they get older. (You can use recordings to expose them to sounds that don’t occur naturally in your home!)

A key part of the habituation process is handling your cat often. It will go a long way if they are comfortable being touched and handled by different people – from reducing stress at vet visits to giving medications easily and being accepting of strangers.

Start the process as soon as your kitten or new cat comes home. Rub their belly, play with their ears, touch their mouth and teeth, and hold them in different positions. Involve friends and family members to build your little one’s trust, and always remember to give a treat or other high-value reward with new experiences.

## SOCIALIZATION CHECKLIST

- Being touched or pet by strangers
- Experiencing human visitors come and go
- Meeting young children (while supervised)
- Meeting healthy and vaccinated cats
- Meeting healthy and vaccinated cat-friendly cats (discuss with your veterinarian first!)
- Hearing the washing machine, dryer, and vacuum
- Hearing the phone ring
- Hearing laughter and clapping
- Traveling in a car
- Seeing and hearing trucks, bikes, buses, or scooters

# STIMULATION, EXERCISE & PLAY



Just like humans, cats need both physical and mental exercise to stay fit, healthy and happy. Getting sufficient physical stimulation and mental enrichment helps to enforce your cat's good habits, and means they will be less prone to behavioral issues. When cats don't get enough exercise, they can turn to disruptive actions like hyperactivity at night, scratching at unwanted surfaces, or play aggression.

## **Ideas for mental stimulation**

1. Regularly play with your cat using a variety of toys
2. Provide interactive toys for your cat to play with while you're away (see recommendations below)
3. Make your cat work for their food with a food-dispensing puzzle toy
4. Hide treats around the home for your cat to sniff out
5. Provide a scratching post
6. Consider creating a 'catio' or dedicated space for your cat with high places to perch and cardboard boxes to hide in

## **TOYS**

While some may consider toys a luxury, they actually play an important role in maintaining your cat's behavior and wellbeing. Playing solidifies the human-animal bond. Whenever you play with your cat, you are building trust and affection, plus toys will help to keep them entertained when you can't be there.

There are hundreds of different types of cat toys on the market. A top tip is to choose a selection of toys that engage your cat's natural instincts: chasing, pouncing, scratching, and climbing. Over time, you'll learn your cat's preferences and habits, which will help you avoid wasting money on toys that will collect dust.

The types of toys you might consider include:

- **Balls:** Some cats love chasing balls and batting them. You could try a regular ball, one with a bell inside (a 'jingle ball'), a motorized ball or even a crumpled paper ball. The [Sphero Mini](#) is a motorized ball aimed at kids but cats love it!
- **Toy mice, and other hunting toys:** Cats are natural predators and toys that tap into their prey drive can keep them entertained for hours. The [Pawboo Cat Toy](#) is a motorized hunting toy that many cats love.
- **Wands/fishing pole/feather teaser toys:** Toys like this [Feather Teaser](#) or the [Smartykat Loco Motion Electronic Toy](#) will encourage leaping, pouncing, and stalking. Just ensure that any toys that include string are only used under your supervision, and are safely stored away from your cat after playtime, to avoid accidental ingestion.
- **Laser pointer:** You've probably seen plenty of YouTube videos with cats going crazy for [laser pointers](#)! They can be relatively inexpensive and effort-free way to give your cat a good workout. Just ensure you get one that's safe for animals.
- **Interactive feeding toys:** Food puzzle toys stimulate your cat's mind and can help entertain them when you're not around; the [Indoor Hunting Feeder by Doc and Phoebe](#) is a great option.



- **Climbing toys:** Cat trees and perches give your cat something to climb when you're not home, as well as places to nap. Cats love having high surfaces to perch on.
- **Scratching posts:** Cats love to scratch; it's a natural instinct that helps them stretch, exercise back and shoulder muscles, and express happiness. It also helps to keep their nails trimmed somewhat. Specific scratching posts encourage your cat to scratch where you want them to – and save your couch from being shredded! We recommend at least one scratching post per cat to avoid territory issues. While vertical scratching posts are most common, some cats prefer horizontal surfaces for scratching, such as a jute door mat or corrugated cardboard scratcher.
- **Catnip toys:** Some cats adore catnip (although it's worth noting that most cats don't develop a sensitivity until four to six months, so for very young kittens, it's best to hold off). It's fairly easy to find toys infused with catnip.
- **Household items, like cardboard boxes:** Cats enjoy using cardboard boxes and other hiding places to play in; they love having enclosed, dark places to hide and observe the world. When inside a box, they feel protected because they are in an enclosed space. Cats are also curious creatures and are naturally drawn to the texture of cardboard to scratch, and to dark places to explore. Cutting holes in a cardboard box will often offer hours of entertainment for a cat, as they can hide whilst observing their environment (practicing their natural stalking tendencies). By hiding treats or toys inside a box for your cat to retrieve, you can also tap into their predatory instincts. You can also link up several boxes of different sizes to create an obstacle course or maze for your cat. These are one of the easiest toys to find – just repurpose a shipping box! Make sure there are no staples in the cardboard that could hurt your cat, and remove any tape so they do not chew on or swallow it.

## HOW TO PLAY WITH YOUR CAT

To interest your cat in play, assemble several toys and your cat in an environment where they can focus on you. Twitch the toy in front of them, just out of reach. You will know you've succeeded when they pounce, bat at, or try to chase the toy. You might also throw some toys around, or roll a ball past them.

It could take time to find the balance between letting your cat catch the toy and keeping it out of their reach to maintain their interest. Take note of what works as you go, and don't be afraid to try new motions or techniques!

### How not to play with your cat

Some types of play are less desirable. For instance, play-fighting with littermates is a natural part of a kitten's socialization process, but without a littermate to play with, most cats will turn toward their human companions.

We know kitten play-fighting can be adorable, but play-fighting with your kitten or cat can result in

biting and scratching, and it can be hard for you to break this habit later. (Which means guests in your home could also inadvertently become targets for play-fighting – something that you probably want to avoid!)

Discourage play-fighting by refusing to engage or acknowledge it and instead redirecting the play desire to something appropriate like a toy. Keeping your cat's nails trimmed will also reduce the damage they can do to unprotected skin.

Also, keep in mind that not all toys are safe for cats. Contrary to popular depictions, cats shouldn't be playing with balls of yarn or string. Eating yarn, string, ribbons, or similar materials can get stuck in your cat's gastro-intestinal tract, causing serious damage that can be fatal for your cat if left untreated. Plastic can also cause intestinal damage, so keep plastic bags out of reach and monitor the toys that your cat plays with and chews on. If your cat starts destroying a soft toy with strings or other hazardous materials, throw it out immediately.



## HOW MUCH PLAYTIME DO CATS NEED?

The amount of playtime your cat needs will vary from cat to cat. It may differ depending on their age, health and lifestyle; cats that are indoor-only need plenty of enrichment to fulfill their needs. Some cats are more energetic than others, but they generally need at least two to three play sessions a day, if not more. These sessions do not have to be long: short bursts of play throughout the day will keep your cat stimulated. Ideally, play with multiple toys until your cat loses interest.

Timing your play sessions to your schedule can also help you establish a routine with your cat. For instance, brushing your cat while playing with a wand in the morning can be a special bonding time that develops into a healthy brushing routine over time.

A vigorous play session before bed may help reduce the chances of your cat pouncing on your toes in the middle of the night (though it's no guarantee!).

Make playing with your cat a fun part of your daily routine. As your bond develops, you will discover what your cat likes, how they play, and how you can keep them entertained and active while they mature.

## CATIOS FOR INDOOR CATS

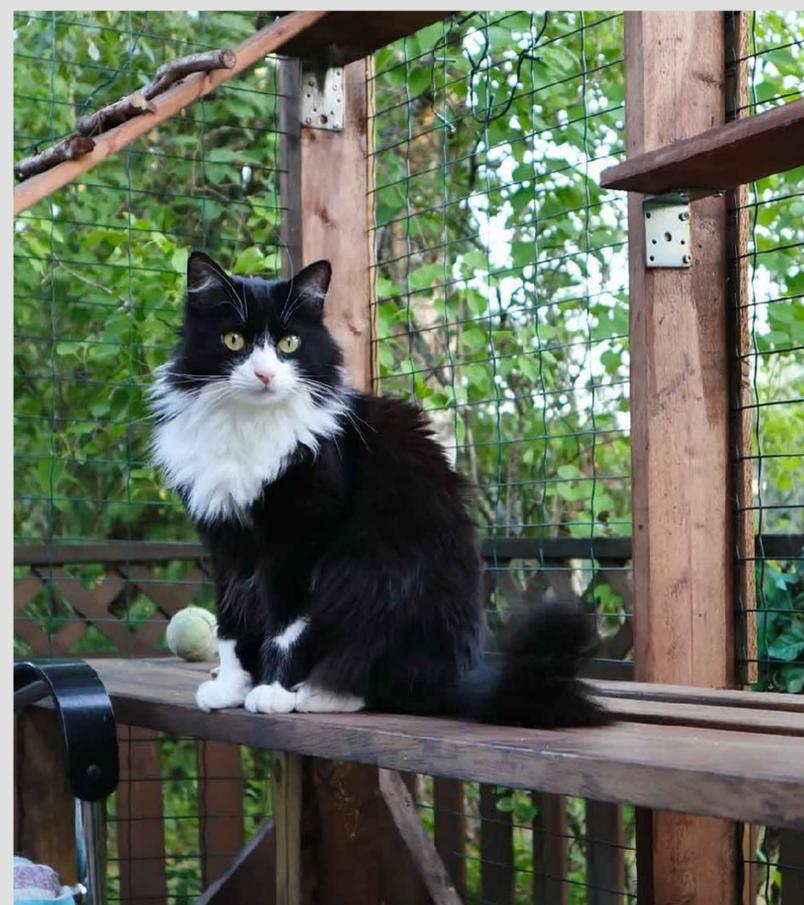
You may have heard the term 'catios' before; a catio is an enclosed outdoor area that allows indoor cats to observe and experience the outdoors and all of its sights, smells and sounds, without some of the dangers associated with being an outdoor cat.

