

Veterinary healthcare guide for your family kitten



NORTH CROYDON

VETERINARY CLINIC

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW FAMILY MEMBER!

We have developed this booklet to give you an overview of things you may find helpful when caring for your new kitten. The fact that you are reading this booklet means you are well on your way to responsible cat ownership. Understanding your cat's needs and ensuring they are met is the main aim and includes things such as:

- Regular vet health checks including vaccinations, desexing, and microchipping
- Providing correct and high quality nutrition
- Providing daily dental care
- Providing regular parasite prevention/treatment
- Regular grooming
- Physical exercise and ongoing mental stimulation
- Pet insurance
- Emergencies

VACCINATIONS

A full health check of your cat is performed at every vaccination to ensure your cat is healthy enough to vaccinate. We check their general body condition, eyes and ears, listen to their heart and chest and discuss any concerns you may have at the time. It is our recommendation that all cats are routinely vaccinated against potentially harmful diseases. There is much debate these days on whether to vaccinate or not, and some people have concerns around "over-vaccinating". It is our belief that the risk of vaccination is minimal compared to the risk of disease. As veterinarians, we have seen first-hand the devastating effects of diseases such as cat flu and feline enteritis. Our recommendation is a series of F3 vaccines initially followed by an annual booster.

A feline AIDS or FIV vaccination is also a consideration if your cat will be outdoors, as feline AIDS is a virus that is spread through bite wounds during fights.

1st vaccine at 6-8 weeks - F3 +/- FIV
2nd vaccine at 12-14 weeks - F3 +/- FIV
3rd vaccine at 16-18 weeks - F3 +/- FIV
Booster at 12-15 months - F3 +/- FIV
Every year after - F3 +/- FIV

PARASITE PREVENTION

In Australia, there are 3 main groups of parasites that we recommend regular prevention for, these include: Fleas and Ticks, Heartworm, and Intestinal Worms. Each group and appropriate preventatives are discussed below.

FLEAS

Fleas are very small parasitic insects that can infest the skin and coat of our cats. They live in environments such as dirt, sandpits and carpets and are capable of jumping up to 150 times their own length. This easily allows them to jump from the environment to our cats, who then act as a host off which the fleas feed. Fleas are a common cause of skin disease in our cats and cause itching, scaly skin, sores, and even a condition known as flea allergy dermatitis where saliva from a flea bite sets off an allergic reaction in the skin. Fleas are prolific breeders with one female able to lay up to 50 eggs per day. For this reason, we recommend year-round flea prevention on all pets in your household to effectively break the life cycle. There are a range of products available to prevent against and kill fleas. Preventatives come in the form of topical spot-on liquids and are given monthly or 3 monthly depending on the product used.

TICKS

Ticks are small parasites that live in bushy areas mainly in the warmer, more humid months of the year. There are different types of ticks, some more dangerous to our pets than others. All ticks will attach to any warm-blooded creature and detach once they have fed. In our area, we do occasionally see bush ticks on pets, which can be relatively easily removed and shouldn't cause too much harm. The more dangerous variety is the paralysis ticks who inject a toxin as they feed. This toxin is absorbed into the bloodstream and gradually affects the nervous system, leading to paralysis of all muscles, including eventually, the respiratory muscles and ultimately the heart. Signs of paralysis tick include loss of co-ordination, changes in vocal sounds, vomiting, panting and progressive paralysis. Immediate veterinary attention is required if you suspect your cat may be affected. Paralysis ticks are not common in our area, however they are found in the Gippsland area of Victoria and extend north all the way up the east coast of Australia. Travellers have been known to inadvertently bring them home from holidays or camping trips so your cat should always be checked regularly. Preventatives come in the form of topical spot-on liquids and are given monthly or 2 monthly depending on the product used.

INTESTINAL WORMS

Intestinal worms that we prevent against in our cats include: Roundworm, Whipworm, Hookworm, Lungworm and Tapeworm. Cats become infected by ingesting these parasite eggs or larvae. It is important to note that some of these parasites are able to infect humans also, and are especially dangerous to children. Regular preventatives are easy to give and come in forms such as tablets and topical spot-on liquid treatments that often include heartworm and flea preventatives. Take care if using these combined preventatives as most will not include prevention of Tapeworm (a separate tablet can be administered for tapeworm prevention). Intestinal worming schedule: treatment should be given fortnightly until 12 weeks of age, then monthly until 6 months of age, then 3 monthly for life, unless giving an all in one product that is done monthly.

