

Towne Square Animal Clinic

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“We treat your pet like our own!”

RAISING THAT FURRY KITTY

Welcome to the world of cats. You will soon find out that you are not a cat owner, but rather the servant to your new little charge. There is a saying that when you call a dog, it comes and ‘Asks you what you want and how it can serve you’. When you call a cat, it basically says, ‘I’ll take a message and possibly call you back later’. Translated, you have just gotten a pet with attitude. It’s that attitude that will make raising your kitten a challenge and pleasure at the same time.

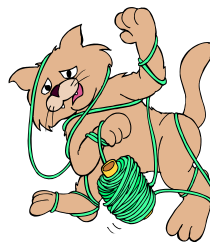
LITTER BOX ISSUES

One of the first things that we want to talk to you about in bringing in a new cat to the family is how to handle the litter box issue. In raising puppies, you have to go through several weeks of challenging potty training to achieve success. With kittens, they literally come to you litter box trained. This is one of the biggest reasons that cats have grown in popularity as pets to keep in the household. When cats misuse the litter box, it is also the biggest reason why cats are put away or given away. For that reason, we need to go over some points that you need to know about cats and litter boxes.

- Always position the litter box where your cat(s) can easily get to it. Many people keep the litter box(es) in the basement for convenience and to avoid the potential mess associated with it. If you do, make sure that the door to basement is always open, or that there is a cat door used. We have seen instances where a cat was spooked because the litter box was placed near the furnace and every time it came on, it scared this cat from using the litter box. Think of all potential future issues when placing your litter box.
- Do not place the food and water bowl near your cat’s litter box. No one likes to eat in the bathroom, and cats are no different.
- KEEP YOUR CAT’S LITTER BOX CLEAN AND ODOR FREE!** This is probably the biggest concern about what can cause an **Elimination Behavior Problem (EBP)** in your cat. What person driving down the interstate on a trip has not had to make a restroom break and found themselves at the service station with a very dirty and odiferous bathroom? We usually strengthen our resolve, get back in the car and hope to reach the next rest area. Cats don’t drive to the next rest area, but rather they will find another area in your house to their liking: the carpet, a laundry basket, your bed.

- ❑ Make sure that your cat likes the litter you have chosen. There are many types of litter out there, but if you just put sand in a box, they would be happy. Litter can range from basic dusty ‘gravel’ litter to the more refined clumping litter. You want to see how your kitten reacts when it is in the litter box. If it gets in the box and starts digging in the box and doesn’t mind being in it, than it will probably be happy with that litter. If that kitten goes in the box, keeps itself to the edge of the box, doesn’t want to cover it’s scat (BM), and quickly gets out, you may want to look for another type of litter. A word of caution on using the fashionable ‘clumping litter’. This is a litter that was created by ultra-finely grounding gravel litter to create a litter that will clump when the cat urinates in it. This allows you to scoop both the scat and the urine out. Great idea! But, some people use that theory to believe that they never have to change the litter. This is a mistake as there is always some small residue of urine left and the odor will build up. As time goes on, you are asking for a cat that will seek another less odiferous place to use the bathroom. Recommendation: if you use this type of litter, change the whole box every 2 weeks at the very least. Other things to know about this type of litter: 1) Increased \$\$, 2) Being that it is so finely ground, a kitten/cat may track this litter outside the box, 3) If your kitten or cat has an upper respiratory condition, this finely ground litter is dusty enough to aggravate the condition.
- ❑ Standard ‘gravel litter’ can be used and modified to make it last longer before changing. In setting up this type of litter box, you first start off with an empty litter box. You may or may not use a litter box liner. At the bottom of the box put several layers of newspaper. On top of this layer of newspaper, sprinkle baking soda in a thin layer. The final topping is the litter itself. When the cat defecates, the scat will always remain on top. The urine goes through the litter, hits the baking soda to deodorize it, and then it hits the newspaper finally. The newspaper allows the urine to disseminate and spread, which allows for faster evaporation. This litter box can possibly last 1 – 2 weeks before having to change it if you scoop out the poop daily.
- ❑ General rule for number of litter boxes in the house: ***1 litter box per cat PLUS one***. Most people use the 1 litter box per cat, but usually you don’t see that extra one being used.
- ❑ If you use a cover on your litter box, be sure that the odor problem doesn’t become a problem, as the tendency will be for the odor to build up in confined spaces. If there is a ‘charcoal air filter’ on the cover, be sure to change it regularly.
- ❑ Other reasons why cats may not use the litter box:
 1. Not given privacy by other cats or a dog(s) in the household
 2. Irritation at seeing a cat outside the window that is invading ‘its territory’. This cat may urinate in the area to ‘mark’ its territory.
 3. Cats do not like change. An example is if you leave for the weekend and your cat is left with all the food and clean litter box it needs. But the fact that you left it alone may cause a temporary EBP from an irritated cat that was ‘left alone’.