Indoor cats do not necessarily need a catio, as long as you provide sufficient stimulation and enrichment for them inside, but for those who have plenty of outdoor space, a catio is something you could consider.

Two of the most important considerations for catios are safety and security. They need to be constructed so that your cat cannot escape, other animals cannot get in, as well as being constructed of materials that cannot hurt them (such as sharp wire fencing).

There are many design options - from small window box type catios to large, garden-shed or aviary type designs that you can consider. Some may choose to make their catio an extension of their home, with the entrance one of their windows, so the cat may come and go in and 'outdoors' at their leisure. [Catio Spaces](#) is a great website for design inspiration or to purchase design plans for a DIY project.

Depending on your catio's planned size, some ideas to help you make this an appealing space for your cat are: giving them areas to scratch, elevated surfaces from which to observe, an area for privacy for your cat to take a nap or observe the world incognito. A branched tree limb can double as both a climbing surface as well as a place to scratch, alternatively you can place purchased [cat trees](#) in your catio that can be multi-functional.



# BEHAVIOR & TRAINING

While training is traditionally associated with dogs, it's equally important to work on instilling good behaviors in a new cat. With practice and patience, your cat can learn appropriate, positive behaviors, ensuring they remain well-mannered as they grow older.

Positive reinforcement is key to ingraining these essential processes in your cat. Behavioral problems like aggression arise in cats whose habituation, socialization, and stimulation is often neglected. Training with rewards and positivity will encourage all the good behaviors and ultimately discourage the negative ones.

## WHAT IS POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT?

Positive reinforcement focuses on rewarding your pet for good behavior, rather than punishing bad behavior. Giving rewards, whether in the form of treats, verbal praise, pets and scratches, when your cat behaves well in specific ways encourages them to repeat these actions or behaviors. Good behavior becomes inextricably linked with a reward.

Use rewards in all aspects of your cat's life: when they play nicely, when they meet new people or places, and when they use toys and enrichment.

## DISCOURAGING UNWANTED BEHAVIORS

No matter what the behavior, remember that you should NEVER physically punish your cat in response. Physical punishment can cause anxiety and aggression issues, and is ineffective at instilling desired behaviors. A loud clap, spray from



a water bottle, or verbal command such as a firm "No!" is a more acceptable expression of disapproval.

- **Scratching inappropriate objects:** Cats have a natural instinct to scratch, so you shouldn't try to stop this behavior entirely; rather redirect it to an appropriate place. Try placing a scratching post or cat tree close to the object. You can also use double-sided tape on the object to prevent scratching, or consider limiting your cat's access to it. If you have a multi-cat household, you should also ensure each cat has their own scratching post, to avoid territorial issues.
- **Biting:** Cats can give you little 'love bites' for several reasons. Sometimes it is just their way of showing their affection in an exuberant way, but it can also be due to overstimulation, and their way of warning you that they dislike how the interaction is proceeding. Many cats actually do not like intense or long physical interactions or certain parts of their body being touched (i.e. down their back) so keeping these interactions short and sweet can help avoid the overstimulation that can lead to these nips. Occasionally, cats can also give you little nips to get your attention if they would like to play or engage in an interaction. Pay attention to your cat and watch for subtle clues to predict their behavior rather than curb it. You are, after all, in



their space and this should be respected. Dilated pupils and twitching of the ears and/or tail can be early indicators your cat is becoming agitated and gives you a good warning that it is time to walk away. Note: if these little nips are not something your cat previously did but are starting to occur when you are petting certain areas, it is time for a visit to the vet. A thorough physical examination can help your vet determine if there is possibly an underlying medical cause (such as pain) that may be bothering your cat.

- **‘Hunting’ your feet:** Cats may display predatory behavior where they are 'hunting' your feet in an attempt to entertain themselves. It is important to avoid overtly correcting this undesirable behavior (i.e. physically trying to stop the cat attacking the feet), as it could trigger further aggressive behavior. Instead, cats respond much better to substitution. Try to anticipate the event and right before your cat exhibits this behavior, throw a favorite toy or treat across the room, in the hope that they will chase this instead. You can often tell a cat is getting ready to pounce as they will crouch low to the ground, stare at an object and sometimes wiggle back and forth subtly on their hindlegs, preparing to launch forward.

- **Aggression towards other pets/ displaying territorial behaviors:**

Cats are naturally quite territorial creatures and territorial aggression may develop if they feel an intruder has invaded their territory and they are competing for resources. Territorial behavior may include hissing, loud meowing, stalking, chasing, swatting or preventing the other cat from gaining access to places. Try providing multiple separate resources for your cats – including feeding locations, litter boxes, scratching posts, beds and toys. You could try feeding your cats at different times, and scheduling individual playtime with

each of them separately every day. You can also increase the space of your cats' territory by adding more vertical space, with cat trees, cat shelves and window perches (provided they are safe and there's no chance the cat could fall out).

- **Climbing on kitchen counters:** Your cat may be climbing onto the counters in order to get a good vantage point from which to watch you and others in the household. Try providing an alternative (higher!) perch for them in the kitchen, with a cat tree, secured bookshelf or even a climbing wall. Place your cat's food or treats up on the new perch to encourage them to explore it. And if your cat continues jumping onto the counter, pick them up and place them on the new perch each time until the new behavior is instilled.
- **Litter box problems and urine marking:** Check out our advice on the next page for litter box-specific issues.

Pet owners should also be proactive in preventing problems. Cat proof your home and get to know your cat's natural or normal patterns and behaviors within your home so you can better predict and avoid possible unwanted behaviors.

## LITTER BOX TRAINING

Many young cats learn to use litter boxes from their mother, and as the instinct to bury their feces is quite strong, many cats will naturally gravitate towards the litter box to do their business. However, some cats may need a little help learning where to go.

### General litter box tips

- **Number of litter boxes:** You should have at least one litter box per cat (often, you may wish to have one more litter box than the number of cats you have, as some cats like to have a choice of places to go). If you have a multi-level home, you should also ensure you have one on each level, to provide easy access for your cat.
- **Location of litter box:** You should place the litter box in a quiet, secluded area that doesn't receive too much household traffic, so that your cat feels comfortable and safe using it. Cats like their privacy; a quiet corner is often a good choice. Make sure it's easy to access and has multiple entry and exit points (i.e. at the 'dead-end' of a corridor may not be a good choice, as your cat may feel they have no 'escape route'). You should also avoid placing it right next to your cat's food bowl, as cats typically don't like to go where they eat.
- **Consistent location:** It's important not to suddenly move the litter box, to avoid confusing your cat or discouraging them from using the box. If you need to change its location, do so gradually over a number of days, moving it a small distance at a time.
- **Type of litter box:** Ensure that the sides of the litter

box aren't too high, so that your cat can easily get in and out. For very small kittens or older, arthritic cats, you may consider adding a ramp for easy access. Some cats dislike enclosed litter boxes, as they can feel trapped and don't feel safe using the box when they can't see out, so an open litter tray may work better.

- **Type of litter:** There are lots of different types of litter to choose from, including litter made from clay (some of which are 'clumping' types, which forms into solid clumps after your cat has urinated on it, allowing for easy removal), fine wood shavings, recycled paper, silica, or even corn or wheat. While clumping clay is used most often, it really comes down to your cat's personal preference; some cats simply prefer certain types of litter over another. You may need to try a few types to find your cat's favorite. Note that if you have a multi-cat family, you may need to use different types of litter for each cat. Some litters are scented to help cover the smell of your cat's urine and feces, but cats often prefer unscented litters. When bringing your cat home for the first time, you should continue to use the litter they are familiar with, and gradually change it over time if you wish. You should never change your cat's litter type abruptly, as it may put them off going.



