

# HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR NEW CAT OR KITTEN



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# THE START OF A BEAUTIFUL COMPANIONSHIP

Deciding to get a new cat or kitten is a big step. And the adventure is only beginning. There are so many emotional, social and physical [benefits](#) to owning a cat.

Use this guide to help ensure your new friend receives proper care, attention, and time to adjust to their surroundings. And check out [YourPetAndYou.com](https://YourPetAndYou.com) for more information as they grow and change. Don't forget to talk to your veterinarian in addition to using this guide.

Congratulations!

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# HOW TO CHOOSE A CAT OR KITTEN

## Look for a companion that fits your lifestyle

All cats have unique personalities. However, some breeds may be more independent, [affectionate](#) or vocal than others. For example, Siamese cats are highly social and crave attention. Some breeds shed a lot, while others [don't shed much](#) at all. Bengals and Russian Blues are two examples of cats that don't shed as much.

Consider the other pets in your household, too. [Bengals](#) tend to be high energy and playful but may be territorial with other cats. [Russian Blue](#) cats also like to play and are more likely to get along with other pets in your household.

When looking to purchase or adopt, ask about individual preferences or behaviors of the cat. Choosing a companion that fits your lifestyle is important so both of you can enjoy your time together. Make sure you have adequate time, space and financial resources before bringing home a new cat or kitten.





## Consider adopting from a shelter or animal rescue

There are so many adoptable cats and kittens in need of loving homes. Your [local shelter](#) or [animal rescue](#) is a fantastic place to find a loving, lifelong companion. It is usually cheaper than buying from a breeder. Most animal rescues and shelters also perform a full health check, first vaccinations and routine parasite treatment. If the cat is old enough, they are likely to have been spayed or neutered as well.

Read more about [where to get a cat or kitten](#).

## Ask questions

Before committing to a cat, find out about their personality, preferences and health history. Examples of [good questions to ask](#) include:

- Is this cat social and affectionate? Or quiet and independent?
- What types of activities does this cat enjoy?
- Would this cat get along with other pets and children?
- Does this cat have any health issues (past or present), medication needs or special dietary needs?

*Not sure if it's the right time for a new cat? Check out [this guide](#) on how to know if you are ready to bring a new cat home.*

 **QUICK TIP:**





# HOW TO GET READY FOR A CAT OR KITTEN

## Purchase essentials

Gather the [supplies](#) you need before bringing your new cat or kitten home. This will make the transition as easy as possible for both of you.

- A warm box, basket or bed
- Quality cat food
- Food and water bowls
- A litter box and cat litter
- Cat carrier
- Toys and treats
- Scratching post



## Prepare your home

Everyone wants to be comfortable in their own home. Your new cat or kitten is no exception. Take these steps to prepare upfront.

- Set up a cat room or a designated corner where they can easily find food, water and toys.
- Make sure your cat has plenty of safe places to retreat and seek refuge.
- Cat-proof your home by putting away items like electrical cords or small items that could be swallowed.
- Dispose of any toxic plants, such as lilies, eucalyptus and jade succulents.
- Establish routine times for feeding, watering, cleaning the litter box and play.







# HOW TO HELP YOUR CAT OR KITTEN FEEL AT HOME

## Introduce them to other pets

Help your new friend get to know other [dogs](#) and [cats](#) in your household. Cats and dogs rely on their sense of smell to get acquainted. Try keeping both animals in separate spaces and gently rubbing them with the same towel so their scents mix. You can also allow each animal to spend time in the other's space when they aren't around.

Supervise your pets while they are together until they feel comfortable. Be particularly careful with adult dogs and kittens. A fully-grown dog can accidentally harm a small kitten.

Not all pets will get along right away, so be patient. It is worth the effort to have a harmonious home for everyone.





