

# URBAN KITTENS

# NEW KITTEN HANDBOOK

## 1.0



RescueCat Project

## **CONGRATULATIONS ON THE ADOPTION OF A KITTEN FROM UK.**

Your kitten has been desexed and has received all their age appropriate vaccinations. When picking up your kitten from the foster carer you will receive documentation outlining their care as well as veterinary certification of desexing and vaccination. If your paperwork is not with the foster carer at pick up time it will be posted to you after the 2 week trial period.

Your kitten has also been micro chipped and after the two week trial period we will message you and organize for the microchip paperwork to be sent to you local Council (with a copy being forwarded to you). Council should then contact you in respect to registering your pet. It has been our experience that the sooner you register your kitten the greater the chances are that your kitten will be safely returned to you if they ever get lost.

## **BEFORE YOU BRING YOUR KITTEN HOME**

### **SUPPLIES**

Here's a list of the most essential items you'll want to have before bringing your kitten home:

1. Quality food, specifically formulated for kittens
2. Collar and ID tags
3. Food bowls, preferably metal or ceramic
4. Litter box and kitten litter
5. A comfortable, warm kitten bed - Although your kitten may want to share your bed it is important to provide them with a comfortable dry bed of their own as well. Use bedding that is safe, can be easily cleaned and dried and place the bed somewhere cosy and private.
6. Kitten carrier
7. Scratching post
8. Kitten safe toys
9. A kitten brush

### **KITTEN PROOF YOUR HOME**

Your kitten is naturally inquisitive and will set about exploring every corner of their new home, like a human toddler. A household can be dangerous to a curious mind, so it will help to go through your home and look at everything from your kitten's perspective.

#### **Some things to consider:**

- Breakable ornaments should be put away in a cupboard.
- Doors to the oven, fridge, microwave, dishwasher, tumble-dryer and washing machine should always be kept closed. Put notes on the doors to remind people to check inside before using them.
- The toilet lid should always be kept down. Kittens can not only drown if they fall in, but they can be poisoned by drinking water that may contain cleaning chemicals.
- If a cleaning chemical has been left in the bath, sink or on the kitchen or bathroom floor, your kitten should be kept out of the room.
- Lit candles are asking for trouble - extinguish all naked flames when puss is around, and put a guard around any fires.
- Aerosols should never be sprayed near your kitten's food and water bowls.
- Plastic bags must be kept safely out of reach.
- Many kittens are attracted to firelighters, which are toxic, so keep them in a secure cupboard out of harm's way.

- Common sense should dictate what other items need to be kept away from your kitten. Here's a list of objects around the house that could signal danger to your kitten: Sewing supplies, razors, needles, paper clips, erasers, rubber bands, staples, twist ties, coins, board game pieces, ornaments, medication, vitamins and pills, cotton balls and loose or broken Styrofoam pieces
- Food scraps must always be cleared away promptly. Chicken bones can be very dangerous, as they splinter when chewed and the string that can be found on joints is also irresistible and potentially deadly.
- Place all houseplants out of the way, and get rid of any plants that are toxic to kittens. Remove any plants that may be poisonous, including, dieffenbachia (dumb cane), poinsettia, Christmas cherry, castor oil plant, avocado plant, philodendron, mistletoe, all lilies, azaleas, daffodils, tomatoes and hydrangeas rubber plant and ivy. Keep garden chemicals stored safely and take care if using slug bait or chemicals on the garden itself – some types can be toxic to animals. You can find a comprehensive list of plants and substances toxic to plants here - <http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/poisons/>
- Hide all trailing electrical cables securely under carpets, or tape them to the floor or wall. A thick, cable protector (available from hardware stores) can also be placed over the cables, to make them chew-proof.
- Remove or shorten hanging tablecloths - many kittens are experts at clearing a fully-laid table!
- All strings, threads and other such materials should be put away after use so that your kitten cannot eat them. Also be aware of risks posed by dangling blind or curtain cords, electrical cords, wires, dental floss and rubber bands. Try planting wheat grass in a stable pot indoors to entice your kitten and safeguard ornamental plants.
- Kittens are inquisitive and will investigate any small, dark places they can crawl into. Should your kitten go missing for any length of time, you should look in cupboards, wardrobes, outdoor sheds etc, in case your kitten has accidentally been shut in or got stuck.

## VET CARE

### FIND A GOOD VET

If you don't have a vet in mind already, ask friends for recommendations or we can recommend a few in the Botany/Mascot/Sydney areas.

### THINGS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR VET

- Have your vet recommend a type of food, how often to feed, and portion sizes.
- Discuss kitten-safe options for controlling parasites, both external and internal.
- Learn about possible signs of illness to watch for during your kitten's first few months.
- Discuss how to introduce your kitten to other household pets.
- Schedule future visits and vaccinations to establish a preventive health plan for your kitten.