- **Amount of litter:** It's important not to over- or under-fill the litter box. Cats like to have enough litter to cover up their feces, but too much can spill out of the box. A good rule of thumb is around two inches of litter, ensuring there is enough space at the top of the tray that it won't overflow when your cat steps across it.
- **Cleaning the litter box:** Cats are extremely clean creatures and may not use their litter box if it's dirty, so it's important to clean it regularly. You should clean it at least every day; ideally, remove any fecal matter after each bowel movement, and scoop out the urine-soaked litter each day. Once a week, you should empty the whole box, clean it with hot water and mild soap, and ensure it's thoroughly dry before refilling with litter.
- **Disposing of used litter:** Dispose of litter in a securely closed bag, then put it in the trash. Never dispose of litter in the garden or on a compost pile, as it can carry diseases.



### HOW TO ENCOURAGE LITTER BOX USE

- **Let them discover the litter box.** When you bring your cat home for the first time, show them where the litter box(es) are located and give them time to sniff the box thoroughly.
- **Allow your cat to do their business in private.** Never disturb your cat while they're eliminating, and ensure you're a good distance away from them so they feel comfortable.
- **Use positive reinforcement techniques.** Once your cat has finished, reward them for doing their business in the correct place. Give them a high-value treat to reinforce this good behavior, such as a small piece of unseasoned, cooked meat or fish.
- **Place them in the litter box at regular intervals.** After feeding or after they've woken up from a nap, they may need to go. Pick them up gently and place them in the box to remind them where to do their business.
- **Keep a watchful eye.** If you notice your cat sniffing around or showing any other signs that they need to go, pick them up and place them in the litter box.

### How to discourage your cat from going elsewhere

- **Don't punish or scold your cat for going in the wrong place.** They won't associate the punishment with their action, and will merely be confused and possibly scared. Punishment has been proven to be ineffective and can lead to anxiety or aggression later in your cat's life.

- **Confine their space.** If your cat keeps going in the wrong place, you could consider confining their space with baby gates or other items like a playpen. Having their litter box nearby will help them to find it when they need it, and being in a confined space will also help you keep an eye on them, so you can place them in the litter box if they show signs of needing to go.



- **Leave a small amount of soiled litter in the box.** This may not work for all cats, as many prefer an exceptionally clean litter box, however, for some cats, the scent of their previous eliminations may help to remind them where to go next time.
- **Use special cleaning products to remove odors.** If your cat has gone in the wrong place, make sure to clean the area thoroughly, using a specially formulated cleaning product to remove odors. This is important, as regular cleaning products may not completely remove the scent, and it may encourage your cat to do their business there again.
- **Cover soil around houseplants.** Sometimes, a cat may associate the soil around a houseplant with litter, and start doing their business there. If this is the case for your cat, try to move the houseplant to an area they cannot access, or cover up the soil with a piece of aluminum foil so they cannot reach it.

### Other issues

- **Medical concerns.** If your cat was previously litter box trained and suddenly begins urinating or defecating outside of the box, there may be a medical problem, such as a urinary tract infection, kidney disease, diabetes or arthritis. In this situation, we should take a look at your cat

to check nothing is wrong.

- **Stress.** Cats dealing with stress or anxiety may regress in their litter training. A new arrival to the home (a new baby, roommate or house guest), changes in routine, moving house or even new furniture can all make your cat anxious. It's important to make your cat feel secure, provide them with lots of love and affection, and keep working on the tips mentioned above to help them return to their usual litter box habits.
- **Urine marking around the home.** Cats may mark their territory by urinating on specific items or places around the home. This is more common in un-neutered or unspayed cats, and may occur if the cat feels threatened or upset about something. They may be reacting to a perceived threat (a new household member or pet, or another cat viewed through a window), or trying to target unfamiliar items (such as a new bag or pair of shoes with an unfamiliar smell). If you're struggling with urine marking, speak to us for advice. Spaying/neutering can help to reduce urine marking, and we can also help to deal with the underlying cause of the urine marking. If your pet is stressed or anxious, we can provide advice on how to manage this, and may suggest pheromone diffusers such as [Feliway](#), or anti-anxiety medication if suitable.

# NUTRITION

## FEEDING SCHEDULES

Generally, kittens should be fed three times a day up to 12-16 weeks, and then slowly weaned to twice daily feedings. Older cats should be fed twice a day (however, for some cats, it may be beneficial to break this up into smaller feedings - see below under 'best practices for feeding your cat'.

To avoid an upset stomach, it's best not to make any sudden changes to your cat's diet. If possible, find out what food they have previously been eating, and buy a small supply to slowly transition them onto your preferred food.

## HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT FOOD FOR YOUR CAT

With hundreds of pet food brands, crazy treat trends, and confusing ingredients, it's hard to know what's best for your cat. In this age of technology, it's so easy to be misled and get inaccurate answers online. Here are a few tips and recommendations to help make the right choice for your pet.

### 1. Look for an AAFCO statement under the ingredients list.

If you see a statement from the AAFCO (the Association of American Feed Control Officials) on your cat's food bag or cans, you're on the right track. This is a sign that your cat's diet meets all the necessary nutrition requirements.

### 2. Don't dwell on the ingredients.

It can be really confusing to look at the list of ingredients on your pet's food. Pet food companies not only use their ingredients and labels for science and nutrition, but also for marketing purposes.

**INGREDIENTS:** Brewers Rice, Whole Grain Corn, Chicken Meal, Pea Protein, Egg Product, Pork Fat, Corn Gluten Meal, Chicken Liver Flavor, Dried Beet Pulp, Lactic Acid, Pork Liver Flavor, Soybean Oil, Potassium Chloride, Iodized Salt, Dicalcium Phosphate, vitamins (Vitamin E Supplement, L-Ascorbyl-2-Calcium Pantothenate, Riboflavin Supplement, Vitamin B12 Supplement, Pyridoxine Hydrochloride, Biotin, L-Tryptophan, Taurine, minerals (Ferrous Sulfate, Zinc Oxide, Copper Sulfate, Manganous Oxide, Calcium Iodate, Sodium Selenite), Mixed Tocopherols for freshness, Natural Flavors, Beta-Carotene.

#### GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

Crude Protein	Min.	22.5%	225 g/kg
Crude Fat	Min.	11%	110 g/kg
Crude Fiber	Max.	2%	20 g/kg
Moisture	Max.	10%	100 g/kg
Calcium	Min.	0.7%	7 g/kg
Calcium	Max.	1.3%	13 g/kg
Phosphorus	Min.	0.6%	6 g/kg
Phosphorus	Max.	1%	10 g/kg
Potassium	Min.	0.6%	6 g/kg
Magnesium	Min.	0.05%	0.5 g/kg
Magnesium	Max.	0.14%	1.4 g/kg
Thiamine	Min.	2 ppm	2 mg/kg
Cobalamine (Vitamin B12)	Min.	0.05 ppm	0.05 mg/kg
Omega-3 Fatty Acids*	Min.	0.1%	1 g/kg
Omega-6 Fatty Acids*	Min.	2%	20 g/kg

\* Not recognized as an essential nutrient by the AAFCO Cat Food Nutrient Profiles.

**CALORIE CONTENT** (calculated): 3615 kcal ME/kg; 369 kcal ME/cup

**AAFCO STATEMENT:** Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that Prescription Diet Feline provides complete and balanced nutrition for maintenance of adult cats and growing kittens.

(An AAFCO statement)

They may highlight different terms like "human-grade" to draw you in, but these are usually made up terms with no nutritional or medical values. When in doubt, talk to your veterinarian.

### 3. Assess the manufacturer.

This is where our doctors at Small Door are here to help. Where your pet's food is manufactured can play a big role in how nutritious it is. We ask pet food manufacturers many questions to ensure we are recommending the best diets to our members, including:

- Where is the food manufactured? Generally, a good manufacturer owns the plants where their food is produced.
- What quality control measures are taken? This looks at quality of ingredients, consistency and nutritional value of the end product.
- Do they employ at least one full-time, qualified animal nutritionist, and does this doctor formulate the diets?
- Do they conduct and publish research in peer-reviewed journals?
- Can they provide nutritional values for any nutrient, beyond what's listed on the label?



### Specific requirements for cats and kittens

Cats are stubborn creatures, especially when it comes to their diets. Providing a complete and balanced diet is very important, but it can also be difficult given their fickle nature. Consider the parameters below when you're looking into your cat's nutrition:

1. **Kittens need kitten food.** Kittens need food that is tailored to fuel their development into young adult life. Kitten food has more calories, with a higher fat and calorie content to help support their fast growth.
2. **The more canned food, the better.** Ideally, feed your cat only a canned or wet food diet. For those that prefer dry food, we recommend that you feed a combination of wet and dry food to cats for a variety of reasons.