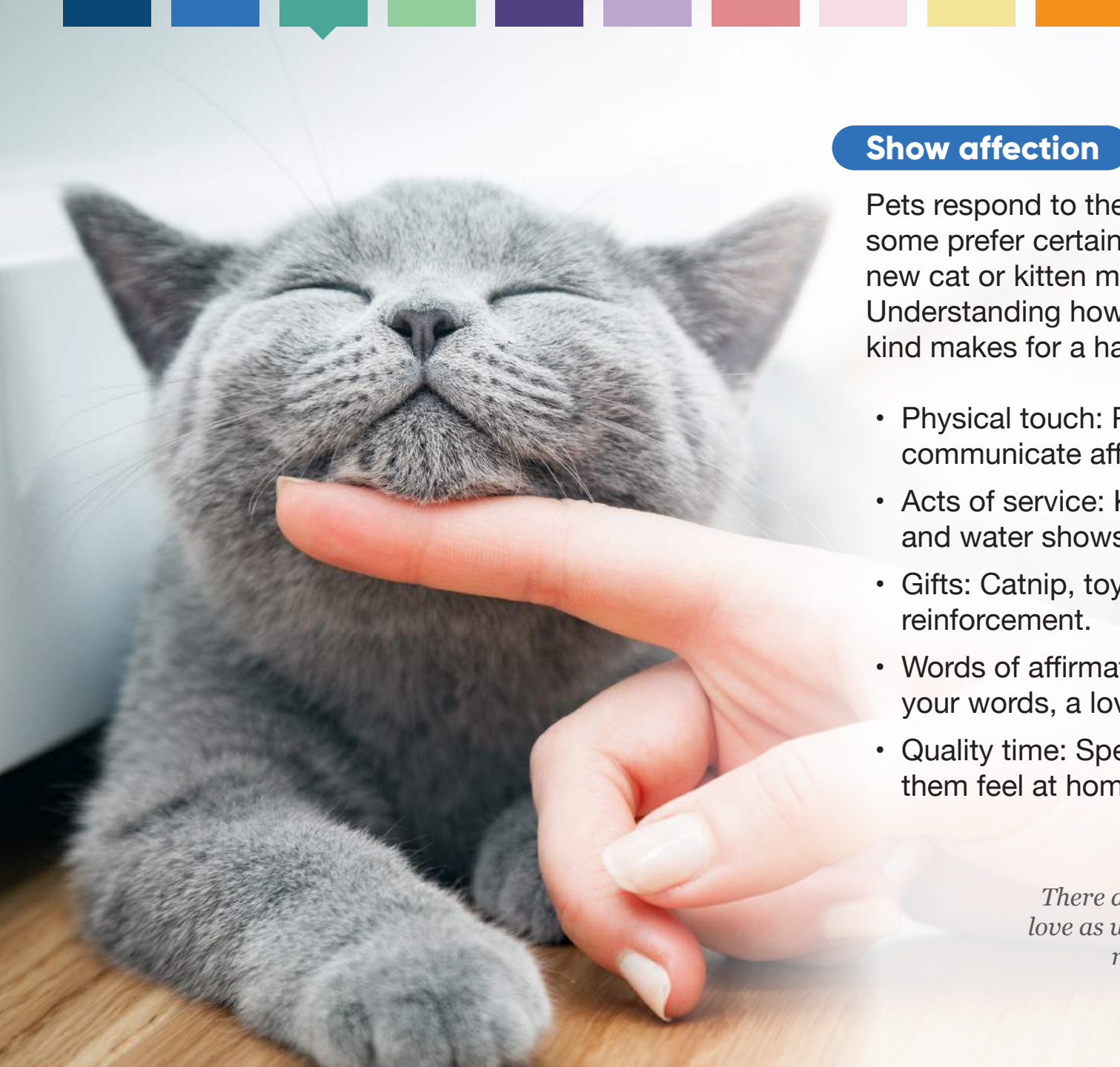
## Provide toys and opportunities for exercise

Cats possess natural predatory instincts and require [exercise](#) to stay healthy and fit. You can help by using a variety of cat toys for a few minutes several times a day.

- Stuffed mice
- Feather wands
- Flashlights and laser pointers
- Cat trees

During [playtime](#), allow your cat to catch the toy at the end. This will satisfy their predatory instinct. Also avoid using your fingers or toes as a toy during playtime. This helps prevent your kitten from forming a painful biting habit.





## Show affection

Pets respond to the [five love languages](#) much like humans do. And some prefer certain love languages more than others. For example, your new cat or kitten might prefer receiving an occasional gift over cuddling. Understanding how your pet expresses affection and how to respond in kind makes for a happy and loving relationship.

- Physical touch: Petting, cuddles, brushing and belly rubs all communicate affection.
- Acts of service: Keeping the litter box clean and providing fresh food and water shows your respect for your pet.
- Gifts: Catnip, toys and treats are a great way to use positive reinforcement.
- Words of affirmation: While your cat or kitten may not understand your words, a loving tone of voice communicates affection.
- Quality time: Spending plenty of time with your cat or kitten helps them feel at home.

