

**Cherrywood Veterinary Clinic.
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2826464**

Care of a Kitten

Welcome to Cherrywood Veterinary clinic and congratulations on getting a new kitten. Owning a cat can be a very rewarding experience but it carries with it some responsibility. Should you have any problems with it please feel free to telephone a member of our staff for advice. The aim of this leaflet is to answer some of the common queries that new owners have about their kittens and introduce some of the services that are available within the practice.

Vaccinations

Kittens are routinely vaccinated against three different viral infections, feline enteritis, feline rhinotracheitis and feline calicivirus. The latter two viruses cause the respiratory condition commonly known as cat flu. Kittens are given their first inoculation at 9 weeks of age and the second at three weeks later, it will be fully protected 7 days following the second vaccine. Booster vaccination is given yearly, but if it is nearly a year since the previous vaccine and the cat is likely to be in a situation where its immune system is stressed, such as a boarding cattery, then a booster is usually advised at least a week before boarding.

Feline leukaemia is a viral disease, which is relatively common and is preventable by vaccination. The vast majority of persistently infected cats will die from tumours or due to the immunosuppression caused by the virus. It is a relatively new vaccine so the cost of the initial two-vaccine course is still relatively expensive so it is not part of the standard vaccine protocol in veterinary practices, though it is to be recommended. Please ask the vet for further details. Because the virus takes some months before it causes disease the vet may suggest taking a blood test to ensure that the cat is not infected before vaccination.

Worming

Intestinal parasites are common in kittens, they can become infected with parasites before they are born or later through their mothers milk. Modern worming preparations are safe and effective, and we recommend their use at 2 week intervals from 2 weeks of age. If you have just obtained a kitten and there is any doubt as to its worming history, then it should be treated. Roundworms provide a small but definite risk to immunologically susceptible children so all cats should be wormed twice a year or more frequently if in contact with young children.

Tapeworms are the most common intestinal parasite of cats. There are a number of intermediate hosts depending on the parasite species involved the most common being the flea and infected prey species such as mice. All cats that have fleas should be treated for tapeworms. We recommend Drontal for cats as the best multiwormer for routine use. They are available across the counter at reception.

Neutering

Males: Castration offers a number of advantages especially if performed at an early age. Following puberty, at about 8-9 months old, the male cat develops a number of often undesirable behaviour changes. He will become territorial and start to mark areas, often in the house, by spraying urine, which by now will have developed a particularly strong odour. He will start to enlarge his territory by straying even further from the house, particularly at night. It is for this reason that many cats involved in road traffic accidents are non-neutered males. By increasing his territory he will come into contact with other cats and fight for dominance. Inflicted fight wounds can result in severe infections and abscesses. Since disease such as FIV and FeLV – which can cause AIDS like symptoms and cancers in cats, can only be spread through bites it comes as no surprise that those most commonly affected by such incurable viruses are non-neutered tomcats. The longer a tomcat is left to spray and fight the less likely neutering will stop it. Finally neutering prevents the siring of unwanted litters.

Females: Spaying of female cats also offers several advantages. Most obviously it will prevent the prospect of unplanned litters. Once puberty is reached, on average at around 7 months old, during most of the year the queen will be “calling” for approximately 1 week in every 2-3 until she is mated. During calling she may display unsociable behaviour, which is often manifest as loud and persistent crying, and frequently rubbing and rolling on the floor. Such behaviour and her scent will attract pestering tomcats for miles around. Neutering will eliminate this. Finally spaying will remove the risk of uterine infection and may reduce the future risk of mammary cancer developing. There is no medical reason for letting your cat having a litter before she is neutered.

Both male and female cats should be neutered between 5 and 6 months of age.

Behaviour

Cats by nature need to sharpen their claws, so offering a cat scratching post is essential. Although you offer the cat a scratching post she may not always use it and may use your couch instead! To encourage her to use the post rather than the couch, buy a post with catnip in and rustle newspaper, make noise near the cat or spray with water pistol (aim at her body) when you catch her using your couch.

