



General healthcare for Cats

This page is written to provide general health care information for your pet cat. It is only written as a guide and if you have any concerns with regards to your cat's health then you must seek advice from a veterinary surgeon.

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Diet

To keep your pet cat healthy it is important to feed the right diet. Complete dry food diets are convenient to feed; they allow the cat to be able to graze their food over the day and help reduce tartar build up due to the abrasive action of the kibble on the teeth. Wet food diets are well liked by cats and help increase water intake due to the moisture in these diets. These diets can be fed exclusively or a mixture of wet and dry food can be fed; what is important is that it is suitable for your cat. Some medical conditions such as cystitis, diabetes and kidney disease can be treated with prescription veterinary diets, but this needs to be discussed with your cat's veterinary surgeon as not all cases are suitable candidates. It is also important that your cat has access to fresh water at all times; each cat is different in how they like their drinking water, with some preferring running water and there are now cat drinking fountains available.

Obesity

Obesity is becoming a common problem in cats and dogs, usually a result of well-intentioned over-feeding. Obesity can be associated with a variety of diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. It is important to address obesity before it becomes excessive. Our nurses at the clinic run free weight loss clinics for our clients. Please contact them or book an appointment for advice.

Grooming

Grooming is required daily in cats with long coats to prevent their coat becoming matted. It is also enjoyed by many cats with short coats and helps bonding between you and your cat. Appropriate brushes can be brought from pet shops. Introduce your cat to the brush by putting it beside him for a few days before gently starting to touch him with it.



Once he is used to this then you can start to groom him more fully. Some cats do not like brushes and there are many alternatives on the market including grooming gloves so that you can mimic the action of stroking rather than grooming. Despite this there are still many cats that will not tolerate grooming and develop mats; these cats can be de-matted at the surgery with clippers and, sometimes, these cats need to be sedated or anaesthetised to allow this.

Clipping Claws

Some cats may need their claws clipping from time to time, although active cats that climb may never need them doing. Providing scratching posts will reduce the frequency of the claw clipping. Some cats resent claw clipping so it is sensible with kittens to get them used to having their feet handled from an early age. Claws can be clipped at the clinic by the nurses or vets or can be done at home by the owner. If you would like to clip your cat's claws then please speak to our nurses about which clippers to use and where to cut.

Teeth

Kittens will lose their temporary teeth at 3-6 months; sometimes these can be found on the floor and/or there may be a little bit of blood seen in the cat's mouth. Many cats swallow the teeth and they are never seen. If your kitten has a loose tooth, do not wobble or pull it out, it will come out on its own in the next few days.

There are many products available to prevent plaque build-up on your cats teeth; these include toothbrushes and toothpaste, chews and specialist diets. These reduce the build-up of plaque, thereby reducing formation of dental disease later in life. Cats that hunt and eat their prey often have cleaner teeth through crunching down on bones. Our nurses at the clinic can advise you on dental disease prevention and treatment.

Fleas & Ticks

Both of these are common complaints of pet cats. Adult fleas live on the cat and they feed from the bloodstream by biting. Ticks are small blood sucking parasites which can attach to the cat's skin and are generally picked up in areas of long grass.

Many cats are simply infested with **fleas** which cause them minor skin irritation; these cats can have many fleas on them but the level of



scratching is low. A number of cats are allergic to flea saliva and so are more obviously affected. Their skin becomes very inflamed and itchy; this can lead to extensive hair loss and skin damage from scratching and over grooming. It can sometimes be difficult to identify fleas on these cats as it can take just a couple of bites to set off the allergic reaction and therefore they are not heavily infested. It is important to treat all the cats and dogs in the house as, whilst some may not scratch, these individuals are likely to harbour fleas for the animals which are more severely affected. To discuss flea control in your house please speak to one of our nurses or vets at the clinic.

Ticks enlarge as they suck blood and can often be mistaken for a rapidly enlarging skin growth. Ticks can carry certain diseases. The tick will eventually drop off after a few days of feeding and isolated ticks can be left to drop off. Alternatively, our nurses can remove the tick for you and teach you how to do so with a tick remover. Often a small firm nodule is left by the tick and this will usually resolve with time. Occasionally these can become infected and require examination by a vet for a course of antibiotics. For tick removal or prevention please speak to one of our nurses at the surgery.

Intestinal worms

Intestinal worms can be carried by cats and dogs. There are two main groups - roundworms (*Toxocara*) and tapeworms. Roundworms are most common in kittens but can be carried by adult cats and excreted in their faeces. Roundworms pose a small but serious concern for human health with children most at risk. It is not possible to tell which animals are excreting the disease as the eggs are microscopic and so it is recommended to treat your cat quarterly. There are three types of tapeworm: *Dipylidium* is picked up from fleas, *Taenia* are acquired from eating hunted prey or raw meat. Whilst neither of these present a human health risk, it is recommended to treat your cat quarterly. The final tapeworm *Echinococcus* does present a human health risk but is thankfully of a very low prevalence in the South East of England. There are many worm treatment products available at our clinic including tablets and spot-on preparations, so please discuss with our nurses or vets which product is most suitable for your cat.

Vaccinating Cats

Cats should be vaccinated against Cat Flu, Feline Infectious Enteritis and Feline Leukaemia



Cat Flu: There are two viruses which can cause cat flu and it is possible to vaccinate against both of these. The disease is contracted through the mucosal linings of the mouth, nose and ears, causing severe debilitating illness with conjunctivitis and corneal damage, mouth ulcers, sneezing, malaise and fever. It is highly contagious. Most cats will recover but this can sometimes take weeks and often involves intensive nursing. As with human flu the very young, old or immunocompromised cats may succumb. Even once fully recovered one of the viruses can remain dormant in the body and cause disease from time to time.

Feline Infectious Enteritis: This disease is similar to parvovirus in dogs. It is contracted orally and leads to gastrointestinal symptoms such as severe vomiting and diarrhoea; it also attacks the bone marrow leading to immune suppression. It is rapidly fatal without treatment and often treated animals cannot be saved.

Feline Leukaemia: This is a viral disease; cats become infected through close contact with infected cats, such as sharing feeding bowls and fighting. It causes a range of devastating diseases which can range from certain cancers to immunosuppression and blood disorders such as anaemia.

Chlamydia: It is not necessary to routinely vaccinate against this disease. It can cause respiratory, ocular disease and, sometimes, infertility. This vaccination should be considered in breeding households.

Kitten vaccinations comprise of two injections, usually given at 9 and 12 weeks of age. Booster vaccination should be given annually to continue to provide your cat with full immunity. It is often a requirement for catteries that your cat is fully immunised against cat flu and infectious enteritis.

Neutering

It is recommended that all cats not kept for breeding should be neutered. Kittens can be neutered from 6 months of age. Neutering male cats lowers the incidence of them spraying in the house, fighting with other cats and also wandering to find a female mate. Neutering female cats prevents them from becoming pregnant but also again from wandering to find a mate. If you would like to discuss the procedure further please contact the clinic and speak to one of our nurses or vets.

Further Information:

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Please do not hesitate to contact us at the practice if you would like to discuss any area of your cat's healthcare with our nurses or vets.