It will help them get enough water, which they may not seek out on their own. Cats have a low thirst drive and are designed to get most of their water with their food.

As indoor cats do not get a great deal of physical exercise, combining the two food types

is beneficial, because wet food has fewer calories.

The high water content in canned food will encourage your cat to urinate more often, flushing out their bladders. This is important to help reduce urinary tract issues, especially in indoor cats.

As cats get older, certain conditions like diabetes and kidney disease respond better to wet food. If you start feeding some canned food to your cat when they're young, they may not be so picky in the future. If you have an adult cat on an all dry diet, your vet can help with tips to transition your cat from a dry only diet.

3. **Cater to their carnivore nature.** You cannot feed your cat a vegan or vegetarian diet, because cats are obligate carnivores – this means they can't get the nutrients they need from plants, and so must eat meat and not a lot of carbohydrates. This is most notably because they get taurine, an essential amino acid for heart function, from their diets.

Look for diets with more protein than fat (a protein content of at least 45% is ideal) and a

carbohydrate content of less than 10%. Home-cooked diets need to be very carefully considered, and planned with the guidance of your veterinarians.

Grain-free does not mean carbohydrate free! Many grain free diets have replaced traditional grains with peas, potatoes, and sweet potatoes – none of which have any proven health benefits for cats.

## BEST PRACTICES WHEN FEEDING YOUR CAT

Because cats can be stubborn eaters, it's important to think about how you're feeding them. A fun feeding routine can improve your furry friend's quality of life. Tailor your methods (how, when, and how much you feed) to their predator instincts.

Feed them alone. As carnivores with a hunting drive, cats prefer to eat alone. If you have multiple cats in the household, make sure to separate their feeding areas and give them space. Feeding together can cause anxiety, aggression, and stress, not to mention weight issues if they eat from each other's bowls.

Switch up the feeding location. You don't have to feed your cat in the same spot everyday. If they get meals in different locations throughout the day, they will be more mentally and physically stimulated.

Make sure they drink enough water. Some cats drink well out of a water bowl, but others won't even touch theirs. If your cat is on the stubborn side, try a cat water fountain to increase water intake as many cats prefer fresh, flowing water.

Give smaller meals more frequently. Cat owners often leave out a full bowl of food during the day. This doesn't tap into their inner predator or make eating exciting. In fact, it can cause overeating and lead to obesity. Equally, feeding large meals twice daily can lead to the 'snarf and barf' syndrome that is so frequent in indoor cats. A cat's physiology is designed to eat little and often. When fed large amounts twice a day, they take in more than their stomachs are designed for, leading to frequent vomiting. If your cat eats smaller meals more often, they won't eat out of boredom and they'll be healthier overall.

Keep it fun and engaging. Try using a puzzle feeder to mimic hunting instincts. We recommend [the indoor hunting feeder by Doc and Pheobe](#) to help mentally stimulate your cat, while providing

smaller meals more often. For multiple cats that give you trouble during meal time, try automatic feeders that work on a timer and can be set to individual cat microchip numbers.



## RECOMMENDED FOOD BRANDS

The following pet food brands are recommended by our medical team in consideration of these nutritional best practices. Some of these brands produce multiple food options, which can vary extensively; we recommend choosing options with a higher protein to fat content, and low carbohydrate content.

It's also good to bear in mind that while we all aim to feed our pets the best of the best, often our cats will ultimately make the final decision on food, given their fickle nature!

Please note that we do not have a vested financial interest in any of these foods. Following thorough research, our vets have determined that they include the right nutritional components from AAFCO, undergo proper quality control measures, and their production is overseen by veterinary nutritionists:

- Hill's Pet Nutrition
- Royal Canin
- Purina Brands (One, ProPlan, Friskies, Fancy Feast)
- Farmina Pet Foods
- Wellness Complete Health
- Almo Nature
- Weruva
- Tiki Cat
- NomNomNow (Fresh food)
- Just Food for Cats (Fresh food)

If you are interested in an exact calorie count for your cat, speak with your veterinarian instead of using an online calculator, which may not always be precise.

## TREATS

As for treats, the healthiest options we recommend are those with a limited and easily understandable ingredient list. As a substitute, try these human foods in moderation: unseasoned, cooked meat and fish (no bones), and small chunks of melon (just make sure any seeds, skin, and rind are removed beforehand).

Cats may often turn their nose up at some of the above healthy options, but all cats seem to love Temptations treats, which can be used in moderation.



## FOOD DANGERS

You may be surprised to learn that a number of common human foods are toxic or dangerous for cats. Most cats are quite picky about human foods, and may naturally avoid them, but if your cat is adventurous when it comes to food, you should make sure to keep the following out of reach:

- **Milk and dairy products** - contrary to depictions in popular media, cats don't actually like a dish of milk! Most cats lose the ability to process lactose after they are weaned as kittens and will suffer stomach upsets when given it.
- **Raw eggs, raw meat and raw fish** - raw items are dangerous due to risks of salmonella. Always ensure anything you give your cat is thoroughly cooked.
- **Bones** - make sure bones are removed from any meat or fish before giving it to your cat, as even

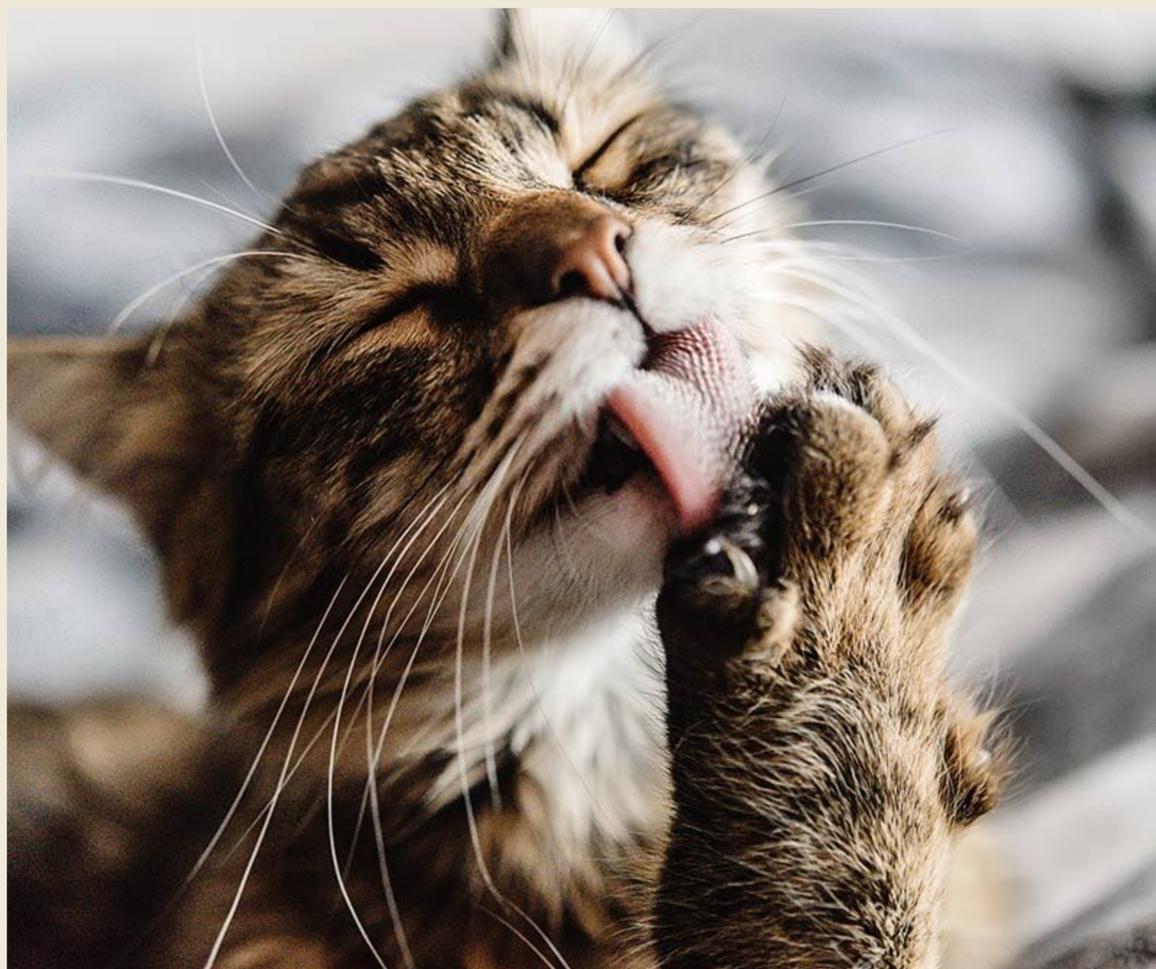
small bones can puncture the gastrointestinal tract.

