



ONTARIO VETERINARY  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

# WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

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**A CAT OWNER'S  
HANDBOOK**







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## **CONGRATULATIONS!**

You have either added, or are considering adding, a new member to your family.

Following the proper care guidelines for your cat can ensure that you and your new companion enjoy many years of happiness together.

Your veterinarian is your partner in maintaining the good health of your cat. Regular examinations are an excellent way to prevent disease and obtain professional advice about the care of your pet.

Pet ownership is a huge responsibility, and cats require a great deal of attention and care. In return, you will receive companionship and unconditional love from your new family member.

For more information on any of the topics covered in this handbook, talk to your veterinarian or visit our website at [www.ovma.org](http://www.ovma.org).

# GETTING READY FOR THE NEW FAMILY MEMBER

Whether you're bringing home a young kitten or have adopted an adult cat, successfully introducing a pet to its new home involves planning and patience.

You should pet proof your home before your new cat arrives. Items like toxic plants, frayed electrical cords and any small household items that could be swallowed can pose a significant risk to your cat. Don't let your cat near open windows and balconies, which can pose a danger to curious felines.

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## New Kitten Checklist

**Before your new family member arrives, ensure you have the following:**

- Food and water bowls
- Litter box, litter and scoop
- Bed
- Toys and treats
- Cat collar, leash/harness and carrier

Moving to a new home can be stressful for your feline companion. To reduce stress, create a relaxing and private environment that your kitten can escape to if she feels overwhelmed.

For the first few days, restrict your kitten to one room. Place food, water, toys and a litter box in this room until your kitten becomes accustomed to its new surroundings.

Confining your new family member is especially important if you have other pets. Dogs and cats can be territorial, which may lead them to be aggressive toward your new cat.

Your new family member could also be carrying diseases or parasites that might infect your other pets. Before introducing your kitten to other animals, or even letting them sniff noses under a door, take her to your veterinarian who will ensure she is healthy and has received all necessary tests and treatments. Depending on the cat's background, a period of isolation may be recommended to make sure there are no signs of contagious upper respiratory disease. Particular care is required with kittens from animal shelters, since many of them carry herpes-related respiratory disease, which can be easily transmitted to other cats. You can even transmit respiratory viruses from one cat to another on your hands or clothes.

Once given a clean bill of health, your kitten can get to know your other pets through a closed door. Then, place the kitten in a cat carrier and let the animals "greet" each other. Once your pets are comfortable with the new animal, allow your kitten access to the rest of your home.

If you have a dog in the family, take extra precautions during the supervised introductions. Dogs love to chase small animals, so keep your dog on a leash to prevent this from happening.





# HOUSE TRAINING YOUR CAT

## THE LITTER BOX

All cats should have access to a litter box. In most cases, your kitten will already know how to use the litter box. However, the stress and excitement of adjusting to a new home could cause your kitten to start eliminating in other places.

Your kitten should be able to climb in and out of the litter box without difficulty. An uncovered litter box can help prevent elimination issues.

Clean your litter box at least once a day. Every week or two, empty the litter box and clean it with a mild soap and hot water. Some cats won't use a litter box that smells of disinfectant or other scents, so rinse the litter box thoroughly and avoid scented litter.

Praise your kitten and reward her with treats when she uses the litter box correctly. After several weeks, your kitten should be using the litter box regularly.

Accidents will happen, and you should never punish your kitten for mistakes. Instead, show your kitten where she should have gone, and praise her when she uses the litter box. If your kitten relieves herself in an undesired area, remove all traces of the waste, as lingering odours may prompt her to use that location again. Use an anti-odour agent recommended by your veterinarian.

Environmental changes can cause your cat to stop using the litter box. Some cats won't use a litter box if it's placed in a noisy or busy area. There should be at least one litter box for every cat in the household, plus one



extra. Make any changes in litter type or location of the litter box slowly. Some cats have very specific preferences for litter type, although the clumping variety seems most popular with cats and their owners.

Medical conditions may also cause your cat to avoid the litter box. For example, a cat experiencing pain while eliminating may stop using its litter box.