If you value your furniture more than having a cat, don't get a cat! Try a goldfish instead.

If you do not want her to jump up onto counters or climb your curtains, use one of the methods mentioned above (i.e. rustle newspaper, clap your hands, or spray her with a water pistol) but be sure to only use one behaviour modification trick for one specific behaviour problem (i.e. water pistol for counter walking, rustle newspaper for couch scratching) other wise you will confuse the cat.

NEVER SMACK A CAT!

Pet Health Insurance

Insuring your cat against unexpected veterinary bills is very wise. With increasing skills, better drugs and laboratory services, cost of veterinary treatments is increasing at the same rate as human medical care. Learning in veterinary medicine is forever expanding. General maintenance of the cat is the owner's responsibility thus

inoculations and general dental care should be budgeted for. The essential feature of pet health insurance is that it provides for the unexpected expense, the road traffic accident, the poisoning episode or the sudden onset of debilitating disease, the cost of which today could run to several hundred euro. A proposal form is enclosed, you can decide whether it suits your needs.

Holidays

One of the benefits of owning a cat as opposed to a dog is that they are better able to look after themselves should you go away for a night or two, particularly if you have a door fitted with a cat flap. A large bowl of dried food, an ample bowl of water and a litter tray is sufficient for a night away. For longer periods you will need to get someone to call to your house daily or place the cat in a boarding cattery. We have facilities to board cats here and as it is difficult to find boarding vacancies during peak holiday times, we recommend you make your appointments as early as possible especially at Christmas. All reputable catteries should insist on the cat to be boarded having a booster vaccination in the previous twelve months.

Feeding

Feeding cats a well balanced diet is essential for their overall health. In understanding the proper feeding behaviour of cats it is important to understand two important facts, firstly unlike dogs, they are complete carnivores which means that high levels of protein that they require in their diet must be derived from animal rather than plant proteins, to contain sufficient levels of essential fatty acids and vitamins such as Vitamin A and niacin. The second fact unique to the domestic cat is that their ancestors were of desert origin, this allows their body to conserve water more effectively and so drink considerably less water than a dog of similar size. Fresh drinking water should always be provided, though do not be alarmed if it is not always used. Obviously cats on dried food will drink more than those on canned diet. It is also important to consider the normal feeding behaviour of a cat. Left to their own devices cats are nibblers and will eat small meals frequently throughout the day and night. Early in life kittens need to eat often because they need relatively larger amounts of food because they are growing rapidly but they have limited space in their tiny stomachs. At 8 weeks they need between 4 and 5 meals a day and by six months two daily meals are sufficient. A good quality kitten food has advantages over adult cat food since it has been specially formulated. Because of their rapid growth nutritional mistakes in kitten hood will have more severe consequences. Since growth is almost complete by six month of age, kittens can be switched to adult food. We recommend a dry food diet. A member of our staff can advise you which food would be best suited to your kitten/cat. The benefit of a dry diet is that adult cats can be allowed access to it all day, which mimics their natural feeding pattern. Dry foods are also considerably better at maintaining healthy teeth and gums than canned products.

Contrary to popular belief, kittens and adult cats do not need milk, in fact weaning kittens often lose the ability to digest milk sugar (lactose) by about 8 weeks of age. Therefore while small amounts may be tolerated, too much can lead to intestinal upset and diarrhoea because it is not digested properly.

NEVER GIVE A KITTEN OR CAT MILK!

Flea Control

Fleas are a common parasite of cats and a major cause of allergic skin disease. The difficulty in controlling fleas lies in fact that their eggs are laid of the host in the bedding and around the house. There are a number of good products available for the control of fleas, the best product to use will depend on your own situation i.e. age and size of the cat, whether you have other animals in the house and whether the product will be used to clear flea infestation or just to prevent such an occurrence. If you are worried about fleas please ask us to recommend a product that best suits your needs.