- **Onion and garlic** - these can be toxic for cats, so ensure any meat you give them is unseasoned.
- **Chocolate, raisins, grapes, uncooked yeast dough, alcohol and anything caffeinated** - as mentioned above, your cat is unlikely to try to eat these items, but if they do, contact us for advice, as they can be toxic or cause ill effects.
- **Dog food** - while not toxic to cats, it's worth noting that your cat needs very different nutrients than a dog, and cannot survive on dog food.

For common food issues, like an upset stomach or if your cat isn't eating, view our advice on pages 33-34.



# GROOMING



Cats are typically fastidious groomers, spending many hours a day grooming themselves. This grooming keeps them clean, and keeps their skin and coat healthy by stimulating healthy coat oil development from the skin and then distributing these oils throughout the coat. Grooming also helps reduce loose hair, similar to when we humans brush our hair.

Consequently, most cats do not require bathing unless they have a specific medical condition.

However, many cats benefit from regular brushing (and indeed many enjoy brushing sessions as a bonding experience with their owner). Brushing mimics the same behaviors a cat does while grooming, helping to remove dirt, dead hair and skin flakes, and stimulate circulation.

One or two brushings per week are suitable for short-haired cats. For cats with long coats, or cats

who are a bit older, may be arthritic or have difficulty grooming, you may need to brush more often. Keep an eye on your cat's coat to ensure they don't develop any knots or matted fur.

Many cats love 'glove' type brushes, which can help distribute some of the oils as well as remove loose hair, although they will not be sufficient for thick coats or matts.

## NAIL TRIMMING

Trimming your cat's nails is really important. Overgrown

nails can become stuck in blankets and carpets, leading to the nail becoming caught and becoming injured as the cat tries to free itself.

Long nails are also typically very sharp, and can cause accidental injury to you or other pets in the household.

Overgrown nails can also be uncomfortable for cats as they will cause deviation of the toes as the nails hit the floor, which also gives them less traction on wooden or tile floors. Very long, curly nails can even turn on themselves and become embedded in the cat's pad, which is extremely painful and will cause a nasty infection.

Ideally, nails should be trimmed every 2 weeks, however this can vary between cats. Some scratching posts are intended to help file down nails, meaning they need to be trimmed less often.

## HOW TO TRIM YOUR CAT'S NAILS

Before you reach for the clippers, get your cat comfortable with you touching their paws and nails. Massage their paw pads, tap their nails and stroke the tops of the paws gently to get them used to being handled. Try to make it a positive experience, using high-value rewards, so your cat is more likely to accept the process with no anxiety.

Introduce the clippers, and let your cat sniff them. Provide more treats as your cat explores the tools.

When you're ready to start trimming, look for the pink part of your cat's nails, closer to the paw. This is known as the quick, and is where the nerves and blood vessels are. If cut, the quick will cause bleeding and pain. Make sure you only cut the white part (the tip or hook part) and not the quick.

When you start trimming, don't feel like you have to trim all the nails at once. If you can only do 2 or 3 at a time before your pet loses patience, you can always go back another day. The trick is to keep the experience positive, both for your pet and you!

There are pet-nail-specific clotting powders that you can apply in the event that you trim a nail too short and see bleeding. You can also use flour or cornstarch in a pinch. If you do cut too short, don't panic. Nails can bleed a lot, but your cat is not going to bleed to death! Contact us; we can take a look to see if your pet needs medical care.

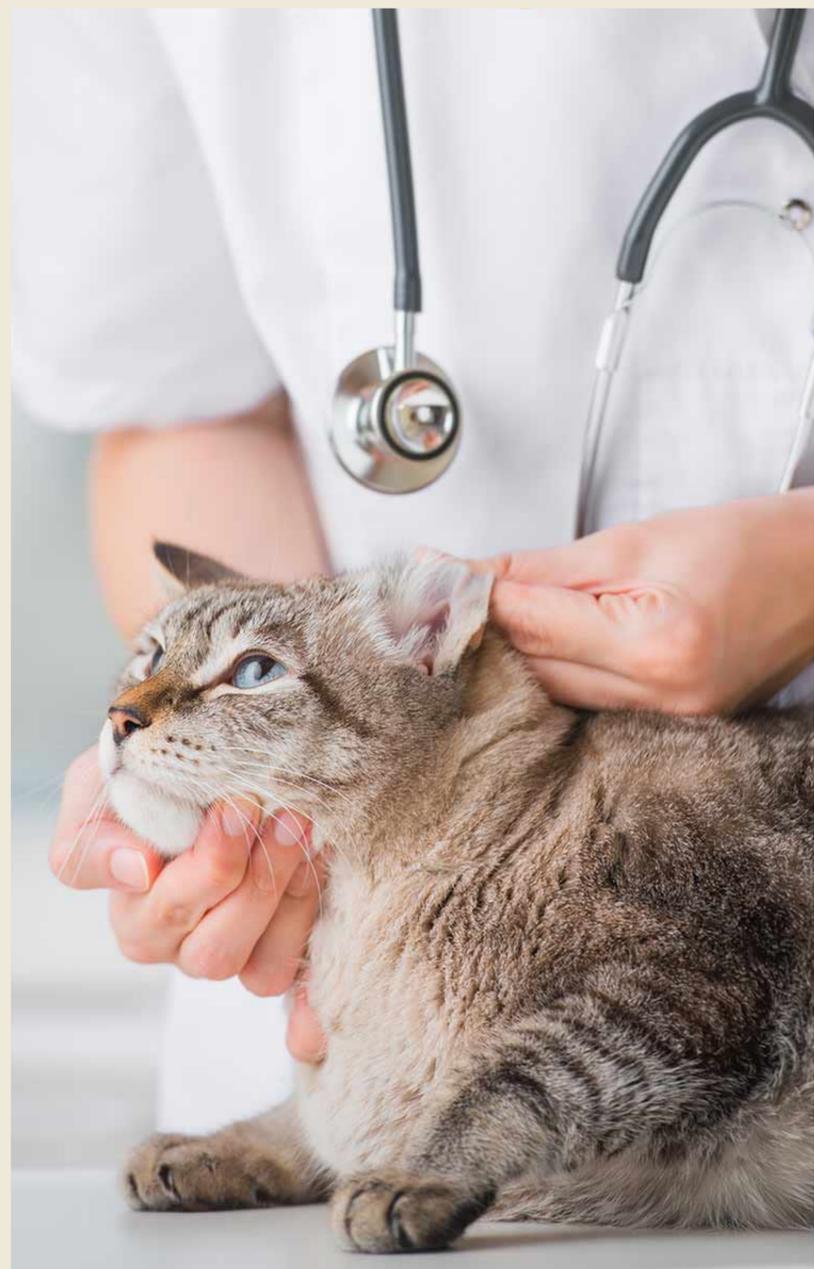
## EAR CLEANING

Most cats' ears naturally stay clean and healthy, and rarely need their ears cleaned. Cleaning your cat's ears at home can actually cause nerve problems, so we recommend you do not attempt to clean them yourself.

However, it's important to regularly check your cat's ears, to make sure you catch any issues and can take them to the vet for treatment before they become serious. Learn what your cat's ears look and smell like when they're healthy (light pink, light pink, relatively odorless, clean and not inflamed).

If you notice any discharge, redness, swelling, excessive wax or you notice an odor, we should examine your cat to identify and treat the issue. In addition, if you notice your cat repeatedly scratching or pawing at their ear or shaking their head, this also indicates a potential problem.

It's worth noting that some breeds, such as Scottish Folds, Himalayan, and Persian cats, are more susceptible to ear infections than others.



# MEDICAL CARE

When it comes to your cat's health, the old saying, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", definitely holds true. Ensuring your pet gets regular wellness care (also known as preventative care) is the key to them living a long, healthy life. Wellness care covers everything from vaccinations, heartworm, flea and tick prevention, nutrition, dental care and regular evaluations of your pet's overall health, risks of disease or other health problems.

The cost of prevention is often a fraction of the cost of treating a disease or problem once it has become more advanced, and early diagnosis and treatment of developing problems or diseases typically increases the likelihood of a successful outcome.

At Small Door, we take an integrative approach to wellness care, and will provide personalized recommendations for your pet's healthcare, nutrition, lifestyle and exercise habits during your cat's regular wellness exams.