For cats, "cleanliness is next to godliness." If your cat fails to establish or breaks litter training, see your veterinarian immediately. Pregnant women shouldn't clean litter boxes, as cat feces may harbour an organism called toxoplasma. For more information, speak with your veterinarian.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Cats spend about one-third of their waking hours cleaning themselves.

# SOCIALIZATION AND BEHAVIOUR

## SCRATCHING

Cats scratch to condition their nails and mark their territory. It's important to remember this is a normal behaviour for cats, even if it's an unwanted behaviour for us. Proper scratching behaviour should be trained, not eliminated. Training your cat to use a scratching post can prevent damage to furniture and carpets.

You can purchase or build scratching posts for your kitten. Ensure that the posts are large enough for your cat to use when it's standing at full length on its hind legs. The scratching posts should be sturdy. You don't want your cat to be frightened by scratching posts that tip over, as this may cause them to avoid using the posts in the future.

Scratching posts should be made of a material that your cat can get its claws into. Carpet and bare wood are good choices. Cat scratch posts can be as simple as a piece of firewood attached to a sturdy base or as sophisticated as broadloom carpet covered posts with multiple levels. Another idea is to affix a piece of plywood covered with carpet onto a wall at "cat scratch level."

Encourage your kitten to use the scratching posts by attaching cat toys or scenting them with catnip. Place the scratching posts in social areas in your home. Your cat wants to feel like part of the family, so place your scratching post in common living areas, not out of sight in the spare bedroom. Use positive reinforcement to promote use of the scratching posts such as rewarding your kitten with praise and a treat if she uses the posts correctly.

Make it difficult or unpleasant for your cat to scratch in unwanted areas, and limit access to areas that may tempt your kitten. There are many preventive products available that deter scratching, so talk to your veterinarian about what products are available if it becomes a persistent problem.

## PLAY

Kittens are playful and love to stalk and pounce. Occasionally, this behaviour can lead to aggression. Discourage your kitten from chasing or pouncing on your fingers or feet. In most cases, you can prevent these attacks by distracting the kitten with a loud noise or a squirt from a water gun.

During play, dangle a long string in front of the kitten or throw cat toys for her to "fetch." Always direct the play away from you. Provide your kitten with plenty of cat toys. Adding catnip to a toy or smearing a small amount of cat food on the toy will encourage your kitten to play with it. If you spend plenty of time playing with your kitten, she will be too exhausted to pounce on you or other family members. Play is also an integral part of exercise, and for an indoor cat this is likely to be their only exercise. Encourage play as part of a daily routine.



# NUTRITION

Good nutrition is as important for your feline companion as it is for you. There are many cat food options available to pet owners, and sometimes choosing the right food for your cat can be a challenge. Your veterinarian is your best source of information about pet nutrition.

## UNDERSTANDING INGREDIENTS

When buying food for your cat, know what to look for. The ingredients on the label are not as important as the nutritional value of the food. For example, don't assume that a brand of cat food is better because meat appears as the first ingredient on the label. The quality of the protein is more important than the source. The same goes for grain-free or gluten-free food, which aren't necessarily better for your cat and could be missing key nutrients. Ask your veterinarian to recommend a food that meets the nutritional needs of your cat.

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Cats are carnivores. They need protein from meat and fish and will become ill on a vegetarian diet. They also have different nutritional needs than dogs, so it's important to stick to food made specifically for cats.

\*Source – Cat Healthy ([www.cathealthy.ca](http://www.cathealthy.ca))

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## CATS NEED DIFFERENT DIETS AT DIFFERENT AGES

Your cat's nutritional needs will change with age. Kittens should receive a high-quality commercial "growth" food. Proper growth food will contain higher levels of protein, calories and minerals than adult diets. The age at which a cat should switch to an adult food varies depending on the pet. Consult your veterinarian about your cat's nutritional requirements and how to assess its body condition.

Your veterinarian may recommend a senior diet for older pets. Other specialty diets include low-calorie formulas for cats that are inactive or overweight, and a large selection of therapeutic diets for various medical conditions. Therapeutic diets are available only from a veterinarian.

## VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS

Cats that are fed a good quality commercial diet don't require any additional vitamins or minerals. In some cases, supplementation can even be harmful.