Lot of space to talk about what may appear to be a non-issue, but if you have ever had a cat that decided not to use the litter box, you know you have a problem. If you are aware ahead of time how to avoid problem areas, the battle is more than half won. If this ever becomes a problem, don’t wait for several weeks to call us for help on how to solve the problem. It will take time and patience, but it can be a battle that can be won.



KITTEN PROOFING THE HOME

One of the more important items that we need to do when we take a new kitten into the home is to KITTEN PROOF the home. What do we mean by ‘kitten proofing’? The old adage is that curiosity killed the cat, and we all know that cats have 9 lives, but how does that relate? Cats are naturally curious creatures, and because of this they will find ways to get in trouble. We need to carefully scan the household for potential things that your kitten/cat can get into. Among things we need to look for and remove access to are: ribbon, lace, needle and thread, small plastic items like the ring off the milk bottle, small plastic items like doll shoes, etc. During the Holidays, using tinsel on the tree can lead to problems. You also need to check out the houseplants to make sure they are ‘pet safe’. Our web site at www.townesquareanimalclinic.com has some postings that help you to research which plants might be a problem for your cat. One other item as far as getting your home ready is to move breakable items from the edge of shelves. Cats like to climb and not all cats are as graceful as they appear to be.

NUTRITION & FEEDING

Nutritionally your new kitten can be a hard customer to serve. Most of us remember the old T.V. ads about Morris the Cat and how finicky he was. Well, its true! **Cats are very finicky** and can be hard to please when it comes to serving them food. Cats are species of animals that are carnivores. What it means is that they **MUST have meat to survive**. Their unique physiology demands that they have vitamins and amino acids that are available in meat to be able to survive. You would think that any meat would do and all cats would have a voracious appetite for meat. Not true! They truly earn their finicky nature. Their style of eating also makes them a challenge in feeding. Most cats are grazers when they eat. This means that they make multiple trips back to the food bowl during the day to eat small snacks each time. If you have multiple cats and one (or more) of them is overweight, this way of eating will make it difficult for them to diet. The other things you must know about cats are that they do not generally drink much water. The cat as a species originated from the Middle East, and they learned early on how to conserve water. If you fed just dry food, you will probably find your cat drinking more water than if you fed some canned food. Those fed canned food may make very infrequent visits to the water bowl. When you cat does drink water, it likes fresh water. This is why you may find your cat on the kitchen counter trying to catch dripping water from the faucet, or in the shower after you have been in it.

As a general rule, stay with a **better quality food** when you feed your cat. For male cats, the general rule is that the better quality and premiums foods such as Iams, Hill’s Science Diet, and Purina Pro Plan are put together to help avoid urinary tract problems that indoor, obese male cats are prone to. In the past, Purina Cat Chow and Meow Mix were closely related to multiple problems with male cats and their urinary tracts.

