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So You Have a New Cat....

Congratulations!!!

Getting a new kitten or cat is always exciting. As a new owner, there are usually many concerns in regards to how you can keep your cat healthy. This handout is written to try to address your concerns and questions. It will also give you helpful tips on how to better attain those goals. After all, we want you and your new cat to have a long, healthy life together. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to call our office and ask.

FOOD/WATER

Fresh water should be available at all times. Be sure to clean bowls at least once daily.

Kittens start the weaning process at approximately 4 weeks old. It is good to introduce a gruel-like formula to nipple feedings. Eventually canned and dry cat food formulas can be added as teeth develop. All kittens should be ingesting a good quality, well-balanced kitten food. It is better to choose foods with less fillers and better nutritional sources.

Examples of food:	Hill's Science Diet	Iams	Taste of the Wild
	Purina ProPlan	Eukanuba	Blue Buffalo
	Nutro	Merrick	

It is recommended to choose one food and stick with it. If, at any time, you choose to change food we recommend doing so gradually over a minimum of 3-5 days. This will decrease the chance of gastrointestinal upset. Remember, there is not one single food that will be perfect for every cat!

Cats, typically, eat in more of a grazing pattern. So leaving the food out throughout the day caters to this behavior. However, you should still measure how much food is available AND replace with fresh food at least once daily. How much food to leave out will depend on your cat's age, size, and activity level.

Multivitamins are not needed if your pet is eating a quality cat food. However, your veterinarian might advise their use during times of sickness or injury.

Treats are usually used as a reward. Cats are trainable, which treats will be needed for this as well. It is a good idea to choose 1 or 2 different treats and stick with them. Do not just buy what is on sale or "looks good". Too many high fat treats can lead to diarrhea and vomiting.

** See our handout "95 Things That Can Harm Your Pet"!

ENVIRONMENT

Just like the famous saying goes, “Curiosity killed the cat!” Kittens love to explore their environment and usually do so with their mouths. Often what goes into their mouths then gets swallowed. Therefore, before you bring your new cat home, make sure to survey your home for potential dangers. Also called “kitten proofing”. This is similar to making your home safe for a human child.

Some examples of “kitten proofing”:

- Know which plants are toxic and place them out of reach.
- Keep all medications, including cat supplements, in a safe area (inside cabinets or drawers).
- Keep all trash cans where cats cannot get into them.
- Keep any cleaning supplies in high cabinets or use childproof latches. Keep pets away from area where these products are being used.
- Keep lid on the toilet bowl closed and stop using any sanitizing flush products.
- Tie up loose electrical cords or use cord concealers.
- Keep small objects out of reach. Things like coins, jewelry, needles/fishing lures, straight pins, thread/yarn/dental floss, paper clips, toys, etc can be toxic or cause damage to your pet.
- Keep doors and windows closed. Keep screens securely fastened and in good repair.
- Make sure all gasoline, oil, pain, fertilizers, insecticides, and auto supplies are placed in secure containers and out of reach. Antifreeze and rat poisons are particularly tasty, but can be deadly if ingested.

EXERCISE

Cats are built for activities, like climbing, stalking and hunting. While it is true that cats have the evolutionary advantage of a high metabolism that works even as they lounge around, they do still need some physical activity to keep them from a sedentary life of sloth and eventual obesity. Daily exercise is good for your cat's mental and physical well-being. It can help avoid obesity-related illnesses, such as diabetes or arthritis. Their energy needs to have an outlet, otherwise cats become bored. Bored cats tend to have more behavioral issues, like inappropriate urination or over-grooming.

The type of activity your cat prefers will depend on your cat's age, weight, temperament, and interests. Activities that stimulate a cat's natural hunting instincts are often the best bet. Small motorized remote controlled and battery powered furry mice are great for getting a cat's attention. Even the economical non-motorized mice are appealing; you will just have to do all the mock mouse movements using a string that is attached to the mouse. Along the same line, feather toys are good bird replicas, and are often attached to the end of a stick or string so that you can mimic the movements of a wounded bird, one of a cat's favorite objects for stalking. It is important that your cat feels like it has had a successful hunt.