Talk to your veterinarian if you think your cat may have a specific need for extra vitamins and minerals.

## BOREDOM AND VARIETY

Cats can be finicky eaters. Some cats will only eat one type or brand of cat food, while others enjoy variety at mealtimes. There is no nutritional reason to change food if it's a balanced, high quality diet. If you change your cat's food, gradually introduce the new food with the previous brand over five to seven days. For example, only use 10 to 20 per cent of the new food on the first day. Abrupt changes in diet may cause indigestion, vomiting, diarrhea and gas.

## COST

Feeding your cat a healthy diet doesn't have to be expensive. To decide if a certain food fits your budget, consider the cost of feeding per day, not just the price of the bag or can. Better quality foods provide more nutritional value per gram of weight, which means your cat eats less food per day. This means that a bag of "expensive" food can last much longer than the same-size bag of a lower quality, "cheaper" food.

## DRY VS. CANNED

Dry food is the most convenient food to feed your cat, as it can be left out all day and will require less cleaning of food bowls. It's generally high in calories and can be a major cause of obesity if volumes aren't carefully controlled. Most canned foods contain fewer calories per mouthful and offer an excellent way to increase your cat's water intake, which may help maintain a healthy urinary tract. Unlike dry foods, canned formulas can easily be made with the low carbohydrate level appropriate for cats. Many feline specialists promote feeding canned food as part of the diet. It's a good idea to start canned food at

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Cats generally lack the enzyme to digest dairy products, so feeding them milk or cream can make them sick.

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an early age, so your cat is familiar with it. Some cats won't eat canned food later in life if they aren't familiar with it.

## WATER

Always encourage your cat to consume water and be sure to provide a large bowl of fresh water daily. The bowl should be large enough that your cat's whiskers do not touch either side. Some cats like moving water, and feline water fountains are available.

## PEOPLE FOOD

Feeding your cat people food can lead to obesity, vomiting, diarrhea, finicky eating habits, poor dental health, bone (orthopedic) problems, and severe illnesses like pancreatitis and food poisoning.

## HOMEMADE DIETS

Cats have unique dietary requirements. If you're considering a homemade diet, consult your veterinarian to ensure the diet meets your cat's nutritional needs.

## HOW MUCH SHOULD I FEED MY CAT?

How much you feed your cat will depend on a variety of factors, including the nutritional value of the food and your cat's age and level of activity. The recommended daily amount listed on the food packaging is only a guideline. It's important that you weigh and monitor your cat's body condition every month.

Obesity is the No. 1 nutritional disease affecting cats. Obesity can cause a variety of health problems and shorten your cat's life. After weighing and

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Feeding your cat bones carries the risk of mouth injuries, severe constipation and potentially fatal intestinal perforations.

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## DID YOU KNOW?

It's estimated almost 60 per cent of cats are obese.

\*Source – Association for Pet Obesity Prevention ([www.petobesityprevention.org](http://www.petobesityprevention.org))

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assessing your cat, your veterinarian can tell you if an adjustment in diet is needed to maintain a healthy weight.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I FEED MY CAT?

Kittens should be fed a minimum of two to three meals a day until they're at least six months old. Adult cats should be fed once or twice a day.

Many cats like to eat small, frequent meals throughout the day. This is acceptable if the cat doesn't show a tendency to gain weight. Just be sure your cat doesn't exceed the recommended daily caloric intake.

## FOOD ALLERGIES

Like people, cats can be allergic to many things, even food. Talk to your veterinarian if your cat has any of the following symptoms:

- Severe itching
- Hair loss
- Rash
- Vomiting/diarrhea

If your cat has a suspected food allergy, your veterinarian will recommend a special hypoallergenic diet.





# WHY ARE REGULAR CHECK-UPS IMPORTANT?

Keeping your pet in top physical shape and optimal health is the goal of every responsible pet owner. It's also your veterinarian's goal. Together, you can ensure your cat stays healthy for years to come.