DESEXING

Female cats should ideally be desexed by 5-6 months of age, as there is no benefit in allowing your cat to have a litter of kittens. Desexing your female cat reduces the risk of mammary cancer, prevents unwanted kittens and helps stop cat fights. The procedure involves a general anaesthetic and removal of the ovaries and uterus. Male cats should also be desexed by 5-6 months of age. This will stop their urine smelling and helps stop urine spraying. It also reduces the need to wander and fight and also helps prevent prostate/testicular cancer. The surgery for both sexes is a day procedure. We use the safest anaesthetics and all our surgeries are performed by a qualified veterinary surgeon and monitored closely during and after by trained and qualified veterinary nurses. Your cat will be given pain relief at the time of surgery and are kept warm and comfortable until discharge that afternoon.

MICROCHIP

All kittens are legally required to be microchipped by the breeder/shelter prior to sending them to their new home. It is important to ensure that your new cat's microchip has been registered into your name, not the breeders/shelters. It is equally important to update the microchip company should any of your personal details change. A microchip is about the size of a grain of rice and is implanted under the skin between the shoulder blades. A special scanner is required to read the chip. Should your cat go missing, they will be electronically linked back to you. Your cat is also required to be registered with the local council from 3 months of age (if you are local to the North Croydon area, this is Maroondah council). Registration forms can be collected from service centres and the council website, pets can also be registered online.

NUTRITION

If you are the proud new owner of a kitten, their nutritional requirements will differ from that of an adult or senior pet. It is recommended to feed your kitten 2-3 times per day as this can be helpful in making sure they are getting adequate nutrition. Our recommendation is to feed a premium, commercially produced dry food, such as "Hill's Science Diet". Other premium brands include "Royal Canin" and "Advance". Follow the

manufacturers feeding guide on the packaging . If you want to change your kitten's food, wait until it has settled in and then introduce the new food gradually over a week. Cool, fresh water should always be available. You will need to feed a specific kitten food until 12 months of age, then you can change your kitten over to adult food.

The benefit of a premium food is that they are a complete and balanced diet, much more highly concentrated than a supermarket food and contain all the nutrients your pet require. When feeding these foods your cat will absorb more nutrients, therefore less poop to pick up! Home-made or raw food diets are not recommended. There are no known veterinary approved home-made diets recorded for kittens as they are constantly growing and obtaining the correct amount of nutrients for optimal growth, is a challenge. Pet milk is not recommended once weaned onto solid food and specific pet milk should only ever be fed as a treat occasionally.

DENTAL CARE (start from 6 months of age)

Cats are like humans in that they have two sets of teeth. Deciduous (baby) teeth that will erupt around 3-4 weeks of age, when they can start weaning onto solid food. Their permanent adult teeth will start erupting around 4-5 months of age. During this "teething" stage you may find they have bad breath, see blood in their mouth or on chewed objects and see teeth sticking out at odd angles. You may or may not see dropped baby teeth as many will get swallowed and pass through the body. Be sure to have some good teething toys for your kitten and put any accessible objects you don't want chewed out of reach such as shoes, cords etc. Kittens will generally have all of their adult teeth by 6 months. At this age you can start adding dental care into your daily routine.

- **Bones** - Bones are a controversial topic in the pet industry. Raw bones can be good for helping to keep your cat's teeth clean, however they can also cause problems. Bones can cause tooth breakage, choking, intestinal and oesophageal obstructions, constipation, vomiting and diarrhoea. If you decide to feed bones, you can help minimise the risks by never feeding cooked, smoked, cured or frozen bones, always choose raw. Give a bone that is an appropriate size. Chicken necks are a suitable size for cats provided they are not swallowed whole.
- **Dental chews** - There are many dental chews and treats available on the market today. We recommend giving premium dental chews daily that have the seal of acceptance from VOHC - Veterinary Oral Health Council. VOHC exists to recognise products that meet pre-set standards of plaque and calculus (tartar) reduction and prevention in dogs and cats. Dental chews with this acceptance include "Greenies". These can be purchased through vet clinics and pet retailers.
- **Dental diets** - A popular dental food for cats is Hill's T/D dry food. This food is a larger kibble with a fibrous inside that scrubs the tooth's surface when crunched, preventing the build-up of plaque, tartar and gingivitis. This diet is complete and balanced and can be fed to adult cats from 1 year of age. To receive the best benefit, this food should be fed as a sole diet. All Hill's dental diets have been awarded the VOHC seal of acceptance. Another good choice is Royal Canin Dental food. The unique shape of this cat kibble helps to physically remove plaque from the surface of the teeth through a gentle scraping action. An active ingredient also helps to reduce plaque deposits.
- **Brushing teeth** - This is considered the gold standard of dental care. Cat tooth brushes or finger brushes should be used along with a pet safe tooth paste that is gently abrasive to prevent build-up of plaque and tartar. These tooth pastes come in flavours such as chicken or beef that your cat will love.