### QUICK TIP:

*There are lots of ways your cat or kitten shows you their love as well. Check out these [14 signs your cat loves you](#) for more tips on bonding with your new friend.*



# WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE FIRST YEAR (Kitten Milestones)

It's so exciting to see your kitten grow and develop their own personality. They'll change a lot in their first year, especially during the first [eight weeks](#). Here are some of the changes you may notice:

## Newborn – 3 weeks

Newborn kittens' eyes and ears aren't open and their claws are nonretractable. The umbilical cord falls off their stomach three days after they're born. [In the first few weeks](#), kittens' eyes and ear canals will start to open. By the end of the third week, their first teeth (incisors) will likely come in and their sense of smell will fully develop.

## 4 – 8 weeks

At 4 weeks old, you can introduce your kitten to toys and the litter box. Once your kitten's premolars come in, they are ready to wean onto wet food. You should bring your kitten to the vet when they are 6 weeks old for their first round of vaccines.

By week 8, your kitten's primary development is complete. Bring your kitten to the veterinarian for a vaccine booster.







### **3 – 6 months**

This is a rapid growth period for your kitten. You'll notice an increased appetite. Ask your veterinarian what a healthy weight range is for your kitten's species and body type. Make sure your kitten has had the rest of their vaccinations and has been spayed or neutered by five months old.

### **6 months – 1 year**

Your kitten has their adult teeth. During this time, they'll transition to adult food. Your kitten grows more confident in their interactions with other animals and humans. By one year, your kitten will have reached their full adult weight.





# HOW TO TRAIN YOUR CAT OR KITTEN

Proper [training](#) can help your cat or kitten learn the expectations of their new home, from using the litter box to using their claws on a scratching post rather than your furniture.

## **Socialize daily**

Use this time to introduce your cat or kitten to other pets, play, and reinforce positive behaviors with affection and treats. Do not punish unwanted behavior.

## **Encourage litter box use**

The litter box should be in an easily accessible area away from noise, activity, and your cat's or kitten's food and bedding. Place them in the litter box when they wake up and after they eat. Show them how to dig by gently moving their front paws in the litter. You can also place them in the litter box when they show signs of needing to use it, e.g., pawing around on the carpet.

For more information, see our full guide for [litter box training](#).



## Provide a scratching post

A catnip-laced scratching post is usually more enticing for cats or kittens than your furniture. It also helps to encourage its use directly. Train your cat or kitten to use the scratching post by gently rubbing their front paws across its surface. [Trimming their nails](#) can also help protect your furniture.

## Reduce or prevent biting through positive play

Most cat owners don't like receiving a "love bite" to their finger or an "attack" at their ankles. However, a certain amount of nipping and biting behavior is natural for cats. You can help teach them proper play habits by providing other options to nip at, like small balls, toy mice, or dangling feather wands.

If your cat or kitten plays too rough, don't respond aggressively or defensively. Either stop moving entirely or get up and walk away calmly. Reward positive behavior with treats and avoid punishments.

Need more help? Review our full guide on [how to prevent biting](#).





# HOW TO FEED YOUR CAT OR KITTEN

Figuring out the right food and proper portion size for your cat or kitten can be overwhelming. Here are some basic guidelines to follow:

**Prioritize protein:** Cats require a lot of protein in their diets and can't digest carbohydrate fillers very well. Ask your veterinarian about the best cat or kitten foods that provide a complete and balanced diet.

**Consider life stage:** Kittens should nurse or bottle feed (if orphaned) until they're at least five weeks old. After that, you can wean them. Feed your kitten whenever they are hungry for the first five months. After that reduce to three or four portions a day until they are six months old. Then reduce to twice daily.

**Have a routine:** Presenting food to your cat at dawn and dusk mimics their predatory nature. If this isn't possible, make sure to stick to a routine time. Keep their water bowl filled and fresh to help [prevent urinary tract infections](#).

**Account for treats:** Most of your cat's caloric intake should come from a quality cat food. However, a few small treats are helpful for training and bonding. You can also break larger treats into smaller pieces.

Read more about [how much to feed your kitten](#).

## QUICK TIP:

*If you think your cat may require a [special diet](#) due to allergies, sensitivities or preferences, discuss with your veterinarian first. Some popular pet diets are based more on fads than facts.*



## Avoid toxins and malnourishment

Did you know most cats are lactose intolerant? Cow's milk is just one of the many [common human foods](#) that can cause gastrointestinal stress or other problems for cats.

**Cow's milk, cheese and other dairy products:** Can upset your cat's or kitten's stomach, causing vomiting and [diarrhea](#).

**Milk and dark chocolate:** Contain theobromine and caffeine, both of which are toxic to cats, and can cause increased body temperature, seizures, and, in extreme cases, heart failure or coma.