## **EARLY DISEASE DETECTION**

Regular check-ups provide an opportunity to prevent diseases, detect them early or even avoid them altogether. Unfortunately, many cat owners tend to underestimate the value of these visits because their cats appear to be healthy. However, this may be deceiving because many diseases and ailments, such as kidney or dental disease, often aren't evident in the early stages. Even exclusively indoor cats should be examined at least once a year.

## **OBESITY/NUTRITIONAL COUNSELLING**

A proper diet ranks as one of the most important considerations in health maintenance. A proper diet helps keep your cat in good shape and can prevent and/or manage many diseases. Nutritional counselling is an essential part of your veterinarian's check-up. Many pet owners use the physical examination as an opportunity to gain valuable advice on what to feed their pets.

Your veterinarian also uses the examination to determine if your cat is obese. Obesity affects almost one-third of pets, making it the most common nutritional disease among

# EXERCISE

Exercise is an essential part of keeping your pet healthy. The amount of exercise necessary will vary from cat to cat. Chasing toys is an excellent way for cats to stay in shape, and you should play with your cat daily to ensure she's getting enough exercise.





# HOW TO MAKE YOUR VET VISIT LESS STRESSFUL

- ❑ Always transport your cat in a cat carrier.
- ❑ The best carriers open from the top or front and can be taken apart, so your cat can remain in the bottom for most of the exam if they prefer.
- ❑ Help your cat become accustomed to the carrier by leaving it open in the house and placing toys, treats or food inside.
- ❑ Place a soft, clean towel or familiar bedding in the bottom of the carrier.
- ❑ Spray the carrier with facial pheromone (e.g. Feliway) 10-15 minutes before travelling.
- ❑ Secure the carrier in the foot well of the back seat of the car to avoid movement during transportation and airbag injuries.
- ❑ When carrying the carrier, keep it stable and horizontal.
- ❑ Place a towel over the top of the carrier to help calm your cat and prevent other pets in the waiting room from making direct eye contact.

\*Source – CatHealthy ([www.cathealthy.ca](http://www.cathealthy.ca))

dogs and cats. Through visual assessment and palpation, your veterinarian can advise you if your pet could benefit from a weight-reduction program.

### **BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS**

The check-up also provides you with the opportunity to ask questions regarding behaviour and hygiene. Knowledgeable owners are less likely to have cats that scratch the furniture or have problems using their litter box. The check-up



provides an opportunity to discuss training techniques and behaviour concerns with your veterinarian.

### **WHAT HAPPENS DURING AN EXAMINATION?**

Before the physical examination begins, your veterinarian will ask questions about your cat's state of health. This is very important for determining if there are specific issues that need to be addressed.

After obtaining a history, your veterinarian will perform a physical examination of your pet. The veterinarian will examine your cat's eyes, ears, face and mouth.

Examining the teeth is especially important, since up to 85 per cent of all cats over four years of age have some degree of periodontal disease. Early detection of periodontal disease is important, not only for effective treatment, but also for future prevention.

Your veterinarian will then examine your cat's coat to look for signs of parasites (such as fleas). Your veterinarian will also ensure that the coat isn't too dry or too oily, which may indicate a dietary imbalance or grooming problems. The veterinarian will also check your cat's weight. If your cat is too heavy, a change in diet may be required to avoid health problems related to obesity.

If your cat is losing weight over time, it may be a sign that your pet has a related medical problem that needs further examination.

During the physical exam, your veterinarian will listen to your cat's chest with a stethoscope to ensure there are no respiratory or cardiovascular problems. The early warning signs of heart failure can sometimes be detected this way. Wheezing and increased respiratory sounds may raise suspicions that your cat has asthma, which is best managed by early treatment.





Your veterinarian will also feel your cat's abdomen and lymph nodes to ensure they are normal. The entire body is checked for lumps or bumps on or under the skin and for any signs of pain or discomfort.

Blood testing and fecal parasite testing is also routinely recommended at the physical exam. These preventive tests can detect issues such as internal parasites, kidney disease, feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus, and helps to ensure your cat's internal organs are functioning properly. By performing this testing with an annual physical exam or every six months as your cat ages, diseases can be detected sooner and managed properly.

