

## **Healthcare and Neutering for Your New Cat or Kitten**

Our second page on Cat Care, gives advice and information about Healthcare, including Neutering, for your new cat or kitten. Our first leaflet deals with settling in your cat or kitten. Please read both leaflets carefully.

When you take on a cat or kitten, you must be absolutely sure that you can provide him with all the healthcare that he will need throughout his life. Apart from routine healthcare, such as regular treatment for fleas and worms, annual vaccinations and neutering, you must be prepared for the unexpected health problems.

Whether your cat or kitten develops an illness or is involved in an accident, he will need professional veterinary care, which is expensive. There are organisations such as C.P.L., R.S.P.C.A and Blue Cross who offer low cost veterinary care to owners on low income or benefit. You could consider taking out Pet Insurance or setting up a 'cat fund', putting money aside regularly.

### **ROUTINE HEALTHCARE**

#### **Grooming**

It is a good idea to get your cat or kitten accustomed to being groomed. A long-haired cat will need his coat carefully and regularly (daily) combed and brushed, to keep his fur free from tangles and matting. Before you take on a 'fluffy' cat or kitten, consider whether you have the extra time needed for this daily task.

Although cats are experts in 'self-cleaning', with their barbed tongues and fastidious grooming routine, even short-haired cats need brushing to remove dead hairs and prevent hairballs building up inside their stomachs.

Your grooming routine should also include checking your cat's teeth, claws and ears. Cat toothpaste is available and can be used with a baby's soft toothbrush. Many cats require a dental at some point but regular cleaning will help to prevent this.

If he is an indoor or an older cat, his claws may grow too long and begin to curl. In this case, they will need to be clipped. It may be easier and safer to enlist the help of a veterinary nurse or professional groomer.

#### **Ear mites**

You should regularly check your cat or kitten's ears for ear mites. If you find a grey/brown wax inside the ears, with possible signs of irritation, then this could be an indication of mites. Take him to your vet to be checked and treated.

#### **Fleas**

Fleas are parasites that feed off their host ie: your cat or dog. They then drop off in to the surrounding environment to lay their eggs. The eggs then hatch and grow into adult fleas, repeating the cycle. With central heating, this problem continues throughout the year.

Regular treatment of fleas is essential to prevent major flea infestation. Your vet will supply you with and advise on the different applications available. Sprays and drops are usually applied every 4-6 weeks. Remember to treat all animals in the household.

Apart from your cat or kitten scratching himself, look out for brown specks of flea dirt in his coat or in his bed, as an indication the presence of fleas. It is also important to treat your carpets, furniture and cat's sleeping area with a spray from your vet .

#### **Worms**

'Worms' are the types of parasites that live inside the gut of a cat or kitten (dog or puppy). The most common are roundworms and tapeworms. Outward signs of worm infestation can be diarrhoea or constipation, erratic appetite, swollen belly and general poor condition. Fleas can be the cause of worms in cats, so it is important to regularly treat for both.

Kittens should be treated at the age of 4-6 weeks. From then, every 3 weeks until they are 4 months old. After this, they can be treated every 3-4 months. Use preparations obtained only from your vet. These come in the form of granules, liquid or a tablet.

## **VACCINATIONS**

All cats and kittens are at risk of contracting several potentially fatal viral diseases during their lifetime. Fortunately, we are able to offer vaccinations against three of the most common.

### **Feline Infectious Enteritis (F.I.E.)**

Caused by a strain of virus called parvovirus which is spread through an infected cat's faeces, and other bodily fluids. Fleas can also help to transmit the virus. In extreme cases, an infected cat can suddenly stop eating and die within a few hours. It is more usual for a cat to show symptoms of depression, high temperature, vomiting, inability to drink, followed by diarrhoea. Hospitalisation and re-hydration is required. Prevention of F.I.E. is vital as the mortality rate is high.

