



[AAHA](#) Your pet Education Center New Kitten Checklist

NEW KITTEN CHECKLIST

Adopting a new kitten requires planning and thinking ahead to what kind of lifestyle your cat will lead later on. Use the [American Animal Hospital Association's Hospital Locator](#) to find a local vet who is accredited by AAHA.

Before the vet . . . Pick the right carrier

Keep it cozy by choosing a carrier that doubles as a bed, or find one with a “lid” to ease stress getting in and out during the exam. Let your kitten explore the carrier long before the appointment, and reward her with treats for spending time inside.

Visit the vet within the first week

The veterinarian can make sure your kitten is healthy and free of parasites like fleas and intestinal parasites that can be passed on to people. Detecting viral infections such as feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus is helpful to plan how she will interact with other cats in your home. During the physical exam, the veterinarian will look for congenital issues such as a heart murmur, hernia, or cleft palate, and will give your kitten a full round of vaccines and boosters, which will need to be renewed at least once a year after that.

Plan for the first year of healthcare

Cats tend to hide pain, but they're not as tough as they appear! Any changes in demeanor, activity level, and behavior are key to note and trend over time. Make an appointment to spay or neuter your kitten before 5 months old—and if you want to really plan ahead, schedule future visits for revaccinations and for annual exams for the year to come.

Decide if (and how) your cat will go outside

Studies show that indoor-only cats have less risk of infections, parasites, and injuries than cats allowed outdoors, but staying indoors also has risks, including obesity, illness, and behavior problems.

Be prepared to answer questions from your veterinary team about other pets in the household, visiting pets, or trips outside the home to a groomer or boarding facility.

Microchip to prevent heartbreak

During the first visit or soon after, it's important to have your kitten implanted with a permanent microchip in case she escapes and is taken to a shelter. Microchips have proven to be safe for cats and are not painful to implant. They do not have GPS capabilities—they can't track your cat down—but if she is found and taken to a shelter, she can be scanned and your contact information will pop up.

To be able to track your cat, invest in a tracking collar or fob that localizes to within a few feet of her location. It's important to get a cat-size collar because tracking collars for dogs are too heavy and not precise enough for cats.

Brush your cat's teeth

Most cats (80%) will develop dental disease by age 3. Left untreated, this can seriously affect your cat's and even lead to early death from extreme inflammation, kidney disease, or heart disease.

Ideally, a cat's teeth should be brushed every day, but once a week is more realistic. Most cats need to get used to having their teeth brushed. Start by putting flavored gel treats on the toothbrush to have the kitten lick it off and gradually work up to touching the teeth with the brush over time.

Kitten-proof your home

Before your kitten arrives, eliminate toxic plants that they might want to chew on. The biggest culprit is the lily. If a kitten even licks the water a lily was sitting in, it can cause kidney failure. (Find a full list of toxic plants for pets [here](#).)

It's also important to keep medications behind a closed door and chase down lost pills, especially Tylenol, ADD medications, and birth control, which are common causes of poisoning in cats.

Look for other areas of potential concern around the house, including loose earbud headphones and strings. Use tight-fitting screens in windows above the main floor to keep a curious, climbing kitten from falling out, and wrap cords from curtains or blinds out of the way so a kitten can't get tangled.

Provide multiple scratching surfaces

Provide scratching posts or surfaces near resting areas and high-traffic pathways. One study revealed that kittens and younger cats preferred rope over other substances such as carpet or cardboard, however every cat is unique. Cats scratched more often when the post was a simple upright type or a cat tree with two or more levels at least 3-feet high. Narrower posts with base-width less than or equal to 3 feet were used more often than wider posts with bases wider than or equal to 5 feet.

Get to know your cat's claws

The cat claw is unique anatomically—the forelimbs are retractable, allowing the cat to expose or retract their claws as needed. A cat exposes its claws for several reasons: When hunting, to grasp prey; when fighting, to defend herself; and when scratching inanimate objects for scent and visual marking.

Scratching inanimate objects:

- Sharpens the claw by dislodging the old nail
- Marks surfaces with pheromones, in order to communicate the cat's presence
- And shows visual markers of the cat's territory

Gone are the days where kittens are automatically declawed when they are spayed or neutered. Cat owners are learning that they can easily manage their cats' claw care. Start playing with your kitten's paws and push down on the toe pads to reveal the nail. Use a small nail trimmer for human nails or a cat-specific trimmer to knick off the sharp tip, avoiding anything that looks pink, which is a blood vessel.

Create the right litter box situation

The rule of thumb is one litter box per cat, plus one additional box somewhere else. Litter boxes should be at least one and a half times the length of the cat from nose to tip of the tail, which means most manufactured boxes are not large enough. You can use storage containers instead, but make sure the edges aren't too high for the kitten to get in and out.

Place litter boxes in different locations around the house and make them easily accessible. Studies show that exposure to different litter types while a kitten could broaden acceptance later on.

Scoop litter boxes daily and clean on a regular basis with hot water, avoiding strong soaps. Replace boxes when necessary. You can splurge and get an automated litterbox, too!

Feed your kitten mindfully

Obesity prevention starts with the kitten. Research shows neutering contributes to weight gain, so the spay/neuter appointment is a great time to start a nutrition plan with your veterinarian.

Cats prefer to eat alone in a quiet location where they won't be startled. Kittens can be weaned onto commercially balanced kitten foods starting at 3–5 weeks, and pay attention to quantities.

- Growing kittens at 10 weeks of age require about 200 kilocalories per kilogram of body weight per day.
- By 10 months, they require only 80 kilocalories per kilogram per day.

Engage your cat's natural feeding behaviors by hiding small amounts of food around the house, or by using food puzzles, which are also a great way to enrich her environment.

Understand kitten behavior

Startling or rough handling may develop fears that last a lifetime, so kittens should be handled gently, while being gradually and positively acclimated to any stimuli. Use food or enticing rewards, and allow her to approach and engage on her own terms.

Kittens have a high play drive and learn predatory behavior by watching, swatting, chasing, pouncing, and catching. They want to play with other kittens until about 12 weeks of age, and then they'll want to play more with objects. Do not use your hands or feet as toys during play! Cats will think this is OK, leading to bites and scratches.

Don't wait to address behavior problems

Behavior problems are among the top reasons cats are relinquished to shelters. When you notice things like urinating or defecating outside the litter box or aggression with other cats, that is the time to see the veterinarian. You should not allow cats to "fight it out." The best thing to do is to separate the cats or other animals as much as possible and seek advice before it escalates. There is scientific data to support the use of pheromone sprays or plug-ins to help keep cats calm.

Call the veterinarian when . . .

Cats don't behave in upsetting ways because they disapprove of your life decisions. If your cat isn't eating (especially if she's still a kitten) or if she suddenly behaves differently, it's time to call the vet.

Young kittens can catch "colds" that stuff up their noses and decrease their appetite because they can't smell their food. You can do some nursing care at home, like humidifying the air and using wet food, but most kittens require a vet visit.

On another note, if you have a male cat, be aware that young male cats commonly strain to pass urine because their urethra is blocked with crystals and mucous, but they rarely struggle with feces. Constipated young male cats are unicorns! If he's straining, pacing, and yowling near the litterbox in the middle of the night, take your kitten to the veterinarian immediately, as this can quickly become a life-threatening emergency.

Visit AAHA's [Pet Owner Resources](#) for more tips to develop a strong, meaningful, lifelong bond with your cat.