****Do NOT use string/ribbon as a toy!*** Cats cannot differentiate between those used for toys and those that are not. Any toy with string, ribbon, or feathers attached should never be left out. Play with these under your direct supervision only! These items can be dangerous if swallowed and even cause an intestinal blockage, which would require invasive surgery and potentially be life-threatening.





Scratching posts and cat trees entice cats to climb, which uses their muscles and naturally wears down the points of their claws. If you have the space, you can set up an obstacle course, using pre-made shelving systems, so your cat can jump from place to place. The goal is to allow your cat to be able to circumnavigate the entire room without touching the floor. Empty boxes with holes cut into them make great “caves” and scratching toys. If you have a yard, you can build or buy an outdoor enclosure that allows your cat the advantage of being outside without the dangers of traffic and other animals. Finally, if your cat really needs to lose some weight, there are exercise wheels -- like the wheels made for hamsters -- made just for cats. Exercise wheels do not take up much space, and they allow cats to run and run to their heart’s content.

Unlike dogs, cats cannot be hitched to the end of a leash and taken for a stroll around the neighborhood – well, they can, but you need to train them from kitten-hood. With a little imagination, and some trial and error, it is possible to find ways to encourage your cat to be active. Activity helps maintain a healthy body weight and muscle tone. It keeps the mind alert. Playing with your cat can be fun and offer opportunities to

bond with him/her.

So how much exercise is enough?

You should try to spend about 10-15 minutes a few times each day engaging your cat in some form of activity. Kittens and young cats will usually take the initiative in engaging you in play, or they will find their own entertainment. They tend to be easily amused and will probably want to continue to play long after you have tired of the game. However, older and overweight cats are tougher to engage. They usually do not have the endurance or interest in extended playtime, but will still benefit from short activities throughout the day. It is recommended to start with a few minutes at a time. Once you have found something that they like, try different versions of that activity and gradually increase the amount of time spent playing.

SOCIALIZATION

When choosing a kitten/cat, one who exhibits friendly and outgoing behavior is going to be easier to socialize. Older cats, who haven't been socialized, will require more time and effort to train, but it is not impossible. Socialization means learning to be part of society. When socializing our new kittens/cats, it means helping them learn to be comfortable within our world. This includes many different types of people, environments, buildings, noises, smells, and other animals. Most young animals have a natural curiosity about the everyday things, but once they reach a certain age they become more suspicious. This is crucial for development so young animals become accustomed to things that will be a part of their lives. The later suspicion ensures that the animal will react with a healthy dose of caution at new things that may turn out to be dangerous.

When socializing cats it is imperative to develop trust in your cat and acclimate him/her to people and other animals in the home environment. This is particularly true if you have young children in the house to prevent them from being scratched or bitten during play. During the socialization period, help your kitten become accustomed to being handled by different people and being touched in different places, such as the ears, paws, mouth and belly. Your kitten should also be offered a wide variety of opportunities to explore and interact with different people, animals, sights and sounds. Cat socialization need not take a lot of time. The more handling the better, but even short sessions of 15 minutes each day will help to gain your cat’s trust and put her at ease in your home.

It's essential that any experience be positive and your kitten is without fear in every situation. If a kitten is exposed to things when she is afraid, and is not provided with positive reinforcement, she will learn that that particular stimulus is bad and should be avoided. It is best to introduce your kitten to new things in such a way that she has the ability to approach the stimulus on her own terms and at her own pace. Pair any experiences with positive rewards. Should your kitten display signs of fear, make the experience less intense — increase the distance between the kitten and the new object, for example, or lower the volume. When you combine a variety of situations with positive reinforcement and rewards, you increase the chances of your kitten growing into a confident cat.