### **HOW OFTEN SHOULD MY CAT BE EXAMINED?**

When you don't feel well, you seek medical help when appropriate. Unfortunately, since your cat can't talk, you don't always know when she's ill. In fact, because predators in the wild tend to prey on the sick or the infirm, an animal's instinct is to hide health problems for as long as possible. This means there may not be any outward signs that your cat is ill until the disease is quite advanced. You should take your cat to your veterinarian at least once a year for a complete physical examination.

Many cats live for 15 to 20 years. Once your cat has reached two years of age, every cat year is equal to approximately four human years. Your cat's health can change a great deal over the course of even a few months. Many pet owners choose to have a physical examination done every six months, which is highly recommended if your cat is seven years of age or older.

### **VACCINATIONS**

Vaccinations help protect your pet from several potentially serious and fatal diseases. Vaccinations cost considerably less than the treatments available for the diseases cats are normally vaccinated against. All cats should be vaccinated, even indoor cats.

# **COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT VACCINATIONS**

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## **What diseases are cats commonly vaccinated for?**

- Chlamydia
- Feline calicivirus
- Feline leukemia
- Feline rhinotracheitis
- Panleukopenia
- Rabies

Speak with your veterinarian about which of these vaccines are recommended for your cat.

## **When does my kitten need its first vaccinations?**

Kittens require a series of vaccinations during their first months of life. Nursing kittens receive antibodies from their mother's milk (maternal antibodies) that protect them from disease during the first months of life. These same antibodies can prevent a vaccine from being totally effective. As maternal antibodies decrease, your veterinarian will give your pet a series of vaccines starting at six to eight weeks of age. These vaccines provide your cat with the best possible protection against disease.

## **Why does my cat need regular booster vaccinations for the same disease?**

The protection provided by a vaccine gradually declines over time. Your pet needs regular "booster" vaccinations to ensure ongoing immunity from disease. Until receiving the last in the series of kitten vaccines at about 16 weeks of age, your pet is not fully protected.

### **Do I need to get my pet vaccinated every year?**

This is a topic that is currently under investigation within veterinary medicine. The duration of immunity for each vaccine is not currently known. While cat owners can have blood tests done to assess their pet's antibody level, this doesn't test the level of immunity currently provided by the pet's immune system. Until more is known about the duration of immunity, the frequency and type of vaccines administered will vary. Talk to your veterinarian about the risk of viral diseases in your area as it relates to your pet's lifestyle and the recommended intervals between vaccines.

### **Why does my veterinarian have to do a physical examination before vaccinating my cat?**

It's important to administer vaccines only to healthy animals. If the animal is already suffering from an illness or is receiving certain drugs, its immune system may not respond to the vaccine. For that reason, prior to vaccinating your cat, your veterinarian will ask about your cat's medical history and perform a complete physical examination.

### **How common are reactions to vaccinations?**

Despite your veterinarian's efforts to design a safe vaccination protocol for every pet, vaccine reactions can occur. Thankfully, they aren't common. Like a drug, a vaccine can cause an adverse reaction, which can range from mild (some discomfort at the injection site, lethargy or loss of appetite for a day or so) to more severe (allergic

reaction, immunologic reactions). Inform your veterinarian if your cat has reacted to a vaccine in the past.

### **I've heard that some vaccinations cause cancer in cats. Is this true?**

Vaccination-induced sarcomas (a form of cancer) in cats are rare – the rate of occurrence is about one in 10,000. They most commonly occur with rabies and feline leukemia vaccinations. It's important for you and your veterinarian to decide if the risk of your cat being exposed to these diseases is greater than the potential risk of developing a vaccine-induced sarcoma. If the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risk, then the vaccine should be given. If your cat develops a lump at the injection site, call your veterinarian.



## **DID YOU KNOW?**

Feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) are contagious, life-threatening diseases in cats. FeLV is generally transmitted through contact with saliva from an infected cat. FIV can also be transmitted this way, however, most cats contract FIV through bite wounds sustained during fights with FIV-infected cats. Cats that go outside are at increased risk for exposure to these diseases. Speak to your veterinarian about testing your cat for FeLV and FIV and appropriate vaccinations.