**Raw eggs, meat or fish:** Could contain dangerous E. coli and salmonella bacteria.

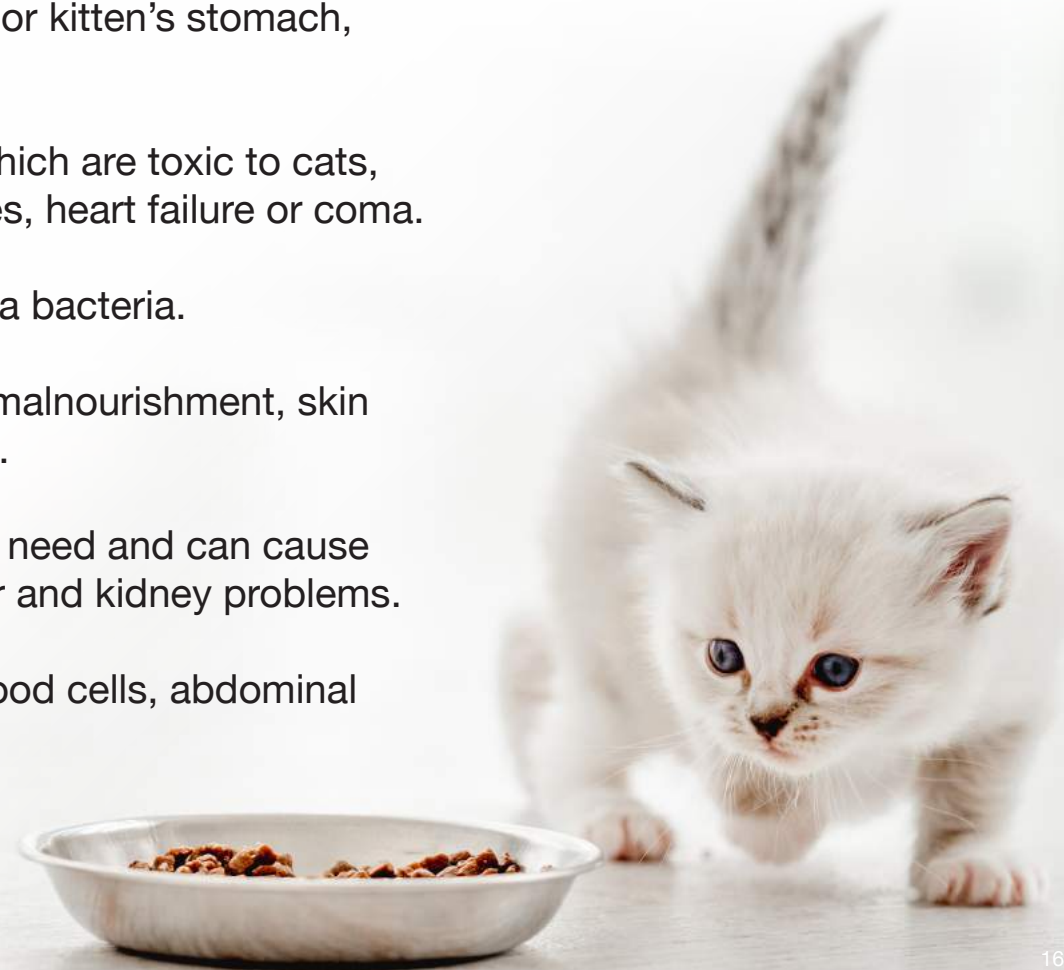
**Dog food:** Doesn't contain the proper nutrition cats need and can cause malnourishment, skin issues, muscular degeneration, heart disease, or liver and kidney problems.

**Yeast and raw bread dough:** Doesn't contain the proper nutrition cats need and can cause malnourishment, skin issues, muscular degeneration, heart disease, or liver and kidney problems.