One main concept is to **START SLOWLY!** Pet the cat in areas where he/she enjoys being petted. As you touch him/her, speak in a calm voice. If your cat displays any signs of agitation, then end the session and leave him/her alone. If the cat engages in any rough play, then say “NO!” firmly and put him/her down. If the cat tolerates the “touching” session, reward with a treat. These sessions should occur several times a day, with the length of time being extended as the cat grows more comfortable with you. As comfort grows then you can begin to move to areas like her feet, belly and tail. You should work towards being able to open your cat's mouth, stroke his/her ears, and handle toes.

Scheduled play time can reduce the amount of misdirected predatory behavior (such as ankle attacks) in which your cat engages. This also helps the two of you form a close bond. As with the touching sessions, do not reinforce bad behavior. If he/she attacks you during play, say “NO!” and end the playtime.

Make a list of things your kitten is likely to experience in his/her lifetime. Use this list to create a schedule of opportunities to expose him/her to new and different things. For example, get your kitten used to guests by inviting friends over for dinner. Ask friends/family to help play with your kitten, ideally with a favorite toy. Always reward with tasty treats when she acts/behaves in a desired way.

Here are some suggestions for situations a cat should be exposed to:

Other cats/animals (if vaccinated and cat-friendly)	Veterinary Office - scale, exam table, restraint	Groomer - restraint, table, clippers/scissors
Car Rides/Crates	Guests in the house	Having picture taken
Being held/restrained at home	Nails clipped/Grooming at home	Playing with a variety of toys

A cat that is not socialized can be timid, distrustful, scared or even aggressive. A well-socialized cat is more likely to be loving, trusting, affectionate, and well-behaved. Your success at socializing your cat will vary depending on the cat's innate personality and genetic makeup, and the amount of socialization he/she received prior to nine weeks of age. Socialization takes longer with some cats than others. Some can be socialized 95% of the way, but still may lash out with nips and scratches from time to time. Others may be inherently anti-social. Be understanding and patient and respect the tiger within the tabby.

Continue to reinforce good behavior and discourage unwanted behavior. Sometimes it will take years to fully complete the process, but you'll be rewarded at the end with a housemate who enriches your life in ways you never expected.



GROOMING

Cats do have built-in grooming tools (tongue and teeth) which make them well-equipped to tackle most of their own hair care needs. But, if he/she should get very dirty or get into something sticky you may be required to take grooming to the next level. Caring for a cat requires knowing how to take care of his/her coat, skin, nails, and teeth. A clean cat is a happy cat, and we're here to give you some tips. From nail trims to bathing, a little maintenance goes a long way. Keep in mind some cats will not tolerate being groomed. If your cat fights you during the grooming process, and there is some potential for physical injury, to you or your cat, please make an appointment with our office or chosen groomer.

The condition of your cat's skin is an indication of her overall health. When a skin problem occurs, your cat may respond with excessive scratching, chewing and/or licking. A wide range of causes—from external parasites and allergies to seasonal changes and stress, or a combination of these—may be affecting your cat's skin and should be investigated. Skin problems are one of the most common reasons pet parents seek veterinary care.

Brushing

Brushing the hair coat of kittens/cats cleans the coat, removes loose hair, and stimulates the oil glands of the skin. Oil helps protect and nourish the skin. It also helps remove skin flakes and stimulates blood circulation, which improves the overall skin condition. Some cats will consider this as just another form of petting, others will dread it. By getting them used to it as youngsters they will let you do the same when they are adults. Healthy coats have a natural gloss and spring back when touched. Neglected ones can lead to painful tangles. Ask your veterinarian what would be the appropriate brush for your cat's hair coat.

Always brush in the direction of hair growth. You want to make sure to concentrate on one section at a time, but you may not be able to do all sections at once. If you find any knots, also known as mats, you can sprinkle corn starch on them and tease them apart with your fingers or a fine tooth comb.