# HEARTWORM, FLEAS & OTHER PARASITES

## HEARTWORM DISEASE IN CATS

Heartworm is a blood parasite that's passed from animal to animal by mosquitoes.

During the summer months, it may be transferred to a susceptible animal. Fortunately, cats are much less susceptible than dogs to developing infection and are much less likely to show outward signs of disease. Unlike dogs, cats will also often clear their own heartworm infection, although not necessarily before it causes a problem. It's important to note that many affected cats are kept strictly indoors.

Adult heartworms live in the heart and large vessels in the lungs. Clinical signs may include vomiting, coughing, trouble breathing, lack of energy, nosebleeds, collapse and sudden death. More general signs include weight loss and neurological abnormalities (head tilt, blindness, seizures). Cats exhibiting any of these signs should be examined by a veterinarian.

Heartworm is more difficult to detect in cats than dogs. Blood testing is available but must usually be supported by other evidence of infection. All owners of cats who die or are humanely euthanized due to signs that could be related to heartworm disease should consider a post mortem to help determine how widespread heartworm disease is in cats in Ontario. We know that it's here, we just don't know the number of cats it's currently affecting.

As for preventive medication, each animal is an individual and as such, owners should discuss preventive programs with their veterinarian. It's important to discuss heartworm prevention if you will be taking

your cat to the southern United States, where heartworm is much more common.

## FLEAS AND OTHER PARASITES

Parasites may be either internal or external. External parasites live on a cat's skin, and internal parasites live within your pet. Fleas are the most common external parasites. They cause skin irritation and can transmit some types of tapeworms. Check under your cat's coat for small black specks and curled debris on the skin. These specks are the fecal droppings left by fleas. Other external parasites include lice, mites and ticks.

Consult your veterinarian if you suspect that your cat has an external parasite. There are a variety of convenient, safe and effective methods to control these pests.

Other than heartworm, internal parasites include giardia, coccidia, hookworms, roundworms, tapeworms and whipworms. Consult your veterinarian about having your cat's stool analyzed to detect if any of these parasites are present. Cats that go outdoors should be regularly dewormed. Since some parasites may be passed from cats to people, it's important to deworm on a regular basis to protect the health and well-being of the entire family.

Your cat can also get ticks, so you should speak to your veterinarian about preventive medications. Unlike dogs and people, cats aren't susceptible to Lyme disease. However, if there's a chance your cat will encounter ticks, preventive treatment is recommended.



# Spaying & Neutering

Unwanted, abandoned and orphaned cats overwhelm Ontario animal shelters.

Each year, thousands of cats are humanely euthanized because there aren't enough people to care for them.

One female cat can give birth to two to four litters every year. The female offspring of this cat can then have two to four litters every year. After seven years, the result of this indiscriminate breeding may be more than 400,000 cats!

The best way to prevent this sad scenario is by spaying or neutering your cat. Veterinarians strongly urge cat owners to have their cats spayed or neutered when they are approximately six months of age, unless the cats are being used for controlled and responsible breeding purposes.

## SPAYING

Spaying involves the complete removal of the female cat's ovaries and uterus. The surgery eliminates the chance of pregnancy, as well as all heat cycles and the desire to mate. North American veterinarians are also starting to adopt a procedure popular in Europe in which only the ovaries are removed. Spaying

your cat will protect it from uterine infections and other diseases.

Studies show that cats spayed before their first heat cycle are less likely to develop breast cancer.

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## THE FOLLOWING MYTHS ARE FALSE:

- Cats can't be spayed until they've had their first "heat period" or a litter of kittens.
  - My cat's personality will be affected by spaying.
  - Cats that are spayed become fat and lazy.
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## NEUTERING

Neutering is the removal of the male cat's testicles. It may eliminate some behavioural problems, including "spraying" or marking territory. Neutered males are less territorial and less likely to roam. This reduces the risk of injury due to fighting with other animals or being hit by cars.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies estimates that only 44 per cent of cats who enter the shelter system are adopted.