### EARLY SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Young kittens are more susceptible to a number of illnesses, and it's always best to catch a health issue in its early stages. Contact your vet immediately if your kitten displays any of the following symptoms.

- Lack of appetite
- Poor weight gain
- Vomiting
- Swollen or painful abdomen
- Lethargy (tiredness)

- Diarrhea
- Difficulty breathing
- Wheezing or coughing
- Pale gums
- Swollen, red eyes or eye discharge
- Nasal discharge
- Inability to pass urine or stool

## VACCINATIONS

All Urban Kittens felines have already been vaccinated when you pick them up, it is up to you to maintain their vaccination schedule. These vaccinations may include:

- **Feline Enteritis** - This is the most common life threatening disease affecting kittens. It is a very contagious viral disease with a high death rate especially in kittens under 12 months of age. Signs include fever, depression, severe stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration.
- **Feline Respiratory Disease (Kitten Flu)** - This is a highly contagious disease. Kittens of all age are at risk, especially young kittens. Signs include sneezing, nasal discharge, runny eyes, coughing, loss of appetite and tongue ulcers.
- **Feline Chlamydia** - Chlamydia is an organism that causes eye disease, predominantly seen in kittens up to 9 months of age. The signs of infection are discharge from the eyes (sticky eye or conjunctivitis) and nose, fever, coughing, respiratory signs, enlarged lymph nodes, lack of appetite, weight loss and depression.
- **FIV Feline Immunodeficiency Virus** - This blood borne viral infection causes feline AIDS which is potentially fatal. Vaccination is available and will be recommended by our veterinarians if your kitten is considered to be at risk. The virus interferes with the immune system and initial symptoms such as fever, sores, lesions and diarrhea, progress to severe chronic infections as the immune system is overcome. There is no treatment or cure for the virus itself but kittens can live long and healthy lives if the disease is diagnosed in its early stages.

## DENTAL CARE

Teeth cleaning and gum massage are very important and probably best achieved by supplying your kitten with the appropriate things to chew on. This helps exercise the teeth and gums and helps to prevent boredom. A well balanced diet, regular checkups and brushing will assist in maintaining good dental health.

## WORMING

The most common intestinal worms affecting kittens in Australia are roundworm, hookworm, and tapeworm. Worms are a common cause of ill health in pets and can result in a loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhoea. To protect your kitten, common worms can be easily controlled with a routine worming treatment. **Kittens need to be wormed every two weeks until twelve weeks of age, then monthly until six months of age. After six months all kittens need to be wormed every three months for effective protection.**

## FLEA CONTROL

If there are fleas about, they will find a way onto your kitten's coat and soon invade your home too. There are excellent flea control products available that are safe, effective and easy to use. These are administered in a variety of ways. Use flea control products specifically designed for kittens. Some common flea control products made for dogs are extremely toxic in kittens!

## USING HUMAN MEDICATIONS WITH KITTENS - JUST DON'T!

DO NOT give unprescribed medications to your kitten without checking with a vet first. Even aspirin and paracetamol can be dangerous if given incorrectly, especially if your pet is on medication or has a medical condition.

## FEEDING

### SHOP FOR QUALITY FOOD

When you first take a kitten home feed it on the same food it has been used to. A sudden change of diet combined with the stress of adapting to a new home can cause stomach upsets and diarrhoea. If you want to change the diet, do so gradually by mixing it with the kitten's usual food. Kittens have small stomachs and have to be fed little and often, like babies. There are foods which have been specially formulated for kittens because they have different nutritional needs to the fully grown kitten. Read and follow the feeding instructions carefully. If the food is marked 'complete' it contains everything the kitten needs to stay healthy. If it is marked 'complementary' it does not supply all the kitten needs and should be fed with other foods.

### SET UP A FEEDING SCHEDULE

To keep up with your kitten's appetite, you'll want to establish a daily feeding routine. Kittens aged 8-12 weeks need four meals a day, 3-6 months three meals, and kittens over 6 months old, two meals. You may want to provide some dry food on an ad lib basis – it depends very much on your lifestyle, what your kitten likes and is used to and if you have other kittens in the house with certain feeding routines and habits. In addition, don't forget to keep his water bowl fresh and filled at all times. But hold the cow's milk. Contrary to popular belief, cow's milk is not nutritionally sufficient for kittens and can give them diarrhea.

## SOCIALISING & TRAINING

### PREPARE A ROOM

Before you bring your kitten home, it's best to designate a quiet area where the kitten can feel comfortable and safe. In this base camp, you'll need to put a few essentials like food and water dishes, a litter box (preferably one with low sides), and some comfortable bedding. Position the litter tray in a discreet corner of the room, with the food bowl in the opposite corner and the water bowl away from both the food and the tray.