The amount of food to feed your cat is always a big problem area. Because cats are grazers, most people find it easier to fill the food bowl and just keep refilling it when it is empty. This method of feeding will quickly lead to obesity in cats, as most indoor cats do not exercise enough to burn the calories off. We recommend that the typical adult cat only needs to get ½ to ¾ cup of dry food per day. If you feed some canned food as a treat, then you must proportionately

decrease the amount of dry food you feed. The biggest problem in controlling the amount of food your kitten/cat eats is that most of them will demand more food and bug you until you give in. You don't have the option of adding 'fillers' to their diet to help them overcome the cravings they have. But in the end, remember to start your kitten off on the right track by limiting the amount of food it gets. Once your kitten gets neutered or spayed, within 2 –3 months switch it from a kitten diet to a less-active or weight control diet. Avoid the 'maintenance diets' as they have too many calories for the typical indoor cat. Even for those cats that are allowed out at times, the less active or weight control diets are the better ones.

HEALTH CONCERNS: VIRUSES, VACCINES, ETC.

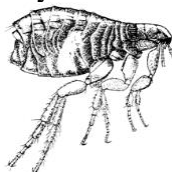
Health needs are a concern for your new feline friend. Most indoor cats are less likely to have as many health problems as those cats that are allowed to have outdoor activity. We have many preventative vaccines to prevent a number of viral diseases that cats are exposed to, but none against other cats, dogs, cars, or other trauma/poison potentials. Think carefully before you allow your new kitten to become an outside cat. Short, supervised visits to the outside while you are there are definitely permissible. Unsupervised visits to the great outdoors will increase the health risks that your cat is exposed to.

One of the first things we will ask you about your new kitten is if it has been tested for **Feline Leukemia/Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)**. Cats are unique in that they have 2 viruses that in many ways imitate the AIDS virus. No, you cannot catch them from your cats, but they can catch them from other cats and can be born with them through their mother's blood supply. These viruses are usually fatal and have no cures. They can lead to long-term illnesses, cancer, weight loss and death eventually. We feel it is better to know right off the bat if your kittens have been exposed to the viruses or not. If they test negative and will be indoors the rest of their lives, the risk of them catching either one of these two viruses will miniscule.

For most cats, we generally recommend two vaccines for the indoor cat: **Feline Distemper/Upper Respiratory Vaccine (FDRC) and the Rabies vaccine**. Kittens are generally given 2 boosters at approximately 9 and 13 weeks of age on the FDRC. We wait till your kitten comes in at 6 months of age for its neuter or ovariohysterectomy (spay) to administer the Rabies vaccine. For those cats that will be getting some outside exposure unsupervised, we recommend an additional vaccine: **Feline Leukemia vaccine**. Those kittens that need this vaccine will generally get that vaccine in a series of 2 boosters: 9 and 13 weeks of age. Annually we booster the FDRC and the Leukemia (if needed). The first Rabies vaccine is good for one year, and thereafter they will be good for 3 years. There are a number of other vaccines that are available for cats, but the safety factor and protection they offer have not been proven to the point that they should be included in your kitten's/cat's annual schedule. We will treat each kitten/cat individually as to their preventive vaccine care package and let you know what we feel is in their best interest.

INTERNAL PARASITES

Most (if not all) kittens are born with **Roundworms** in their system. For that reason, we will deworm them automatically when they come in, and have you give a second dose 3 weeks later. Some other intestinal parasites that they can catch include: hookworms, coccidia, and tapeworms. We recommend testing for intestinal parasites on a yearly physical checkup. The one intestinal parasite that cats can get that we usually are not able to identify with our lab check is the **Tapeworm**. We need your help to watch for this parasite. It can be seen on fresh bowel movement as a small (1/4 inch or less in size), flat, white or beige worm with sometimes 'bookworm' movement. A dried-up tapeworm can sometimes be seen around your kitten/cat's rectum as a piece of 'rice krispie' stuck to the hair, or around the area where they may be lying. If your cat is a hunter for mice, rabbits or rodents, or else has fleas, we suggest checking their stools frequently for signs of tapeworms. All these things are involved in the life cycle of the tapeworm. Once you see these worms or the presence of them, let us know and we have tablets or an injection that will rid your cat of these parasites. If your cat continues to hunt or have fleas, tapeworms may be a constant problem with them.



