

ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS (SA) INC

CARE OF CATS/COATS/HINTS

Owning a cat is a great experience. They are excellent companions - often highly independent and self sufficient, which sometimes leads their owners to be casual about the involvement in caring for a feline.

Cats need:

- Adequate shelter and protection
- Access to fresh water
- Daily exercise

FEEDING

Kittens should be gradually introduced to solid food from about five weeks of age, but should not be taken from their mother until eight weeks old. Kittens require three to four meals a day.

Adult cats need food twice daily. The quantity should be about 30 grams to every one kilogram of body weight. Use of a brand name cat or kitten food, dry or canned is recommended. Most commercial cat foods are adequate and are fortified with additional vitamins and minerals. For any additional vitamin and mineral supplement, consult your veterinarian. Fresh water should be available. Most cats like milk and cream, but some are unable to digest it properly and may suffer diarrhoea as a result.

BEDDING AND TRAINING

A cat likes a warm, clean, dry bed. A large, lidless wooden box or basket raised off the ground to avoid draughts is quite suitable. Bedding should be of a washable material and be laundered regularly. Cats are best kept at home after dark so they will not bother neighbours or become victim to prowling dogs or traffic.

HOUSE TRAINING

Cats can be trained by being provided with a box or tray filled with kitty litter, sand or dry earth. It should be cleaned daily or the cat may not use it.

GROOMING

A cat's coat benefits from a regular brushing as this prevents the formation of fur balls - a source of stomach illness. Regular medication with a commercial fur ball preparation can help if your cat suffers from fur balls.

Should fleas or other skin parasites be troublesome, cats are better treated using a dusting powder than bathing. Dust the cat lightly all over and repeat in a week's time. Also, sprinkle powder over bedding and surrounding area. Brush the powder from the cat's coat and bedding after about two to three hours. Be sure that the product you use is recommended for use on cats.

Remember kittens need flea protection, too. Be sure to use a powder or spray which specifies that it can be used on kittens. Use it sparingly and wipe off any excess with a damp cloth.

HEALTH

If your cat loses its appetite, sneezes or coughs, has watery eyes, vomits, has diarrhoea, or any other sign or symptoms of illness or inappropriate behaviour for your cat such as listlessness or going frequently to the litter tray and crying out in pain - SEE YOUR VETERINARIAN IMMEDIATELY.

Get your cat vaccinated against feline enteritis and cat flu. The mortality rate is high for these diseases. Cats of all ages should be vaccinated yearly and kittens vaccinated at six to nine weeks of age, followed by a booster for both cat flu and feline enteritis at 12 weeks. a booster for cat flu may be necessary at 16 weeks. Consult your veterinarian about an appropriate schedule for your pet.

Cats need protection from hookworm, roundworm and tapeworm. If using a commercial wormer, be sure it will give the cat adequate protection from all worms and that you give the correct dosage.

Always keep a close check on the condition of your cat's teeth. Gingivitis and tartar can build up easily and cause bad breath and gum problems and affect your cat's appetite and health. Get your veterinarian to check your cat regularly. If your cat is scratching and rubbing its ears and shaking its head this could indicate an infestation of ear mites. If neglected, ear mites can cause deafness and pain.

Never put a leather collar or tie a ribbon around the cat's neck as the cat may get caught by the collar and be strangled. Cats should wear a collar with an identification tag so it's owners can be easily traced if it becomes lost. Elasticised collars are best. Check the collar regularly to make sure it is not too tight (especially on a growing kitten) - you should be able to slip two fingers through the collar.

Desexing of cats is vital in controlling the huge unwanted population of cats. All cats should be desexed at five to six months of age. It is a myth that cats should have a litter before they are spayed. Consult your veterinarian about the most appropriate age for your male or female cat to be desexed.

Caring for Your Cat's Coat

Keeping a cat as a pet is not very time consuming, but owners should be aware of the particular grooming needs of their cats, especially if they are amongst the long haired varieties. A beautiful, sleek, glossy coat that is well cared for makes all the difference to the appearance of a cat.

Some people tend to think that because a cat spends so much of its time grooming (sometimes up to a third of its waking hours) the owner need not do anything more. Certainly cats are very good at keeping their coats in shape, their tongues are excellent as grooming devices, but additional grooming by the owner can be very beneficial. The gentle massage which brushing helps to promote blood circulation in the skin. Hand grooming also assists in the removal of any scales and debris which have sloughed from the skin and may be trapped at the base of the hairs. Grooming also helps to relieve the cat of any burrs, twigs or pieces of dead leaf and so on which may have caused tangles in the hair. It is quite impossible for a long haired cat to do this itself.

A wide range of equipment is available for grooming, but essentially you should have you should have both a wide and a narrow tooth comb, a baby brush and another, firmer brush (preferably of natural bristle, to avoid producing static electricity) and a chamois leather.

First, go through the coat with the wide toothed comb, removing any tangles or trapped debris. Pay particular attention to the tummy area and behind the back legs and beneath the tail. then go through the coat again, this time with the firm brush. This will remove dead skin scales and loose hairs. the softer bristled brush may be used for the more sensitive regions around the head or overall for very short haired cats such as the Rex varieties.

Grooming gives you an ideal opportunity to examine you cat's skin closely; by parting the hair at intervals you can learn the normal skin colour and texture. Check for any abnormalities such as unusual reddening of the skin, especially around the abdomen and rump regions, discoloured patches, spots, scabs or severe flaking. It is also important to make the cat lie on its back so that you can check properly for any flea infestation, such as fleas themselves or their small brown or black

droppings. Here the fine toothed comb is very useful; it will allow you to remove all the small particles, and fleas themselves from the skin. If evidence of fleas is found, you should treat your cat with an insecticidal spray or powder. You will also need to treat the cat's bedding and immediate surroundings and the cat's companions. Your vet will advise you on the preparations to use.