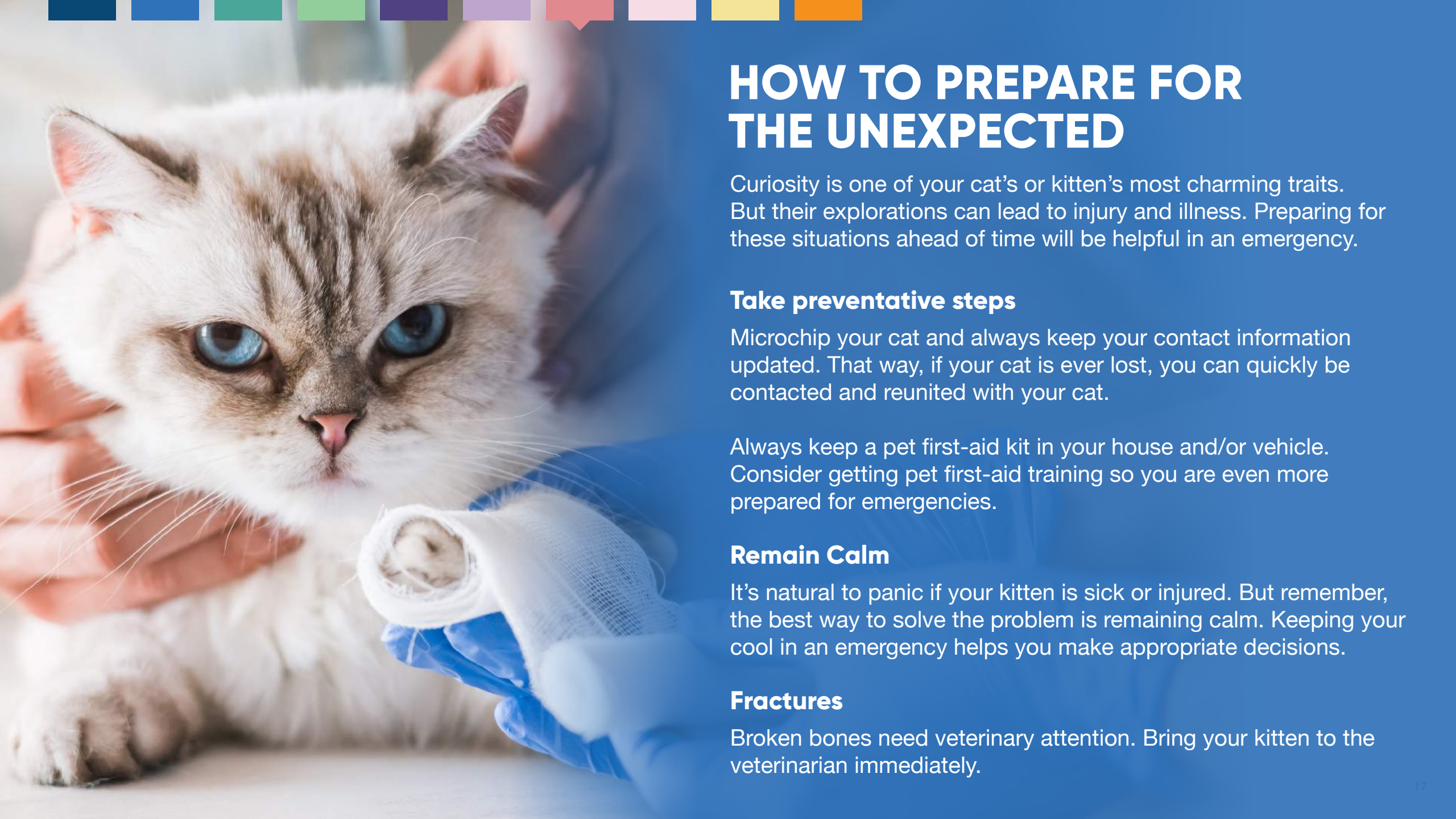
**Onions, garlic, chives and leeks:** Can cause [anemia](#), damaged red blood cells, abdominal pain and other symptoms in cats.

### QUICK TIP:

*Cooked tuna as an occasional treat is fine, but it lacks several nutrients cats need. Too much tuna can cause mercury poisoning.*







# HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Curiosity is one of your cat's or kitten's most charming traits. But their explorations can lead to injury and illness. Preparing for these situations ahead of time will be helpful in an emergency.

## **Take preventative steps**

Microchip your cat and always keep your contact information updated. That way, if your cat is ever lost, you can quickly be contacted and reunited with your cat.

Always keep a pet first-aid kit in your house and/or vehicle. Consider getting pet first-aid training so you are even more prepared for emergencies.

## **Remain Calm**

It's natural to panic if your kitten is sick or injured. But remember, the best way to solve the problem is remaining calm. Keeping your cool in an emergency helps you make appropriate decisions.

## **Fractures**

Broken bones need veterinary attention. Bring your kitten to the veterinarian immediately.



## Breathing problems

If your kitten has difficulty breathing, immediately bring them to the closest veterinary office. If you have pet first-aid training, you can provide respiratory assistance or check for items lodged in their throat before taking them to the vet. Only do so if you have the proper training.