DO NOT CUT KNOTS!!

Typically 1-2 brushings per week should be adequate. You will find that regular sessions are especially beneficial when your cat ages and is no longer able to groom as meticulously on his/her own. Brushing should be performed prior to bathing in order to remove dead hair, dirt, mats, and burrs.



Bathing

Bathing can start right away with a new kitten. The traditional belief that cats and water don't mix is a myth that can be disproved by using principles of psychology, gaining your kitten's trust, and not giving up. Bathing helps control odor by removing excess dander, oil, and bacteria from the skin/hair coat. There are numerous shampoos on the market; however, you want to choose a soap free/non-detergent one. Baby shampoo is a suitable substitute. These types of shampoos do not irritate the eyes; remove the coat's natural oils, or topical flea treatments.

Just like with any other behavior modification, patience and reward is the key to success. Psychologists and other mental health care professionals use a process called systematic desensitization to help their patients overcome phobias. Simply stated, baby steps completed successfully lead to achieving the ultimate goal. The patient builds on each small victory by adding new achievements to the foundation of past successes already in place until the desired behavior is formed.

Ear Cleaning

Unlike dogs, regular ear cleaning is NOT necessary for most cats. Studies have shown that having a “hands off” approach is best when it comes to the feline ear. This does not mean to ignore the ears. Be sure to monitor for any redness, odor, or warmth in the ears. There may even be some sensitivity present. If you notice any of these abnormalities please contact our office for an exam. Your vet will advise you on the best way to handle your cat's ears. Follow the recommendations as directed.

Ear Cleaning Process (if directed to do so):

- Inspect the ears. This gives you an idea of how dirty they are and to check for excess hair or discharge/debris.
 - Best to be done in an easy to clean area. This is because when your cat shakes his/her head the debris and cleaner have to go somewhere. So Beware!
 - Hold the ear flap up and gently squirt a small amount of ear cleaner into the canal opening.
 - Before he/she can shake the head, begin massaging the base of the ear (this is near the jaw where cartilage can be felt) for a few seconds to help loosen debris. You should be able to hear a “smacking sound”.
 - Allow your cat to give a good shake.
 - Using a paper towel/washcloth/cotton pad wipe out the opening of the ear canal and underside of the ear flap.
- ** DO NOT USE COTTON-TIPPED SWABS (Q-tips) IN ANY ANIMAL'S EARS!!!**
- Reward your cat with a treat
 - Repeat the process if the ear still seems dirty. Do not over clean, this can lead to irritation.
 - Move to the other ear and repeat.

Oral Care



HEALTHY MOUTH



PERIODONTAL DISEASE (notice gum redness)

Kittens have 26 teeth, while adult cats have 30. Periodontal disease is considered the most prevalent disease in cats three years of age and older. Dental disease begins when bacteria colonize the mouth and a plaque biofilm is formed. Over time, this biofilm mineralizes, and calcifies into tartar. The bacterial population accumulates, which leads to inflammation and results in periodontal disease. Additional factors such as misaligned teeth, systemic disease, nutrition, and genetics may also contribute to disease.

Unlike dogs, cats are very individualistic in their acceptance of home oral hygiene. Home oral hygiene can make a tremendous difference in your cat's comfort and health. There is a wide variety of options available, but keep in mind that anything you can do to help prevent plaque and tartar accumulation will pay in the long run. Give your cat home checks and follow the tips below.

Brushing with Toothpaste – The single most effective means to maintain oral health between professional dental examinations. The bacterial film that forms on teeth is easily disrupted by the mechanical effect of brushing the teeth. Frequent (ideally daily) brushing is recommended to maintain optimal dental health. The key to success is to be patient and gradual in your approach. Focus mainly on the outsides of the “cheek teeth” located under the upper lip. Small cat-specific toothbrushes are available. Some cats prefer finger brushes. It is best to start with allowing your cat to lick the pet-specific toothpaste from your finger and then gradually transition to a toothbrush. Remember to use pet-specific toothpastes. They come in flavors like poultry and seafood.