- Place a cardboard box on its side with a thermal, washable fleece blanket inside so that the kitten has somewhere to hide if it feels a little shy or insecure.
- Place a kitten scratching post nearby. (Prepare to replace this with a taller one as the kitten grows.)
- Have a couple of toys ready for playtime. Don't leave any toys out with string attached; only use these under supervision as kittens can easily be harmed.

### INTRODUCING YOUR KITTEN TO THE FAMILY

A new kitten is a new family member. Here is the most effective way to introduce your kitten to the family without causing any sibling rivalry!

Get everyone to sit on the floor and only touch the kitten if approached. There should be no grabbing or arguing. If kittens hide, tempt them out with a toy or a treat – encourage but don't force them to be sociable.

**If you have children, they will need to learn how to handle kittens properly.**

- Teach them how to stroke the kitten gently. Toddlers generally 'pat', which can hurt.
- Teach them where to stroke kittens – the top of the head and along the back.
- Although tummies are irresistible when a kitten is rolling and playing, most are rather sensitive about this area and may lash out.
- The litter tray is not a sandpit – so don't let young children play in it!
- Your kitten should always be left alone when feeding, toileting, or sleeping.
- Tails should never be pulled.
- Hands should be washed after handling the kitten and the litter tray.

## INTRODUCING YOUR NEW KITTEN TO OTHER KITTENS

As well as the suggestions below we've always found a great wealth of information available in respect to cat behavior on Jackson Galaxy's' website. Everything from how to set up the litter box to how to introduce new cats into the household. Well worth a repeated look.

<https://www.jacksongalaxy.com/cat-daddy-tips/>

Make sure any pets you already have at home are healthy and current on vaccinations before introducing them to your new kitten. Unhealthy pets can not only pose a health risk to your new kitten, their behavior can also get the relationship off to a bad start.

- Most kittens will eventually accept a newcomer, though it depends on the personalities involved. Let your kitten settle in for a couple of days before any introductions are made.
- Play it safe and use an indoor pen or carrier to protect your new arrival from any over-reaction from the surprised resident territory holder. Put the carrier on the floor of a chosen safe room.
- Invite the older kitten into the room. Both kittens will be able to assess each other through the bars of the crate without coming to any harm.
- Stroke your older kitten to provide some reassurance and show there is no favouritism.
- Don't worry if there is a spat with hissing and arched backs – this is natural.
- Once the introductions have started going smoothly, reverse the positions and bring the kitten to meet the older kitten. Praise them both if they are civil to each other and give them each a treat.
- Hold the next meeting in another room. Keep moving around the house so the kitten's scent spreads too.
- Repeat short introductions frequently until there is less of a reaction from either of the kittens.

## INTRODUCING YOUR NEW KITTEN TO CANINE COMPANIONS

Even if a resident dog doesn't get terribly excited at the sight of a new kitten, great care should still be taken when introducing a kitten to a dog. Over-exuberant play can harm a kitten, so mutual respect needs to be encouraged.

- Place your kitten in a pet carrier, then put your dog on a lead and let him investigate the new arrival. If the dog shows any signs of getting over excited, remain calm. Try to distract your dog's attention and give him a treat when he settles down.
- Repeat the process over several days, moving the carrier around the house until they are paying little attention to each other.

- When they're both ready, you can remove the carrier. Choose a room that has an upward escape route (so your kitten can jump up and out of the dog's reach).
- Make sure the doors are closed.
- Hold the dog on a lead before bringing in the kitten. It is important that the kitten doesn't run away, as this will make things more exciting for the dog who may see it as a fun chase game.
- Keep the meetings short and sweet. Over several meetings, they will probably start to ignore each other.
- Once your pets are no longer bothered by each other's presence, remove the lead. Always ensure the kitten can jump up to a safe spot out of the dog's reach.
- Never leave the two unsupervised until you can trust them completely with each other.

## INTRODUCING YOUR NEW KITTEN OTHER PETS

Don't take any chances with other pets such as birds, rodents and other small creatures. Kittens have evolved to hunt and eat such creatures and they are unlikely to change their habits after millions of years. Use your common sense and keep your new kitten well away from their natural prey!

## REWARD-BASED TRAINING

Reward-based training which is the most effective way to train pets. This type of training involves rewarding your kitten when they perform a 'desired' behaviour. Rewards can be in the form of a tasty kitten food treat, verbal praise or patting. 'Rewards' positively reinforce the desired behaviour and make it more likely your kitten will perform the behaviour again.