## Bleeding

As soon as you notice bleeding, place direct pressure over the area and hold it for at least five minutes to stop the immediate bleeding. Gauze pads, a clean cloth, or paper towels are all options. Unfortunately, even small wounds may be deeper than they seem. Bring your kitten to the veterinary clinic and avoid placing a bandage on them until your veterinarian examines them.

## Transporting injured animals

Don't forget that your kitten is in pain. Use a suitable pet carrier to transport them to the closet veterinarian. Towels or blankets inside the carrier are a good idea so your kitten is as warm and comfortable as possible.



### QUICK TIP:

*Even if your kitten doesn't tend to bite, they might when they're in pain. Be very careful moving an injured pet so you don't make their condition worse or get injured yourself in the process.*





# HOW TO KEEP YOUR CAT OR KITTEN HEALTHY

## Regular veterinarian visits

Your veterinarian is the best source of information about your cat's or kitten's well-being. Starting with their [very first visit](#), make sure your cat has a foundation for good health throughout their life.

Don't wait for an issue to happen before taking your cat or kitten to the veterinarian. [Proactive care](#) is essential to both preventing and catching health issues related to weight, joints and mobility, skin and coat, and digestion early on.

Depending on your cat's or kitten's needs at the time, a visit to the veterinarian may include a thorough physical examination, blood and urine tests, vaccinations, dental care, and guidance on exercise or nutritional supplements. Let your veterinarian know about any unusual symptoms you notice right away, like [excessive drooling](#) or [diarrhea](#).





A close-up photograph of a person's hands gently holding a small, brown and white tabby kitten. The kitten is wearing a blue fabric harness with a black plastic buckle. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

## Protect from parasites

Parasites such as fleas, ticks and worms are dangerous to cats and kittens. Understand the risks of each parasite and ask your veterinarian how to protect your cat.

**Fleas:** Fleas are one of the most common parasites to affect cats. They are tiny wingless insects that feed on blood and lay eggs on your cat's fur.

Potential risks of fleas for cats are flea allergy dermatitis, anemia from blood loss due to flea bites, tapeworms (can be transmitted when a cat swallows an infected flea), and Bartonella. Also known as cat scratch fever, it is possible for a Bartonella infection to spread from cats to humans.

**Ear mites:** Ear mites live in the oil and wax of your cat's ear canals. This can make your kitten very uncomfortable. Mites are extremely contagious, so if you have more than one pet, you'll need to treat them all. Health consequences of ear mites include hearing loss, permanent ear scarring and ear infections.

**Ticks:** Ticks are a risk for both indoor and outdoor cats, especially if there are other pets in the household that spend time outdoors. Ticks transfer onto hosts when animals (or humans) walk through long brush or grass. Both pets and people can bring ticks inside with them. Don't assume your indoor cat isn't at risk.

Cytauxzoonosis, also known as bobcat fever, is the most serious disease risk from ticks. Symptoms of bobcat fever include severe fever, lethargy, loss of appetite, difficulty breathing and jaundice. Other disease risks for cats include Lyme disease, Ehrlichiosis, Anaplasmosis and anemia.



**Intestinal worms:** It's easy for kittens to contract worms, and they are more severely affected than adult cats. Since [deworming treatments](#) aren't available to kittens under eight weeks old, preventative steps are key. This includes keeping them away from rodents that could carry disease as well as areas where other animals may have left infected feces.

Kittens can be infected with [roundworms](#), [tapeworms](#) and [hookworms](#). If left untreated, worms can cause unpleasant and even dangerous symptoms such as weight loss, vomiting, diarrhea and blood loss.

**Heartworms:** Heartworms damage the heart and lungs of cats. When a mosquito infected with heartworms bites your cat, the worms migrate to the lungs where they trigger an inflammatory reaction. While this reaction typically kills most of the worms, it can also cause lung damage and respiratory distress, and can even be fatal. Unfortunately, there is no treatment for [heartworm disease](#) in cats if all the worms do not die.

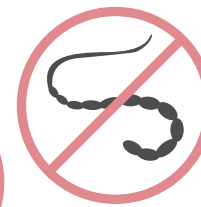
Common symptoms of heartworm disease in cats include coughing, increased respiratory effort, wheezing, and quick, shallow breaths. Additional, though less common, symptoms include vomiting, lethargy and seizures.



FLEAS



TICKS



WORMS

**QUICK TIP:**

*Prevention is your best bet for dangerous parasites. Ask your veterinarian about comprehensive coverage for your cat or kitten.*



## Vaccines

Vaccinations are a key component of preventative healthcare for cats and kittens.