Grooming

Domestic cats come in two distinct varieties, shorthaired and longhaired. In general shorthaired cats require very little attention to their coats. However with longhaired animals, some are less able than others to groom themselves properly. In such cases it is important that you comb out the coat on a regular basis to prevent matts developing. In occasional cases if the matts become too thick it may be necessary for us to anaesthetise the cat to remove the clumps of hair. With some cats the onset of a dirty or matted coat may indicate ulcers or tartar in the mouth which makes it uncomfortable to groom itself.

Moving House

Cats are territorial animals and they may have problems accepting a new house as their home. If the old house is nearby cats may return to their old haunts and try to take up residence with the new people living there. If the move is further away cats may just wander off and get lost. A few tips may help, these obviously apply should you acquire any cat other than a young kitten. Cats should be fitted with an elastic/break free identity collar. On arrival at the new house a cat should be left in its basket until it has settled and it is then confined to that room for a day or so with its favourite food and a litter tray. Then let it explore the house ensuring all windows and doors are locked. Cats should be given extra food, attention and petting during this period. When it accepts the house it can be allowed accompanied access to the garden, first on then off a lead when it is fully settled it can be let out for short periods but try to do this when it is hungry so that it will not wander too far and will respond to a call when food is produced.

Zoonoses

A zoonose is a disease that can be passed on from animal to humans. They are very rare in cats, but a number should be borne in mind. Firstly toxocariasis is infection with the larval stage of the roundworm. It has been dealt with earlier and is prevented by regular worming. Ringworm is a fungal infection of the superficial layers of the skin, hair and nails. It is commonly seen in young stray kittens; most typically the cat will show a circular patch of hair loss with accompanying crusting of the skin. It is treated with a course of tablets. Ringworm can be transmitted quite readily to humans and it is therefore important to minimise exposure to the fungus during treatment. If humans develop thickened red skin patches then medical attention should be sought, it generally responds quickly to treatment.

Finally, cats can carry a disease called toxoplasma, particularly those that hunt or are fed large amounts of red meat. It very rarely causes any illness in cats, but is of significance only because of potential

exposure to pregnant women. If a pregnant women acquires infection during pregnancy the infection may be spread to her baby. This is only a risk if she acquires the infection during the pregnancy, a women who has previously been exposed to the parasite carries no risk to the foetus if she subsequently becomes pregnant. Prevent by cleaning litter trays daily, because it takes more than 24 hours for the oocysts to become infectious after they are passed.

Other things to know

Adult cats MUST stay in the house for at least one month, longer if possible, to prevent her from straying. By keeping her in the house for at least one month she will identify the house as her territory that needs protecting. Many cats let out before the one-month period stray- some go looking for their previous home and others get lost.

Kittens MUST stay in until they have been neutered/spayed and if possible keep kittens in as long as possible.

Kittens and young adult cats have very little road sense so the longer you keep the cat in the better. Also most road traffic accidents happen at night so only let your cat out during the day.

If your cat does go missing, inform the clinic, Garda station or pounds in your area, and neighbours. Putting up signs in local shops also proves to be helpful.

Be sure to put an elasticised/ “break – free”, safety collar and disk on your cat with at least two telephone numbers on it in case she does go missing.

Cat collars must be elasticised/or “break free” to allow the cat to wriggle free from it in case she gets caught in bushes or on branches. Cat collars should be loose enough to fit 2 of your fingers underneath it and check the collar regularly to make sure it’s not too tight. Kittens grow quickly!

Keep washing machine and dryer doors shut and check them before using them.

Keep toilet seat lids down as kittens can easily drown in the toilet.

Keep loose wires tied safely away – kittens love to chew on these.

If you have any questions, regardless of how silly you may think they are, do not hesitate to contact.

Good luck.

Cherrywood Veterinary Clinic

Surgery Hours

Monday to Friday, Reception open 8.30am – 7.30pm

Saturday Reception open 9am – 1pm

Please phone 2826464 for an appointment

Emergency out of hours service

Phone 1890 564 036.