Reward-based training also involves generally ignoring 'undesired' behaviors. For example, play time is a good opportunity for you to teach your kitten good manners. Occasionally games can get a bit intense and rough – make sure play time ends if they scratch hard or if there is biting. In this way, your kitten will learn quickly that they don't receive any attention for 'undesired' behaviors such as scratching hard or biting, and they will tend to stop doing these behaviors quickly.

If your kitten does scratch hard or bite, never punish your kitten physically or yell or spray with a water bottle, as this will scare them. Kittens are also unlikely to associate the punishment with their behaviour leading to confusion. The best thing to do in these situations is to generally ignore the behaviour.

## SCRATCHING POLES

Kittens instinctively need to scratch things to keep their nails in good condition and to express natural behaviours.

It's important to provide a scratching pole or several scratching poles around the house. Choose posts that are sturdy and tall enough for your kitten to reach up and stretch while scratching. Most kitten trees also include scratching areas. Good choices are sisal rope, corrugated cardboard or wood. Place posts next to areas where your kitten likes to sleep.

Get a scratching routine started by gently helping your kitten do scratching motions and reward immediately. This will help to prevent your kitten scratching other objects such as furniture etc. If your kitten does start to scratch furniture, cover the furniture with protective material and provide plenty of appropriate alternative things for them to direct their scratching behaviour towards. Some kittens may prefer a scratching mat.

**Close supervision.** Keep watch to prevent climbing and scratching in places other than scratching posts. If scratching or climbing occurs, calmly take your kitten to the post to redirect it. Reward with a few kibbles of kitten food or praise your kitten for using the post. Consistency is key. When you're not able to supervise, confine your kitten to a familiar room with a scratching post, litter box, food and water.

**While you wait for results.** While you wait for results. Until your kitten is using the post regularly, confine your kitten to a familiar room with toys, scratching posts, litter box, food and water when you



are not able to supervise. Remove any items that may be tempting to scratch. Once your kitten is frequently scratching the post, gradually allow freedom in the home without supervision.

## **GROOMING**

Regular grooming (gentle brushing) is important particularly for medium-haired and long-haired kittens. Start grooming your kitten early on so that it becomes an enjoyable bonding activity and part of routine care. Positively reward your kitten with a tasty kitten food treat, verbal praise and patting for allowing you to groom them. This way your kitten will associate grooming with positive things, making it easier for both of you.

Grooming removes dust, dead skin, loose hair, grass seeds and tangles and shed fur, which can help prevent your kitten experiencing 'fur balls' – some kittens will swallow fur when they self-groom, especially long-haired kittens, and this can build up in the stomach to eventually be vomited.

Grooming should always be comfortable for your kitten. Avoid any hair pulling or jerking movements. Fur mats and tangles may need to be carefully trimmed off using blunt-nosed safety scissors. Always point scissors away from your kitten and ensure the skin isn't touched.

In general, kittens don't need to be bathed and most kittens can find it quite stressful. Therefore generally avoid bathing unless recommended by your vet for medical reasons.

## **PLAY**

A kitten's life is all about playing and having fun. This way they learn about themselves and their environment. Playtime can also be important experience for bonding between you and your kitten.

To begin with kittens will play with their littermates and mum, and it's usually at this stage that they learn to inhibit their bite and use of claws so that they can have as much fun as possible without hurting each other.

When kittens go to new homes, the focus of this play can be transferred on to us, so it is extremely important that we continue to ensure that they play with us in a safe and appropriate way. Always use appropriate toys, preferably fishing rod toys as this keeps the kitten's teeth and claws away from your hands.

Throw toys away from you, so that they have to chase and pounce on them. Tasty treats can be placed inside some toys, and this adds an extra challenge to a kitten, as once they have chased and caught the toy, they then have to work out how they will get to the reward inside.

If you have a kitten that seems to focus on hands and feet, don't punish them or tell them off. Simply remain as still and as quiet as possible until they stop. Then, refocus their attention on to a suitable toy and praise them enthusiastically. This way they will learn that hands and feet are boring, and that playing with toys is much more exciting and fun.

Some particularly excitable kittens may try to play with a family kitten or dog, and if they are happy to play in return, always supervise in case things get out of hand.

Kittens have a lot of energy to burn and as kittens are primarily nocturnal animals, you may notice they become more active at night. You can help alter this behaviour by playing with your kitten in the early evening to use up some of their excess energy. Set aside playtime when you would like your kitten to become most active. This is also a great opportunity to help develop the relationship between you and your kitten. Do not feed them or play with them if they wake you during the night as this only rewards unwanted behaviour.



## **Document review**

As indicated on the front cover this guide is intended as a living document. Please direct any feedback to [urbankittens@optusnet.com.au](mailto:urbankittens@optusnet.com.au)