**Rabies vaccine:** May be administered as early as eight weeks. Check your state guidelines for vaccination and booster requirements.

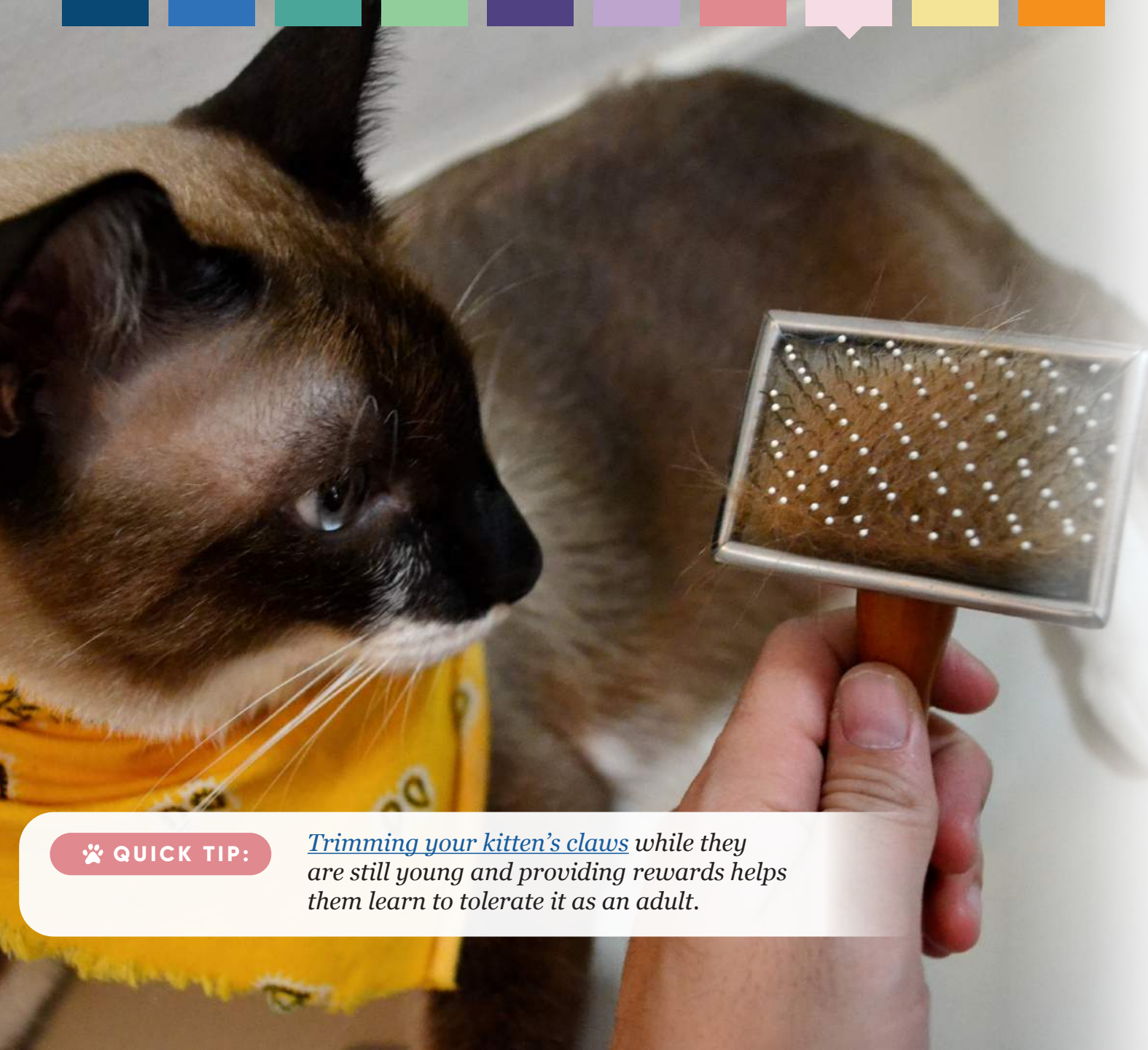
**Feline distemper vaccine:** Can be given as early as six weeks and repeated every three to four weeks until 16-20 weeks of age. Another booster is recommended at 6 months of age then every three years after that.

**Feline herpesvirus:** Can be given as early as six weeks and repeated every three to four weeks until 16-20 weeks of age. Another booster is recommended at 6 months of age then every three years after that.