Avoid human products because they often contain abrasives and high-foaming detergents that should not be swallowed.

Oral Rinses/Gels – These are similar to human mouthwash. You want to look for rinses that contain Chlorhexidine. This ingredient has been shown to have immediate bacteria-killing action. It also has a prolonged action because it binds to the oral tissues and tooth surfaces and then is gradually released into the oral cavity. It is safe for pets and rarely causes problems, though it can have a bitter taste. Therefore some cats do not tolerate this very well. The rinse is applied by squirting a small amount inside the cheek on each side of the mouth. The gel is applied by smearing it onto the teeth using your finger or piece of gauze. The tongue and lips will spread the rinse or gel around the mouth.

Diets/Chews – These are an additional means of decreasing dental disease. Several “dental diets” employ a specific kibble design and others include a chemical anti-tartar, poly-phosphate ingredient; for example, Hill's t/d. Giving these daily yields the best results. Palatability is important! One diet/treat may be appealing to one cat, but not the next cat. Toys can satisfy your cat's natural desire to chomp, while making his/her teeth strong.

The following are signs that your cat may have a problem with his/her mouth and should be checked by your veterinarian:

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Bad breathe | Excessive drooling | Inflamed (Red) gums |
| Facial swelling | Dropping food | Chewing on one side of mouth |
| Loose teeth | Oral growths | Discharge from nose |
| Pawing at mouth | Tooth grinding | |

Often there are no obvious signs of dental disease. Most cats with dental disease still eat without a noticeable change in appetite! Discuss your cat's teeth at their routine preventive care veterinary visit. If you are suspicious of dental disease, an examination by a licensed veterinary professional is indicated.

PREVENTIVES

In our area of the country internal and external parasites are a very common problem.

Heartworms –

Heartworm infection in cats has been diagnosed around the globe and is considered, at least regionally, endemic in each of the contiguous 48 states and Hawaii. Transmission of the disease requires a susceptible mosquito vector (carrier). The urban-dwelling mosquitoes are able to reproduce in small containers, such as flowerpots and bird baths. Significant differences exist between feline heartworm disease and its canine counterpart. Although cats are susceptible hosts, they are more resistant to infection with adult *Dirofilaria immitis* than are dogs. Most heartworm infection in cats is comparatively light and consists of less than 6 adult worms. Nevertheless, because of their relatively small body size, cats with only a few worms are still considered to be heavily infected in terms of parasite biomass. The life span of the parasite in cats is thought to be 2-4 years, which is considerably shorter than that in dogs. Nevertheless, heartworms are capable of causing SEVERE disease in cats. *There is no great test to confirm infection, nor is there a treatment!* Heartworm infection is preventable. Kittens should be started, on *monthly* preventive, as early as 8 weeks of age, without performing a heartworm test. Options for effective prophylaxis include *monthly* oral or topical medications. These products require a prescription. All cats, indoor or outdoor, living in heartworm-endemic areas is at risk, so prevention is a high priority. Ask your veterinarian which is the best preventive for you and your cat's needs.



Fleas & Ticks –

Fleas are external parasites that are wingless with mouthparts adapted for piercing skin and sucking blood from mammals and birds. Their hind pair of legs is used for jumping, sometimes up to 7 inches vertically. The tough body is able to withstand great pressure, so they can often survive mashing or scratching. Eggs are laid on the host itself; therefore, areas where the host rests/sleeps become primary habitats. They remain resting until they received a signal that a host is near – vibrations (visual and physical), heat, and carbon dioxide. In ideal conditions, fleas can have a lifespan of as long as 1 and ½ years. Female fleas can lay 5000 or more eggs over their life, which allows for phenomenal growth rates. Fleas are not simply a source of annoyance. They can also lead to hair loss, anemia, or infectious diseases (bacteria, viruses, tapeworms, and trypanosomes).