### **Cat 'flu'**

A general term for feline upper respiratory disease, usually resulting from a viral infection. The viruses responsible are highly contagious; transmitted mainly by sneezing, direct facial contact and food bowls. The main viruses responsible are the herpesvirus and calicivirus. Symptoms range from lack of appetite, fever, sneezing, discharges from eyes and nostrils and severe inflammation of the eyes. The calicivirus causes severe ulceration of the mouth and tongue. Antibiotics are usually administered to combat any secondary infections but cannot really treat the symptoms. Cat 'flu' can be fatal in kittens and older cats.

### **Feline Leukaemia (FeLV)**

Another nasty virus which can cause cancer of the white blood cells, other cancers and suppression of the immune system. An infected cat cannot fight off disease and may develop inflammation of the gums, skin and bladder infections. Also diarrhoea and anaemia may follow. The virus is generally transmitted by prolonged direct physical contact with an infected cat; mainly through saliva, urine and faeces.

Vaccination is recommended, although a vaccinated cat should never be deliberately exposed to FeLV (no vaccination is 100%). Sadly most cats will succumb to infection within 3 1/2 yrs. of the diagnosis. The vaccination for leukaemia can now be given as part of a triple vaccine with the enteritis and cat flu.

The primary course of vaccinations can be given from 9 weeks of age, followed by a second injection 3 weeks later. Your cat or kitten should not go outside until a week after the course is completed. To ensure immunity, you must follow up with an annual single booster.

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| Primary course costs between | £45/£65 (inc. leuk.) |
| Annual booster costs between | £25/£35              |

## **NEUTERING**

As a responsible and caring pet owner, it is essential that you get your kitten neutered at the appropriate age, normally 5 1/2 to 6 months of age.

A.R.C. and most other animal charities try to ensure that this is done by asking you to sign for this when you adopt a kitten. Most charities neuter cats over 6 months, before they are adopted.

### **The operation**

Both procedures are performed under general anaesthetic. A female cat will have an area shaved on her flank and a vertical incision will be made. The ovaries and womb will then be removed. The wound is then stitched up, with either sutures or surgical staples. These are removed after 10 days. Pain killers may be administered and she will normally be allowed home on the same day.

The male cat will have his testicles removed via two tiny incisions made in the scrotum. Stitches are not

generally required, as the incisions will heal themselves.

### **The cost**

It will cost about £60 to spay a female cat and about £40 to castrate a male cat. Please consider this expense before you take on a kitten. If you are on low income support you can be eligible for low cost neutering from organisations such as C.P.L., R.S.P.C.A, Blue Cross and Celia Hammond Trust. contact us for more details.

### **WHY NEUTERING IS SO IMPORTANT?**

Many thousands of kittens are born every year. Many of these will become unwanted and homeless within the first year. Some of these unwanted kittens and cats will find new homes but many of them will be destroyed because there are simply not enough homes.

Even if you manage to find homes for your kittens, you will have taken those valuable homes away from the many unwanted cats and kittens. Don't forget that an un-neutered tom will also be responsible for reproducing many litters.

Animal welfare organisations and other professional bodies are desperately trying to control the overpopulation tragedy, by ensuring that people do not allow their pets to breed and by educating owners about the benefits of neutering.

### **The benefits**

Your male cat will be less likely to wander, reducing the risk of becoming lost or injured. He should stay closer to home and therefore be a better companion.

He will be less likely to mark his territory by spraying strong smelling urine around the house and garden. (eau de chat is not a pleasant fragrance!)

He will be less interested in having territorial fights with other cats. Apart from sustaining injury, he would be at high risk from contracting several potentially lethal infectious diseases, such as F.I.V. and FeLV.

Your whole neighbourhood will benefit from not having to listen to the tuneless howling of the cat's chorus!

Male and female cats tend to become calmer, even tempered and often more affectionate after neutering.

Entire females are more likely to develop reproductive cancers and are also at risk of contracting potentially lethal viruses through mating.

There is absolutely no benefit from allowing your female cat to have her 'first' litter. It will not make her calmer and it could put her health at risk.

Your cat will not become fat as a result of being neutered. He will only become fat if he is overfed (or if he is being fed by the rest of the neighbourhood!)

**ARC – Animal Rescue & Care**

<http://www.animalrescueandcare.org.uk>