# PREVENTING DENTAL DISEASE

It's estimated that up to 85 per cent of all cats over four years of age have some degree of periodontal disease. Dogs and cats have teeth just like we do, and the same conditions that lead to our tooth and gum problems also occur in our pets' mouths. In cats, a special problem occurs called resorptive lesions. These are painful holes through the enamel into the sensitive dentin and pulp of the tooth. If left unchecked, they can lead to very painful mouths, as well as tooth loss. In addition to pain and discomfort, periodontal disease puts your pet at risk for other problems such as lung, heart, kidney and joint infections. This occurs because bacteria in the mouth enter the bloodstream (a process called bacteremia) and can be distributed throughout the body.

## TOOTH ERUPTION

Just like humans, cats will have two sets of teeth in their lives. A kitten's first set of temporary or deciduous teeth is replaced by the permanent teeth between three and six months of age. Cats have 26 deciduous teeth and 30 adult teeth.

The permanent teeth should remove the deciduous teeth. At no point should there be two teeth in one spot. If you notice this occurring, consult your veterinarian to have the deciduous tooth extracted immediately. If left in this condition, malpositioning of the adult tooth can occur, and plaque and tartar can accumulate more rapidly.

## HOME DENTAL CARE

Routine home care should be started at three to four months of age. Try to make brushing an enjoyable and rewarding experience. It takes an average of two months for your pet



to get used to having its teeth brushed, but the health rewards are well worth it.

Toothpastes and liquid gum conditioners are available for cats, along with tartar control treats and foods. Consult your veterinarian for the one best suited to your pet. Human toothpastes, salt and baking soda should not be used. The foaming action of human toothpaste is irritating, and these substances can cause illness if swallowed.

## VETERINARY DENTAL TREATMENTS

If your cat has existing periodontal disease, a veterinarian will clean her teeth under general anesthetic. The teeth and gumline are examined, and the teeth are scaled and polished. A medicated solution is flushed below the gumline to remove debris and reduce bacteria. Fluoride may then be applied to the teeth. Resorptive lesions require any affected teeth to be extracted.

A comprehensive oral health assessment and treatment performed by your veterinarian can take anywhere from 35 minutes to more than two hours depending on the severity of the dental disease present.



## GROOMING

Cats groom themselves, but they also need your help.

Brush your cat regularly to avoid hairballs. Longhaired breeds will need more frequent brushing (often daily) to avoid painful mats in their fur. Some cat owners also bathe their cats occasionally.

Trimming your cat's nails and providing scratching posts will keep its nails in good condition. Your veterinarian can demonstrate nail trimming techniques during one of the kitten vaccine visits.

## PET IDENTIFICATION

Proper identification can mean the difference between life and death for your cat. Provincial law requires animal shelter operators to take reasonable steps to find and notify the owner of any found cat that has a license tag, microchip or other means of identification. However, fewer than 10 per cent of cats in shelters are ever recovered by their owners because they aren't identified.

Increasingly, pet owners are microchipping their pets. A microchip is a tiny chip that's inserted beneath the animal's skin by your veterinarian. The microchip is permanent and cannot be lost. If a cat is lost and recovered by an animal shelter or veterinarian, the shelter will scan the cat for a chip. When the chip is scanned, a unique identification number is revealed that allows the shelter to determine the name and address of the cat's owner. Even indoor cats should be microchipped, as they may escape by accident. Microchipping may also decrease the cost of licensing your pet in your municipality.

Ask your veterinarian for more information about microchipping.







# BEWARE OF THESE HEALTH HAZARDS

## INDOORS OR OUTDOORS?

Each year, thousands of outdoor cats fall victim to cars, wildlife predators, animal cruelty and other hazards. Outdoor cats are also more likely to contract parasites, viruses and diseases. Outdoor cats often get into fights with other stray or outdoor cats, which can lead to bite wound abscesses and the spread of fatal diseases such as feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus. The life expectancy for an indoor cat is up to six times longer than that of an outdoor cat.

Cats love to explore, and trips outside can be an adventure. However, it's much safer to keep your feline companion indoors. It's also much safer for the birds and wildlife your cat might hunt!

If you want to provide your feline with a chance to get outside, supervised outdoor excursions may be the answer. Train your cat to wear a leash or harness and supervise her outdoors.