## VACCINATIONS

### Why we vaccinate

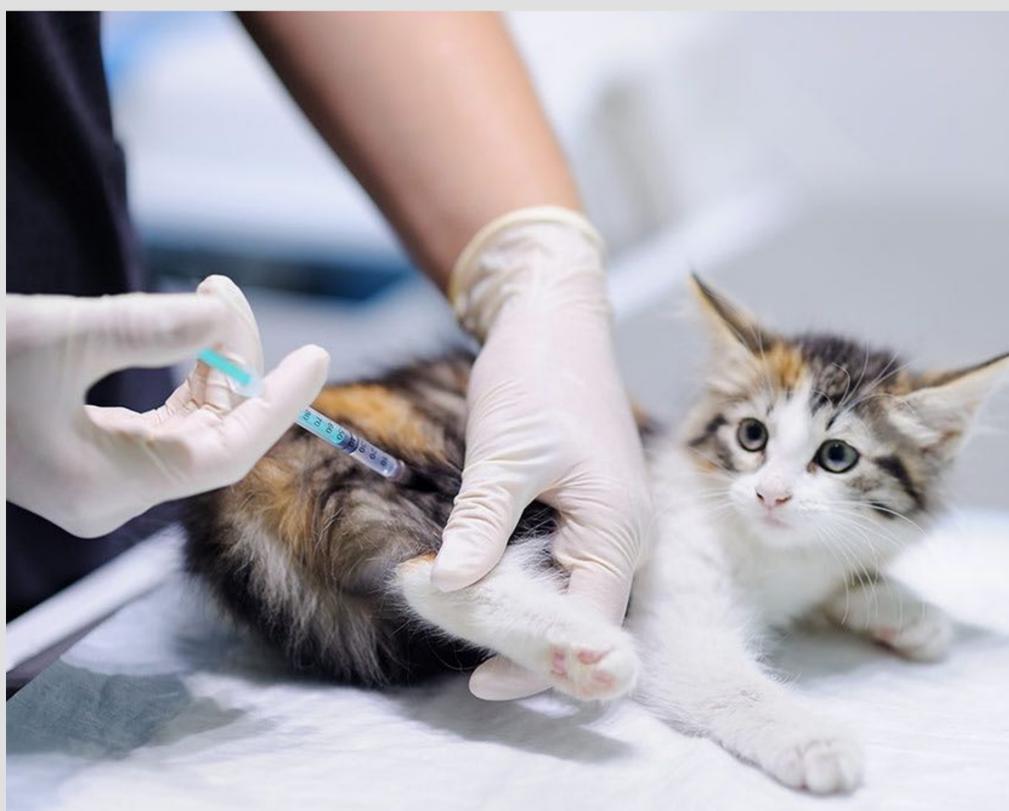
Vaccines, also known as shots, work by exposing your cat's immune system to an incomplete or inactive strain of infectious agents. This helps their body build immune cells that are specifically designed to respond effectively when the real thing comes along.

In recent years, vaccines have at times been called 'dangerous' for a number of reasons – but there's little to no scientific evidence to support this claim. And in fact, the diseases they prevent are irritating at best, and potentially deadly at worst. Vaccines are also relatively painless, easy, and cost-effective to administer.

Kittens (along with old or immune-compromised cats) are especially vulnerable to diseases because they have underdeveloped immune systems. That's why we begin vaccinating at a young age. Kittens also initially receive some immune protection from their mother, but this doesn't last for very long. This maternal immunity can also interfere with the vaccines we administer, and make them less effective. So, to make sure kittens acquire a high enough level of antibodies to be effective, we have to vaccinate them multiple times – in other words, administer boosters.

### CAT VACCINES

- **FVRCP:** a combination vaccine that protects against Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia
- **Rabies:** legally required in most states, regardless of whether the cat goes outdoors or not
- **Feline Leukemia Virus:** protects against an incurable virus



## VACCINE REACTIONS

The whole point of vaccinating is to stimulate the immune system and prepare the body to defend itself when exposed to the actual disease. As such, a small subset of animals can experience undesirable reactions. The majority of these are mild and will resolve quickly with time and mild supportive care.

A mild decrease in appetite and energy directly after the vaccination is normal. Your cat may also be a little sore at the vaccination site for a few days, or have a small lump there, but that's normal, too.

If your cat experiences any of the following reactions after a vaccination, please contact us:

- Vomiting
- Facial swelling, hives, or excessive itching
- A lump at the vaccination site that lasts more than a couple of weeks
- Excessive lethargy or a refusal to eat, especially if it lasts more than a day

## PREVENTATIVES

Preventatives are regular (usually monthly) medications that you should give your cat to protect them from fleas, ticks and heartworm. There are a number of different brands and types of preventatives, including pills/chewables, topical medications and injections. Whichever type you choose, they need to be applied year-round in order to keep your cat safe.

Fleas are common year-round. They live on cats, feeding on their blood and laying eggs in their fur. The eggs fall off of your pet and into the nooks and crannies of your house before hatching. When dealing with a flea problem, not only does your pet need to be treated but the environment as well. Regularly washing your pet's bedding in hot water,



vacuuming and home 'bombs' or foggers are all strategies to help remove and/or kill flea eggs – all of which are labor-intensive and why prevention is superior to reaction.

Ticks are most active during the warmer months and hibernate when it's very cold out. However, it is important to note that they're active during a wide range of temperatures, so just because it's winter, doesn't mean your cat is not at risk.

Fleas and ticks do not only cause irritation and itchiness to your cat, they may also cause or exacerbate skin allergies, leading to sores and infection. Fleas can also transmit an internal parasite, the tapeworm, which can cause malnutrition and weight loss in your pet. Furthermore, the cost of eradicating flea infestations from your home can be quite high.



It's also necessary to test your cat each year for heartworm. While heartworm preventatives are highly effective, they are not 100% foolproof. Not following a strict schedule of administering preventatives raises your cat's risk of infection. Sometimes pills are not swallowed, or they may be thrown up. Administering heartworm preventatives to a heartworm positive cat can also cause a severe, life-threatening reaction, depending on the extent of the infestation. This is a key reason heartworm testing is so important.

Spending a minute or two, once every month, to administer preventatives can save you a lot of time, hassle, pain, and money down the road. At your first appointment, we'll discuss the different types of preventatives with you, and determine which suit your cat best.



## WELLNESS CARE SCHEDULES

After you've brought your new cat home, we generally recommend letting them settle in for a few days before bringing them to the vet. Taking them for a wellness exam within the first week is ideal.

From then on, the frequency of wellness exams will depend on your cat's age and health. During kittenhood, frequent check-ups are important to ensure they're developing normally, and to provide them with all of their kitten vaccines. For adult cats, wellness exams are recommended every six months, whilst senior cats and those with chronic health conditions may require check-ups more often.

### KITTEN SCHEDULES

The exact timing of kitten appointments and vaccines may differ depending on how old your kitty was when you brought them home, and what care they have already received, but the below is a rough guide to when we should see them. We try to space out vaccines to reduce the likelihood of reactions.

- **8 weeks** – First Kitten Visit: FVRCP vaccine (one of three), fecal testing and deworming
- **12 weeks** – Second Kitten Visit: FVRCP vaccine (two of three), Leukemia vaccine (one of two) Rabies vaccine, fecal testing and deworming
- **16 weeks** – Third Kitten Visit: FVRCP vaccine (three of three), Leukemia vaccine (two of two) fecal testing and deworming
- **Prior to spay/neuter (around 6 months):** bloodwork and fecal testing

### Adult schedules

If they are otherwise healthy, we like to see adult cats for wellness exams twice a year. We conduct a thorough nose-to-tail exam that looks at everything from their weight, body condition, temperature, teeth and gums, ears, eyes, heart, lungs, down to their paws.

During these exams, we will administer any vaccine boosters they require, and once a year, we'll conduct bloodwork to detect any developing health conditions as early as possible, plus fecal, heartworm and tick-borne testing to check for parasites. We can also trim your cat's nails for you during these appointments.

### Senior schedules

As your cat gets older, we may need to see them more often to keep an eye on any health problems. We'll discuss any specific requirements and make a plan together to ensure your cat is making the most of their golden years.

Vaccine schedules remain the same as adult cats. For healthy seniors, we typically test bloodwork every 6-12 months, whilst cats with health conditions may need to be tested every 4-6 months or more frequently.

## INDOOR CATS

It's a common misconception that indoor cats don't need to go to the vet as often as outdoor cats. While it's true that contagious feline illnesses are often contracted via contact with animals in the outside world, there are nonetheless many reasons that regular vet visits are important for indoor cats.

In addition to administering legally required vaccines, indoor cats can also develop many illnesses and conditions that have nothing to do with the outside world, such as issues with weight, hormone problems, genetic conditions, and tumors, among other things.