Flea control includes placing all pets in the home on a monthly medication, such as Comfortis or Revolution. Frequent and thorough vacuuming is also helpful to pick up the larvae and eggs in the environment. It is recommended to dispose of the bag after each vacuuming of flea-infested area. Be careful when using any environment-treating products until you determine it is safe for use around your particular pet. Bathing your cat dramatically reduces the flea population on a badly infested animal. It should be combined with brushing/combing and a mild shampoo. Products like baking soda and table salt can be used weekly on carpets and floors to kill fleas by dehydration. Borax and diatomaceous earth have also been used, but exposure to these products can be dangerous if inhaled or ingested. People should wear a dust mask and animals kept from the environment until it has been cleaned. Fleas cannot withstand high temperatures, so placing bedding and clothes in a medium or high dryer setting will kill fleas.

Ticks are external parasites that also survive by sucking the blood of mammals and birds, and sometimes reptiles and amphibians. They are incapable of flying or jumping. Ticks are widely distributed around the world and they tend to flourish in regions with warm, humid climates. This is because they require a certain amount of moisture in the air to undergo parts of their life cycle. Many ticks hold on to leaves and grass and wait with legs outstretched waiting to climb on to the host. When a host brushes the spot where a tick is waiting, it quickly climbs up. Some attach immediately and others wander looking for thinner skin (like the ear). Ticks are vectors for a number of diseases that can affect both humans and other animals. Examples of tick-borne infections are: Lyme disease, Q fever, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Tularemia, ehrlichiosis, anaplasmosis, and babesiosis. Sometimes one tick can harbor more than one disease-causing agent.

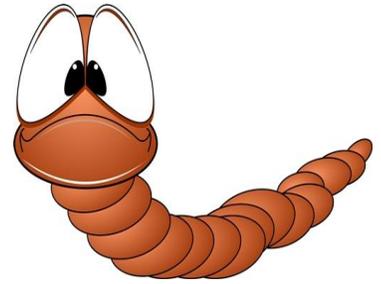


The treatment and control of ticks is different than that for fleas. Ticks are typically found in wooded areas. However, as wooded areas are torn down for urban growth the wildlife (and their parasites) gets displaced into our yards. So ticks are now being seen more frequently in suburban-like areas. Also many houses use decorative material, like mulch, which can contain ticks. These parasites can get inside homes by hitchhiking inside on pets, people, or our clothing. Therefore, it is always a good idea to inspect pets and our children. Ticks can also become a problem if there are suitable ticks hosts living the crawl spaces or attics of our homes. Repairing any crevices or gaps and keeping grass cut short outside may discourage infestations. Dispose of all empty bird and rodent nesting materials. Expose shaded areas to sunlight to decrease moisture available to the parasites. Remove thick leaf litter or ground cover as well. These changes are typically done in areas frequented by pets and family members, not necessarily the entire property.

Any feeding ticks found on people or pets should be carefully removed. Tweezers should be used to grasp behind the head and then use a gentle pulling motion. It is important that the tick be completely removed and then the area should be washed thoroughly and disinfected. Since ticks are capable of seeking safety in hidden areas within the home, infestations are harder to battle. Therefore, we recommend using a monthly product to protect your pets from these nasty parasites. Ask us which product is best for your cat's lifestyle.

Intestinal Parasites –

These are very common. They are more often seen in younger animals, but adult cats can become infected as well. Some of these can even cause problems in people (zoonotic). We often deworm kittens, whether we find anything in the fecal samples or not. The typical schedule is every 2 weeks from age 2 to 10 weeks. The most common symptoms of intestinal parasites are: anemia (pale gums and lethargy), vomiting, diarrhea (sometimes with blood), dull coat, and poor growth. Infection, with the most common worms, can also be controlled with monthly heartworm preventives. If your cat is diagnosed with any of these, please complete all recommended treatments to help prevent egg shedding. We recommend annual fecal examinations, minimally, on all pets. We will often repeat this test if your cat develops gastrointestinal signs, such as vomiting and diarrhea.