When grooming, look out also for any bare patches where the hair may have been pulled out, or areas where the hairs are broken. This could indicate skin irritation, calling for veterinary attention. After brushing, rub the cat down with the chamois leather. This is soothing and will also really bring out the shine. When grooming for shows, some owners use bran or talcum powder to absorb any excess grease and leave the coat feeling very smooth.

In spring and autumn, when most cats moult, it is beneficial to groom your cat a few times every day, to remove as many loose hairs as possible. Special attention is vital with short haired cats when they are moulting for otherwise they may swallow large quantities of loose hair, which can become lodged in the throat and digestive tract as matted fur balls. Hair balls in the intestines can cause serious blockages which may need removing by surgery. If cats do swallow hair, they often eat grass to make themselves vomit and so get rid of it. For this reason, there should be grass available at all times. If necessary in cities it can always be grown in a flower pot.

While grooming the head, always have a piece of damp cotton wool handy to clean the delicate tissues around the cat's eyes, ears, nose and mouth. It is a good idea to check the ears for any discharge or offensive smell, which could indicate an ear infection, again calling for veterinary attention.

If the cat is light coloured and tends to become dirty, you may need to bathe it. This is generally only recommended if the cat has come into contact with substances that could cause harm if ingested during grooming (motor oil, grease etc). Use only a pet shampoo from your vet or pet shop. It is essential to remain calm and unhurried when bathing a cat, which may otherwise become nervous and dislike the process. Ideally, if you are going to bathe your cat, it should have been trained to accept it from an early age. If you follow a simple, straightforward grooming routine such as this, you should soon see marked improvement in your cat's coat.

Always remember that general grooming should start at the kitten stage so that the animal becomes accustomed to being handled in the sensitive areas. Once adulthood is reached your cat may not appreciate being touched or brushed in the sensitive areas on the tummy etc. and a battle will ensue from which the cat will almost certainly come out the victor, leaving you with the scars.

It is also to be remembered that elderly cats in particular need special care as often they will have lost some teeth and find it difficult to groom themselves thoroughly, resulting in matting which is difficult to comb out.

A regular grooming routine through out life will ensure your cat will have a healthy coat and perhaps most importantly, both you and your cat will benefit from the closer relationship you will no doubt build up.

HINTS FOR CAT OWNERS

HOW DO I LOOK AFTER MY NEW KITTEN?

Kittens require a series of vaccinations for protection against cat diseases. The first vaccinations are usually given at about 7 weeks old. If your kitten has not been vaccinated prior to purchase you should arrange with your local veterinarian to start the vaccination series as soon as possible. The kitten should be kept inside until the vaccinations are complete.

A young kitten is better confined to one room of the house until it has settled in. Most kittens will know how to use a litter tray, but if it is a little reluctant place it in the tray after each meal or after it wakes up.

Kittens need a different diet than adult cats and, having small stomachs and big appetites, need up to four or five meals per day. They should be fed nutritionally complete commercial kitten food which is available in both canned and dry forms. They should have access to fresh, clean water at all times. Food and water bowls should be shallow and clean. Cow's milk causes diarrhea in many kittens. Low lactose pets' milk is available but should only be fed as a treat.

Kittens should be wormed with a kitten worming product, available from your veterinarian, pharmacy or pet shop, every two weeks from the age of three weeks. The mother cat should be wormed with an adult cat preparation at the same time.

HOW DO I MAKE SURE MY CAT IS FRIENDLY?

Try not to get a kitten from a wild or scared mother. Kittens which are born to friendly mothers will generally grow up to be friendly cats themselves. Kittens are naturally curious, playful and trusting and, unless frightened or tormented, will grow up to be loving companions. Children should be taught to handle the kitten gently and allow it to rest when tired.

HOW DO I STOP MY CAT SPRAYING?

Male cats that are not desexed will spray to mark territory. If a desexed cat starts spraying or urinating other than in the litter box, it should be taken to a veterinarian to determine if there are any medical problems. If there are no underlying medical problems some solutions are:

- Prevent other cats from coming around the house.
- Make sure the litter box is immaculate but do not clean it with disinfectants.
- Prevent overcrowding in multi cat households and provide more than one litter box
- Catch the cat 'in the act' and squirt it with a water pistol.

Cats will be likely to return to previously soiled areas so you will need to remove the odour. Never use cleansers containing ammonia as this will attract the cat to the spot. Carpets should be cleaned with carpet shampoo, then soaked with club soda for ten minutes and blotted dry. Enzyme products are available which will help remove the odour. Concrete and timber floors will be more difficult to clean and you should seek advice from cleaning services.

HOW DO I STOP MY CAT FROM FIGHTING?

Undesexed males are very territorial and will fight other cats. Desexing any cats not required for breeding will reduce the incidence of fights.

HOW DO I STOP MY CAT FROM SCRATCHING THE FURNITURE?

Catch the cat in the act and squirt with a water pistol. Double sided sticky tape applied to the furniture will deter the cat. Scratching is a natural behaviour for cats so a scratching post should be provided. A sisal covered post or one covered with carpet underside turned out, is preferable to a carpet covered post which may encourage the cat to scratch your carpet. Praise and reward the cat when it uses the scratching post.

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