**Feline calicivirus:** Can be given as early as six weeks of age and repeated every three to four weeks until 16-20 weeks of age. Another booster is recommended at 6 months of age then every three years after that.

**Feline leukemia vaccine:** Recommended for at-risk cats (e.g., indoor/outdoor cats). Can be given as early as eight weeks and is followed by a second dose three to four weeks after the initial dose. Booster doses are recommended annually for at-risk cats.





## Bathing and grooming

Cats are known to be fastidious groomers, but there are certain [circumstances where a bath may be necessary](#). This includes overweight cats, older cats, and those with skin conditions, ticks or fleas. If your cat is grooming too much, they may gag up hairballs more often than is healthy. Review this [guide to managing hairballs](#) to find out if your cat's hairballs are cause for concern.

Your veterinarian may also recommend that you [clean your cat's ears](#). This gets rid of dirt, wax, and debris, and helps prevent the buildup of bacteria or yeast that could lead to infections.

Most cats will have an issue with [shedding, mats or dandruff](#) at some point. You can help them maintain a healthy skin and coat by brushing, limiting stress, adding a nutritional supplement approved by your veterinarian, keeping them hydrated, and using a shampoo, rinse or conditioner formulated for their specific needs.

### QUICK TIP:

[Trimming your kitten's claws](#) while they are still young and providing rewards helps them learn to tolerate it as an adult.



# HOW TO TRAVEL WITH YOUR CAT OR KITTEN

Trips with your cat or kitten are inevitable, even if it's just a short drive to the vet. You should always use a cat carrier in transit. Take steps early to introduce them to their carrier and the [basics of traveling](#).

## Going to the veterinarian

Before the appointment, practice putting your cat or kitten in their carrier and then rewarding them with treats. See if they will enter the carrier on their own. If your cat still seems nervous about the carrier, squirt a synthetic feline facial pheromone (FFP) analog spray in the carrier at least 30 minutes prior to leaving for the vet. Items like towels also allow your cat to feel hidden while they are at the clinic.

## Taking an extended trip

Research information about veterinary clinics near your destination. If staying with friends or family, let them know that you're bringing your cat. This gives them an opportunity to cat-proof the house. Also confirm no one has allergies. If you are staying at a hotel or similar establishment, make sure to choose pet-friendly accommodations.





## What to pack

- Your cat's ID tags: Update their information and include phone numbers where you can be reached during your trip.
- Wipes or paper towels: Many pets get motion sickness. Keep supplies handy to clean up your cat, the carrier, and any other soiled belongings.
- A portable litter box: So your cat can "go" while on the go.
- Favorite toys: Keep your cat occupied during travel and at your destination.
- A list of current vaccinations and medications: This is useful in case of an emergency or unexpected trip to the veterinarian.
- Familiar food and treats: The more familiar items they have, the more likely they are to adjust well to the trip.

### QUICK TIP:

*Every cat is different. Some may take to travel, while others might find it stressful. Once you arrive, play with them, reward them with treats, or give them alone time if they prefer it.*





# HOW TO HAVE A HAPPY CAT OR KITTEN

Sometimes it's difficult to know if your cat or kitten is feeling good about life. Here are a few steps you can take to [keep them happy](#).

## Know the signs of depression

Unhappy cats have several [common behavioral cues](#). Eating or drinking less could indicate sadness, but it can also be a more serious issue if it continues for longer than a day. Excessive meowing, especially a longer, deeper meow than is typical, is another indicator. Other signs of depression include clawing at and destroying furniture or other items, over-climbing into unstable or dangerous areas, or “accidents” outside the litter box.

## Schedule regular playtime

Playing with your cat, especially when they are young, helps with their coordination, social skills and mental and physical development. Avoid using your fingers or toes as toys during [playtime](#). Instead, provide a variety of toys like plush mice, feather wands, and cardboard boxes.

A few short sessions of play throughout the day will give your cat or kitten an outlet for their natural predatory instincts. This should be enough to keep them engaged without overtiring them.



## Give them their own space

Cats like to have their own space with a bed, scratching post and litter box to fulfill their basic needs and independent nature. Keep their food and water in a different place. You can also create several ideal napping spots throughout your home, such as a cushion near a sunny window.

## Keep it clean

Just like many people, cats prefer neat spaces. Make sure to regularly clean their food station and change their litter daily or every other day. If you have more than one cat, you should have one litter box for each plus one extra.

### QUICK TIP:

*Cats are individuals, just like people, and different things may make them happy. Check out our guide on [meeting your cat's needs](#) to learn more.*







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