Type of Parasite	How Infected?	Zoonotic?	How to Prevent?	Preventive Available?
Coccidia	Ingesting feces, grooming due to being immune-compromised (young, sick, stressed, etc.)	NO*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strict sanitation. - Bathing infected pets to decrease coat contamination. - Strict insect and rodent control (can carry coccidia from place to place). 	NO
Giardia	Ingesting infected feces, drinking contaminated lake/standing water	NO*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promptly remove feces from yard. - Prevent drinking of possibly unclean water. - Strict sanitation. 	NO
Hookworm	<p><i>Young</i> = crossing the placenta, through milk</p> <p><i>Adults</i> = ingesting feces, worms penetrating skin</p>	YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promptly remove feces from yard. - Avoid areas with high animal traffic. - Wear shoes/gloves when gardening. - Wash hands thoroughly after handling dirt. - Prevent feces ingestion. - Deworm puppies every 2 weeks until old enough for monthly preventive. - Cover sandboxes when not in use. 	YES
Roundworm	<p><i>Young</i> = crossing the placenta, ingesting feces</p> <p><i>Adults</i> = ingesting eggs in soil or items contaminated with infected feces (like insects)</p>	YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promptly remove feces from yard. - Avoid areas with high animal traffic. - Deworm puppies every 2 weeks until old enough for monthly preventive. - Clean sandboxes/litter boxes with soap & water with aggressive scrubbing (eggs are sticky and long-lived). - Strict insect control 	YES
Tapeworm	Ingesting infected fleas or tissue of infected animals.	YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make sure all family pets receive strict monthly flea control. 	YES
Whipworm	Ingesting infected feces or matter (water, tissue, etc.)	NO*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promptly remove feces from yard. - Avoid areas with high animal traffic. 	YES

*Even though these are not directly zoonotic, humans have their own species of these parasites.

SPAY/NEUTER

These terms refer to the sterilization of female (removal of both ovaries and uterus) and male (removing both testes) animals, respectively. We **HIGHLY** recommend this be done at approximately *5-6 months of age*. By sterilizing your cat you decrease unwanted behaviors, improve his/her health, and prevent pet overpopulation. Should you elect to breed your cat, please consult our staff regarding the proper technique and what to expect. *** See our handouts “Why Spay” and “Why Neuter”.

EXAMINATIONS

Routine physical examinations are extremely important to ensure the continuing health of your cat and to prevent potential problems in the future. Some studies have shown that 10% of pets that appear to be healthy are found to have hidden diseases. It is an excellent idea to start these exams when you get the cat and then 1-2 times a year. Exams are also advised should you notice any changes in your cat's normal behavior, as these can be the first indicators of underlying problems. Your veterinarian will inform you of the best course of action should anything abnormal be found on your cat's physical exam. Wellness testing leads to the early detection of disease, which leads to early treatment and possibly a better prognosis.

**Remember, a yearly examination is comparable to you getting a physical exam every 4-7 years!*

VACCINATIONS

Vaccinations are given to your cat in an effort to prevent infections that could harm and potentially decrease your pet's lifespan. These are usually started at 6 weeks old and are given every 3-4 weeks until he/she reaches 4 months old. They can be started later depending on the age the kitten first presents. Vaccines given by a breeder/non-veterinarian are not recognized by the veterinary profession. We will start your vaccination series based on the age of your cat, and provide a schedule for you. Since we live in an endemic area (meaning there are proven cases of these diseases each year) our hospital suggests the following general schedule. Please be sure to follow the recommended schedule for your particular cat.