FLEA CONTROL

Fleas are a nemesis for cats as well as dogs. Many kitten or cats may carry fleas and not show any signs of scratching or chewing. Sometimes the only way you will know will be that you see signs of tapeworms, or small black specks in the area where they have been laying. Fleas carry disease and can cause dermatitis on your cat, other pets in the household, as well as yourself. The best place to look for fleas or flea dirt (flea poop that is black because it is your cat's blood digested) is over the area of the tail. If you see flea dirt, but not fleas, be assured that your kitten/cat has fleas. Cats as a species are much more sensitive to the products we use to control fleas. You have to be very careful with the products you would like to use on them to control the fleas. Many cats are sensitive to flea collars, and we do not recommend you use them on your cats and especially your kitten. The best place for a flea collar is to be cut up in little bits and put in your vacuum cleaner bag. As you vacuum the house, any dust mite or flea that might be in the carpet or rugs will be sent to a little 'gas chamber'. The three safest products we recommend for flea control in your cat are:

- 1) **Frontline Topspot Plus**. This product is a topical liquid that is applied right down to the skin in the area over your cat's shoulder. It spreads by itself and will control adult and preadult fleas for 1 month.
- 2) **Program Liquid, tablet or injection**. This product is what we describe as a flea-birth control product. It works by disturbing chitin synthesis in the flea. The end result is that the female fleas that ingest the product in your cat's blood will lay eggs that do not hatch. If you decide to use this product, all the dogs and cats in your household have to also be on this form of flea prevention.
- 3) **Capstar**. This unique tablet works well with the Program flea preventative. It is a tablet that is not long lasting, but once given orally to your cat, it will kill all the adult fleas within 3 – 4 hours, and will start working within 30 minutes.

Other products are available to control fleas and external parasites on your cat, but be sure that they are labeled for use in cats. As a general rule, most cats do not like baths, dips or flea sprays. Be careful in using any of these products, and if in doubt, call the clinic first and ask the doctors.

THE CLAWS: WHAT DO YOU DO?

Because most cats will by nature try to sharpen their claws, many people wonder what to do to prevent this natural, but annoying problem. Cats will usually stretch and reach upwards to sharpen their claws on items such as tree bark when outside. When inside, this unfortunately usually ends up being your furniture. You can avoid this problem by providing a scratching post and teaching them to use it. Putting a scratch piece of carpet on a vertical surface can suffice. If that doesn't work, you will need to trim your cat's claws every 2 weeks. There are some products that can be ordered that will help this situation. One of those are plastic tips that you glue on to your cat's claws. They can be expensive and troublesome because they need to frequently be replaced. If everything you have tried doesn't seem to work, there is a surgical procedure called declawing that can be performed. Among cat people, this one subject can raise many arguments as to whether it is needed or not, or whether it is cruel or not. We do offer this surgical procedure, and recommend that if you want it done, have it done at 6 months of age when they are neutered or spayed. There is pain control for the procedure, and we find that if the procedure is performed at a young age, they recover quickly and are none the worse for the wear. This decision is left to each individual client. If you do decide to have this procedure performed, we strongly recommend that you only have it done for indoor cats.

A number of things to think about for your new feline friend. Do remember that each cat is an individual and they are not 'small dogs'. For the most part they are independent creatures, and they determine when they will give you affection. They do expect you to worship and serve them, and it is only through their good graces that they allow you to share the same space with them. Although some of the previous statements are overboard, there is a lot truth in them. Enjoy and realize that we are here to be your partners in serving this unique creature. If you have any questions, feel free to call us at the clinic at **(513) 793-1875**.