### VACCINE BOOSTERS

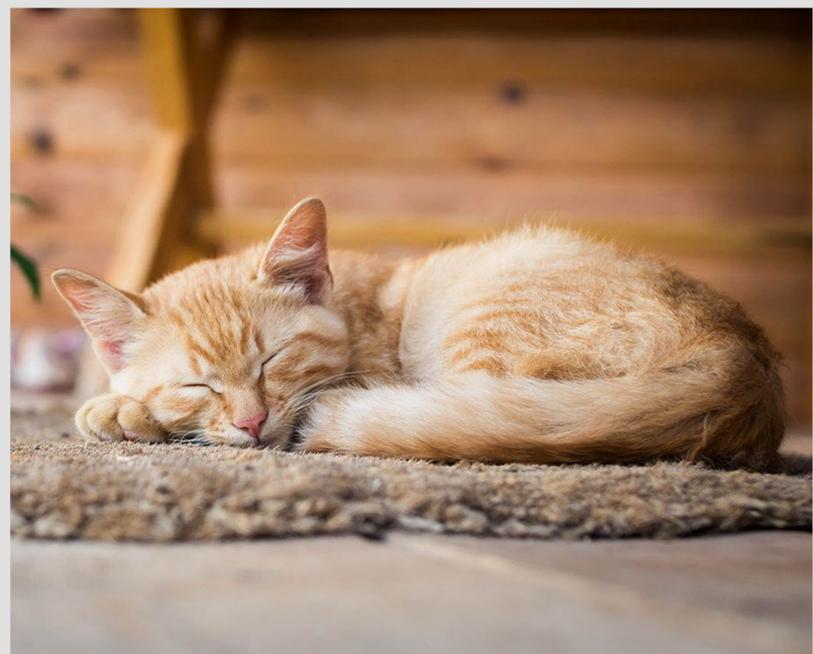
Adult and senior cats need regular vaccine boosters to maintain immunity:

- FVRCP – every 3 years
- Rabies – every 3 years
- Feline Leukemia Virus – 1 year after the initial kitten series then every other year for at-risk (outdoor) cats only

at hiding pain and illness. They have a natural instinct to hide any signs of weakness, a skill that would keep them from being easy targets for predators and competitors in the wild. However, the fact that they're so good at keeping problems hidden means that by the time they show any symptoms, the problem has likely already become advanced.

Prevention is often far easier, less expensive, and more effective than treatment when it comes to health issues, which is why it's vital to keep abreast of any changes in your indoor cat's health through twice annual vet visits.

Even subtle changes could signal diseases that could be developing—diseases you should catch and handle before it's too late.



## Weight Management for Indoor Cats

A common health problem that many indoor cats share is weight management. Over a quarter of all cats are obese, and indoor cats are particularly susceptible. While some indoor cats may love to play, they tend to lead mostly sedentary lives, which can inevitably lead to some weight gain.

It can be difficult for owners to recognize that their pet is overweight. Because you see your cat on a daily basis, gradual changes in their weight can be hard to detect, but those gradual changes can add up over time.

Gaining even a pound can make a huge difference in the health of an animal as small as a cat and can significantly affect their long-term health. Being overweight makes cats significantly more susceptible to diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and arthritis.

We can help monitor your cat's weight and provide nutritional advice and recommendations for keeping your cat at a healthy weight.

## SPAYING AND NEUTERING

Unless your cat is already spayed/neutered, you may have to make a decision about whether to spay or neuter your pet. While this is a personal decision, we can talk it over with you to make sure you have all the information to make an informed decision.

### Why do we spay and neuter?

Overpopulation is a large problem, with millions of unwanted pets still in shelters, and millions of healthy cats having to be euthanized every year. Spaying and neutering has been statistically proven to decrease the number of homeless pets. It also has a number of health and behavioral benefits for your cat.



Spaying at a young age has been shown to reduce the occurrence of mammary (breast) cancer and uterine infections (also known as pyometra). In unspayed cats, heat cycles may start as early as the fourth or fifth month of a kitten's life, and will continue until she is either bred or spayed. They tend to last from several days to two weeks or longer, and repeat every two to three weeks. Although cats do not generally have vaginal discharge during their heats, they'll often display behaviors that some owners find irritating, like increased meowing and howling. Spaying eliminates heat cycles.

Neutering prevents testicular cancer, and both spaying and neutering may also help prevent or alter unwanted behaviors, such as aggression and urine marking.

As with any type of surgery, there are small risks associated with the anesthetic and surgery itself. Your veterinarian will discuss these risks with you based on your pet's health.

### When is the best time to spay or neuter?

For cats, both spays and neuters should typically be carried out around 6 months of age. However, if you have an older cat who is unfixed, they can still be spayed/neutered. We'll discuss all of your options at your first wellness visit, and advise on the best time for your cat.

## DENTAL HEALTH

Like humans, cats can develop oral diseases like periodontal disease and gingivitis, caused by the buildup of tartar and plaque on your cat's teeth and underneath their gums. Over time, these conditions can lead to pain, inflammation, infection, tooth decay, and tooth and bone loss. You can reduce the amount of plaque and tartar in your cat's mouth by regularly brushing your cat's teeth with a cat-specific toothpaste.

Keep in mind that oral health isn't just about preventing tooth decay. The more serious issues have to do with periodontal disease. Plaque and bacteria can enter your cat's bloodstream, which can affect other organs like your cat's heart, liver, and kidneys. Maintaining good oral hygiene for your cat will reduce this risk and improve your cat's overall health.

How often should you brush your cat's teeth?

Ideally, you should brush your cat's teeth every day. Regular tooth-brushing removes particles of food and bacteria that cause plaque and tartar development, and gives you a regular opportunity to inspect your cat's mouth. This can help you catch problems like fractured teeth or gum issues before infections set in.

### Finding the right toothbrush

There are several different types of toothbrushes suitable for cats. The most common are:

- Special cat toothbrushes
- Finger brushes
- Children's toothbrushes

Finger brushes are rubber or silicone brushes that slide over your finger like a finger puppet. These brushes are suitable for all cats and can be great for training, as you have more control over the brush.

Specific cat toothbrushes are smaller than regular human brushes, to suit your kitty's mouth.

Children's toothbrushes or small-headed brushes with soft bristles also work well. The soft bristles clean feline teeth without causing discomfort.

While brushing remains the gold standard, certain prescription diets such as Hill's t/d can help keep the amount of tartar in your cat's mouth to a minimum.

### TOOTHPASTE FOR CATS

Human toothpaste is dangerous for cats and should never be used to brush your cat's teeth, as it contains fluoride, which can be toxic for cats. Instead, use a pet toothpaste. They're safe, specially designed for animals, and come in flavors your cat will enjoy, like chicken.



## HOW TO BRUSH YOUR CAT'S TEETH

Just like any new activity, teeth brushing requires patience and training. Luckily, the taste of cat toothpaste acts as its own reward. It's designed to be ingested, so you don't need to worry about convincing your cat to spit it out – much more difficult is convincing your cat not to chomp on the toothbrush itself!

Before you start, here's what you need to know:

- Focus on the outside of your cat's teeth, not the inside as this is where the majority of tartar tends to accumulate.
- Use slow, gentle strokes
- Do not force your cat's mouth open – this can make them frustrated and you may lose their cooperation

First, let your cat taste a small amount of toothpaste. Then, using your finger only as the 'brush', gently rub the toothpaste onto your cat's teeth and gums to get them accustomed to the process.

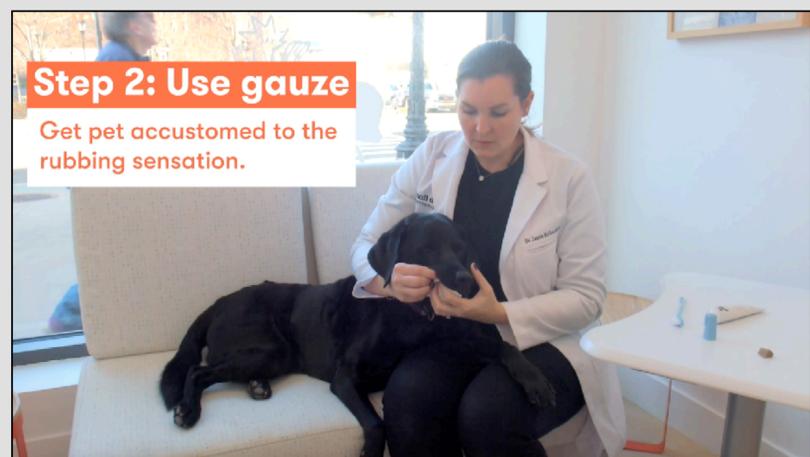
Once your cat is used to this, which may take a week to a month, you can progress to using a piece of gauze to rub against the teeth, getting them used to the rubbing feeling. Next, put a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on your toothbrush or finger brush. Gently lift one side of your cat's upper lip and brush in small, circular motions for a few strokes. Stop, praise your cat, and repeat these steps until you have brushed the outside of all their teeth.

Some cats enjoy brushing more than others. Your cat may tolerate brushing immediately, or it may take days or even weeks to get them comfortable. Take things slow to keep the experience stress-free for your cat: you may find that you are only able to brush a few teeth or make one pass over their teeth when you first begin. This is totally normal.