Date	Age		Vaccinations
	Option 1	Option 2	
	6 weeks	-----	Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia
	9 weeks	8 weeks	Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia Feline Leukemia Virus *
	12 weeks	12 weeks	Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia Feline Leukemia Virus *
	16 weeks	16 weeks	Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia Rabies
	1 year & 4 months (then annually)	1 year & 4 months (then annually)	Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia Feline Leukemia Virus * Rabies

* Feline Leukemia Virus can be considered an optional vaccine, which means it is one that can be given based on an individual cat's risk of exposure.

If you would like to know more about a specific disease, do not hesitate to ask your veterinarian. Keep in mind, on occasion, we may recommend the vaccines be given separately.

Mild/Acceptable side effects of vaccines are:

Mild fever

Decrease in activity

Decreased appetite

Discomfort/mild swelling at injection site

These generally last about 8-24 hours.

More severe side effects* are:

Swelling of face/legs

Vomiting/Diarrhea

Whole body itching

Difficulty breathing

Collapse

*Contact our office, or emergency clinic, immediately if any of these are seen.

NOTE:

Since vaccines are among the most common injections cats receive, they are often blamed for feline injection-site sarcomas (FISS), which are cancerous tumors that can arise following injections. Injection-site sarcomas are considered to be a rare development. Reports indicate that they occur at a rate of about 1 case per 5,000 to 10,000 cats. The time interval between injection and development of a sarcoma can vary tremendously; from anywhere between 2 months to 10 years after administration. Due to their aggressiveness, these tumors can invade local tissue and even metastasize to other areas of the body which can lead to a very poor prognosis.

While a specific cause has not been established, it is thought to be caused by an inflammatory process related to the administration of any injectable product. Studies are underway to determine if genetics play a role. Some think the adjuvant contributes to the local inflammation. An adjuvant is a substance added to the vaccine to increase the effectiveness of the component antigens in the induction of an immune response. Therefore, it is not the organisms that cause disease (or what we are vaccinating against). For the vast majority of patients, vaccination is a low risk; but, no vaccine is known to be completely risk free. Keep in mind that any injection, in the right cat, may lead to an injection-site sarcoma. The USDA and vaccine companies place great emphasis on vaccine safety and continually work to improve the safety profiles of vaccines. We now use non-adjuvanted vaccines with a smaller volume in an attempt to decrease local inflammation.

YOUR CAT AGES.....

Just as people are living longer, cats are living much longer, too. This is due to better nutrition and care.

The formula for calculating your cat's human age equivalent is simple:

1st 2 years of cat's life = 24 human years

Every year thereafter = 4 human years

Example --- 16 year old cat = 80 year old human

Cats are individuals and, like people, they experience advancing years in their own unique ways. Many cats begin to encounter age-related physical changes between seven and ten years of age and most do so by the time they are 12. Just like in people, your cat's health will change as it ages, no matter how many preventative measures you take during its life. Because animals age faster than people, major health changes can occur quickly. The annual examinations (usually required more often) may indicate a need for further testing over and above that done on previous visits. Depending on the symptoms, we will discuss the options and recommended course of diagnostics and/or treatment. Senior cats are at an increased risk for developing arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, hyperthyroidism, and cancer just to name a few. If you see any of the following, an exam is recommended.

Change in water/food consumption

Change in weight

Bad breath/Drooling

Change in litter box habits

Lumps/Bumps on or under the skin

Change in urination/bowel movements

Change in normal behavior/sleeping habits

Increased stiffness/trouble walking

Vomiting

Cats are experts at hiding illness, and elderly cats are no exception. It is common for a cat to have a serious medical problem, yet not show any sign of it until the condition is quite advanced. You should remember that, while young cats usually have only one disorder at a time, this is often not the case in older patients, where diagnosis and treatment may be complicated by several concurrent disease processes. Since most diseases can be managed more successfully when detected and treated early in their course, it is important for owners of senior cats to carefully monitor their behavior and health. The take-home message? Never assume that changes you see in your older cat are simply due to old age, and therefore untreatable. Any alteration in your cat's behavior or physical condition should alert you to contact your veterinarian.