Bones, chews and specific dental foods are a good way to keep your cat's teeth clean and healthy. However, if your pet is reluctant to chew you may find your pet suffering from dental disease and decay as they get older. This condition can cause a multitude of problems to your pet's health, as not only will their teeth and gums suffer, but periodontal disease can cause systemic problems affecting the kidneys, heart, lungs and liver. Once the disease progresses to the point where diet alone cannot fix the problem, your pet may require a dental scale. This is a procedure performed under general anaesthesia by a qualified veterinarian and may involve the removal of any rotten or broken teeth, the cleaning and scaling of remaining teeth and a polish to finish. Once your pet has had this procedure we recommend an ongoing dental health program (such as Hill's Prescription T/D) to keep the remaining teeth as healthy as possible.

BATHING & GROOMING

Whether your kitten has a long or short coat, start grooming it at an early age so your kitten gets used to being handled. Gentle brushing will help your kitten's coat clean and free of loose hair and provides an opportunity to spot any skin or health problems. Sharp nails can be trimmed with cat nail clippers. We are happy to show you how to do this, just ask us!

TOILETING

Cats are naturally very clean animals and will use a litter tray where provided. Change the litter regularly or when soiled, using gloves and dispose of the litter according to council regulations. Cats faeces may transmit roundworms and Toxoplasmosis to humans. Toxoplasmosis can cause miscarriage in pregnant women. It is abnormal for cats to urinate or defaecate inside the house other than in the litter tray once it has learned to use it. It may mean that there is a health issue or problem if they are inappropriately toileting in other areas.

EXERCISE

Playing indoor games is a great way to exercise your kitten and also keeps them mentally stimulated. Providing some kitten toys and hiding treats will provide some environmental enrichment. This will also help with the bonding process with your kitten. Scratching posts and towers provide somewhere for cats to sharpen their claws and they also like being in high places.

PET INSURANCE

There are a multitude of companies offering pet insurance these days. While we don't specifically recommend one company over another, like any insurance be sure to read the fine print and be well aware of what your cover includes, excludes and waiting periods. Pet insurance differs from health insurance in terms of pre-existing conditions. Be advised that anything deemed pre-existing is unlikely to be covered under the policy. For this reason, we advise if you are going to take out a policy on a new pet, be sure to do it as soon as possible. When making a claim with your insurance company, you will be required to fill out a claim form which then needs to be signed by the vet and posted with all relevant history and a finalised invoice. We ask that you have your part of the form completed before you hand it to your vet. We're more than happy to post your claim on your behalf if you provide us with a stamped, addressed envelope. Some companies also offer an online submission service, reducing the amount of paperwork involved in making a claim. If you are interested in pet insurance and wish to find the right policy for you and your pet, please visit: <https://petsure.com.au/findapolicy/>

POISONS & EMERGENCIES

There are many things around our homes that are toxic or dangerous to our pets. We have compiled a list of the ones we see most commonly.

FOODS

- Chocolate
- Onions and garlic
- Nuts
- Grapes/sultanas/raisins
- Fruit stones/pits
- Caffeine
- Alcohol
- Fatty foods
- Cooked bones
- Xylitol (artificial sweetener)

GARDEN/HOUSEHOLD

- Lilies (toxic to cats)
- Fertiliser
- Baits - snail/rat (even "pet friendly" is toxic)
- Toadstools/mushrooms
- Compost/garbage
- Batteries
- Cigarettes
- Medications/drugs

If you suspect your cat has had access to any of these items, or has consumed something you are unsure of, please seek veterinary treatment immediately. For any after-hours emergencies, we refer to:

AEC (Animal Emergency Centre) - Mt Waverley Open 24 hours, 7 days a week 37 Blackburn Rd Mount Waverley 3149 Ph. 9803 8122

CONTACT US

North Croydon Veterinary Clinic 84-86 Exeter Rd Croydon North 3136 **Ph.** 9726 9616

Email: admin@northcroydonvetclinic.com.au **Website:** www.northcroydonvetclinic.com.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/northcroydonvetclinic

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 8am – 6pm Saturday: 8:30am – 1pm

Public holidays: CLOSED

Consultation by appointment only - emergencies seen as priority.