We encourage you to brush your cat's teeth before either breakfast or dinner. This way they learn that after having their teeth brushed, they get the 'treat' of their meal, which provides positive reinforcement to the activity of tooth brushing.

Unfortunately, some cats never learn to tolerate tooth-brushing. Wiping a piece of gauze over these cats' teeth two to three times a week can still remove plaque and bacteria and improve oral health. You can also ask your veterinarian for assistance at your next check-up.

Watch our [tooth brushing demonstration video](#) to see this process in action. (Although it's a dog, the process is the same!)



### Does my cat still need a dental cleaning if I brush their teeth?

Yes. Brushing reduces the amount of tartar, plaque, and harmful bacteria in your cat's mouth, but it doesn't entirely eliminate them. Even with brushing, your cat will still need dental cleanings periodically, just as people do. Your vet can thoroughly clean your cat's teeth and gums, and also look for cavities, fractures, and other dental issues.

### Brushing your pet's teeth is worth it.

It may not be fun for either of you, but brushing your pet's teeth will pay off in the long run, saving you money and saving your pet a lot of pain. And remember, if you're having trouble with tooth-brushing, contact us for more tips and advice.

## MICROCHIPPING

If your cat has not yet been microchipped, we recommend getting it done as soon as possible after you bring them home. Microchipping vastly increases the likelihood of reuniting with a lost cat, as collars and ID tags are not foolproof. It's equally important to make sure the microchip record is kept up to date with your current contact information.

## PET INSURANCE

While pet insurance is a personal decision, we do recommend that pet parents strongly consider getting it for their cat. For \$30 or so per month, it could save you thousands of dollars in treatment costs, and knowing that your pet's vet bills are covered in the event of unexpected illness or injury can provide great peace of mind.

Different pet insurance policies can vary greatly, so it's important to always read the details thoroughly, research and compare policies before

purchasing. A good resource you can utilize is [www.pawbamacare.com](http://www.pawbamacare.com) where you can compare insurance plans to better understand your coverage needs.

### **How does pet insurance work alongside Small Door membership plans?**

Pet insurance is designed to help cover the cost of the unpredictable, and so typically covers (either the total or a percentage of) expenses related to injuries or illnesses.

It typically does not cover wellness or regular preventative care to keep your pet healthy, such as annual vaccines, exams, wellness bloodwork or other testing, or monthly flea, tick and heartworm preventatives. That's where Small Door plans come in.

If you have any questions about whether pet insurance is right for your cat, reach out to us – we're more than happy to help chat you through the decision.



## DEVELOPING A POSITIVE VET EXPERIENCE

At Small Door, we do everything we can to help your cat have stress-free visits, and even enjoy coming to see us. If your cat does get anxious easily, there are also a number of things you can do to help develop a positive vet experience.

- **Socialization is crucial.** Acclimating your cat to different sounds, smells, people, and animals as early as possible can help them create positive behavior traits. And that translates to easier, more positive vet trips for you, your cat, and your vet.
- **Use a carrier.** The carrier will protect your cat from other pets and distractions, and provide a safe space where they're comfortable. Lining the

carrier with a blanket or toys that smell like home can also help calm your cat in an unfamiliar setting. Try to get the carrier out several days prior to any vet visits so your cat has time to get used to it in their environment and not be so fearful.

- **Use a pheromone product.** Pheromones can help cats to stay calm; we recommend [Feliway](#). You can spray some pheromones inside your cat's carrier to help keep them relaxed.
- **Talk to us.** If you know your cat gets very distressed by vet visits, contact us. We can help make special arrangements, like organizing your visit for an off-peak time; taking your cat straight through to the exam room instead of spending a few minutes in the waiting room; or discussing whether anti-anxiety medications may be appropriate.



# COMMON PROBLEMS, AND WHEN TO SEEK HELP

From time-to-time, your cat may experience minor episodes of vomiting, diarrhea, or go off their food temporarily, but this does not always mean there is cause for concern.

Remember – as a Small Door member, we're here for you 24/7 via the app. You can chat to us for immediate advice whenever you have concerns about your cat. We can discuss your cat's symptoms and help you determine whether it's safe to monitor them at home, or whether you should bring them in for an exam.

If you ever notice signs of sickness, or your cat begins behaving differently, we want to hear about it, even if you think your cat is completely fine. However, we hope the below helps to put your mind at ease in terms of what may be considered normal, and what may signify a medical concern.

## Vomiting

Vomiting is never fun for your cat, but thankfully it isn't always a cause for concern. If your kitty has only vomited once or twice, and otherwise seems bright and and stable, it's safe to keep a close eye on them and wait to see how things develop. We

recommend not giving any food for the next few hours (water is fine), and when you do reintroduce food, try a small portion of their regular food to see if they can hold it down.

If however, your car has vomited more than a few times, is vomiting blood, is retching without bringing anything up, seems lethargic, isn't eating or there's a chance they may have swallowed something they shouldn't have (e.g. some string), you should bring them in to be evaluated.

## Diarrhea

As with vomiting, if your cat has only had diarrhea a few times and seems otherwise bright and stable, it's safe to keep a close eye on them. The same recommendations apply in terms of food and water.

If you notice any lethargy, blood, persistent diarrhea (more than 3-4 times within 24 hours), or straining, you should bring them in to be evaluated.

## Not eating

There are many reasons why a kitten or cat may stop eating, and it is not usually a cause for concern if they just skip one meal. However, if this inappetence persists for more than 24 hours, it is best to bring them in to be evaluated.

## Coughing

Cats can cough for a number of different reasons, and some are more serious than others. If you notice any lethargy, distress, labored breathing or fast breathing, a blue tinge to the tongue/gums, or they aren't eating, we should see them as soon as possible.



**Lump or bump**

There are many reasons a pet may have developed a lump ranging from an allergic reaction, a pimple, or something more serious. If the lump is at the site of a recent vaccine (within the last two weeks), it may be a small reaction to the vaccine, which is not a cause for concern.

If the lump appears painful, your cat seems bothered by it, or you've noticed it has changed in size or appearance, you should bring them in for an exam.

**Nail cut too short**

Nails that are broken or cut too short can seem to bleed a lot, but don't panic, as it's usually not as bad as it seems. If the nail is still bleeding, you can try putting a pea sized amount of flour or cornstarch on a paper towel or cotton ball, then applying it to the bottom of the nail and holding it there for a few minutes. Make sure not to rub the flour in, as this disturbs the clotting process. You can repeat this a few times and often it'll stop the bleeding on its own.

If the bleeding doesn't stop after five minutes, the cut nail is still dangling/attached and you can't



remove it, or your cat seems to be in pain, you should bring them in so we can help.

**Not urinating**

If your cat is urinating less than usual, this may be due to environmental factors (a hot day, or insufficient water intake). Make sure they have plenty of fresh water and encourage them to drink. Ensure you're providing them with some wet/canned food, as cats often get a lot of their water intake through their food.

If your cat is not urinating at all, you notice any straining, blood in the urine, or your cat seems to be in pain or uncomfortable (pacing/straining/whining/licking at hind end), you should bring them in as a matter of urgency. 'Blockages' such as bladder stones or UTIs can have serious consequences, and are best treated asap.

**CONCERNING SYMPTOMS**

In general, if your cat displays any of the below, we'd like to hear about it:

- Lethargy (without known cause, e.g. a long walk that has tired them out!)
- Repeated episodes of vomiting or diarrhea
- Not eating or eating less than usual for two days or longer
- Excessive thirst
- Difficulties urinating or urinating more than usual
- Not pooping, or unusual stool
- A new lump (without known cause, e.g. vaccination site) or change to an existing lump
- Changes to eye appearance
- Sudden weight loss
- Excessive scratching

## EMERGENCIES

If your cat experiences any of the following, contact us immediately, while on your way to the practice, or emergency hospital during out-of-hours:

- Wounds, possible broken bones or internal injuries from a blow or a fall
- Sudden collapse, difficulty breathing, labored breathing, or unconsciousness
- Seizure
- Bleeding from mouth, nose, or eyes
- Extreme pain (whining or shaking)
- Swallowed an inedible object
- Possible poisoning from consuming something toxic
- Repeated vomiting, vomiting blood or retching or trying to vomit with nothing coming up
- Hard and swollen abdomen
- Straining, unable to pass urine
- Unable to stand, wobbly, or dragging limbs
- Sudden disorientation
- Pale colored gums
- Unable to deliver kittens (30 minutes of straining to have a kitten without delivery, over one hour between kittens or a kitten that is visibly stuck)

Hopefully you'll never need to contact us in the event of an emergency, but if you do, **we're here 24/7 on the app.**

We hope this guide has helped you feel confident about the first few days and weeks with your new furry family member. Feel free to reach out to us at any time if you have questions. We can't wait to meet you both at the practice soon!

Talk soon,  
Small Door



**small door**  
VETERINARY

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