Some municipalities require cats to remain on their owners' property.

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## TOP 10 POISONOUS PLANTS

- Lilies (very toxic and can be fatal)
- Autumn crocus
- Azalea
- Cyclamen
- Kalanchoe
- Oleander
- Dieffenbachia
- Daffodils
- Lily of the Valley
- Sago Palm
- Tulips and Hyacinths

\*Source – Pet Poison Hotline

## HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

There are many household products that are dangerous if ingested and should be kept away from cats and other pets.

These products include:

- Antifreeze, gasoline, oil and other automotive products
- Detergents, bleach and cleaning agents
- Insect and rodent bait
- Dental floss, yarn or string
- Holiday decorations, including lights and tinsel
- Human medications
- Human foods



## DID YOU KNOW?

In cold weather, outdoor cats may climb under the hood of a vehicle to seek a source of heat. Before you start your vehicle, bang on the hood once or twice.

# RABIES

## WHAT IS RABIES?

Rabies is a viral disease transmitted through the saliva or tissues in the nervous system from one infected mammal to another. Rabies can be transmitted from a wild animal (i.e. bat or raccoon) to a cat, dog or human, and from pets to humans via a bite or scratch. The virus attacks the central nervous system, causing severe neurological symptoms and then death. Rabies is one of the deadliest diseases on Earth, with a 99.9 per cent fatality rate.

## DOES RABIES EXIST IN ONTARIO?

Yes, rabies poses a significant threat to wildlife, pets and humans in Ontario. Over the last several years, there's been a spike of cases in wildlife, primarily in bats, skunks, foxes and racoons. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency tracks the number of reported rabies cases in each province by year. To view a list of reported cases by area, visit [inspection.gc.ca](https://inspection.gc.ca) and type in the search "rabies in Canada".

## HOW CAN I PROTECT MY CAT AGAINST RABIES?

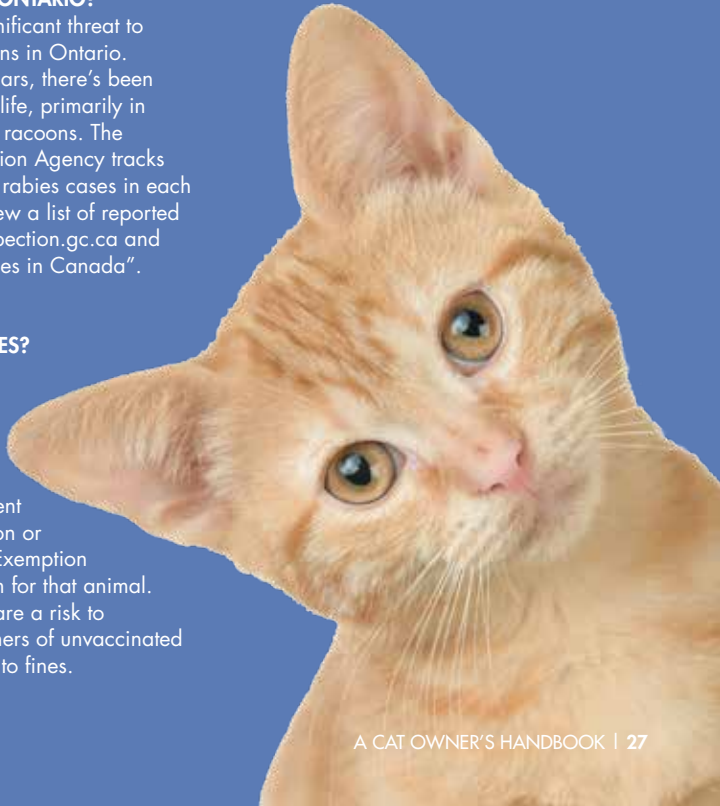
The best way to protect against rabies is by vaccinating your pet. By law, all cats over three months of age must have either a current Certificate of Vaccination or a current Statement of Exemption issued by a veterinarian for that animal. Unvaccinated animals are a risk to human health, and owners of unvaccinated animals can be subject to fines.

## HOW LONG DOES THE RABIES VACCINE LAST?

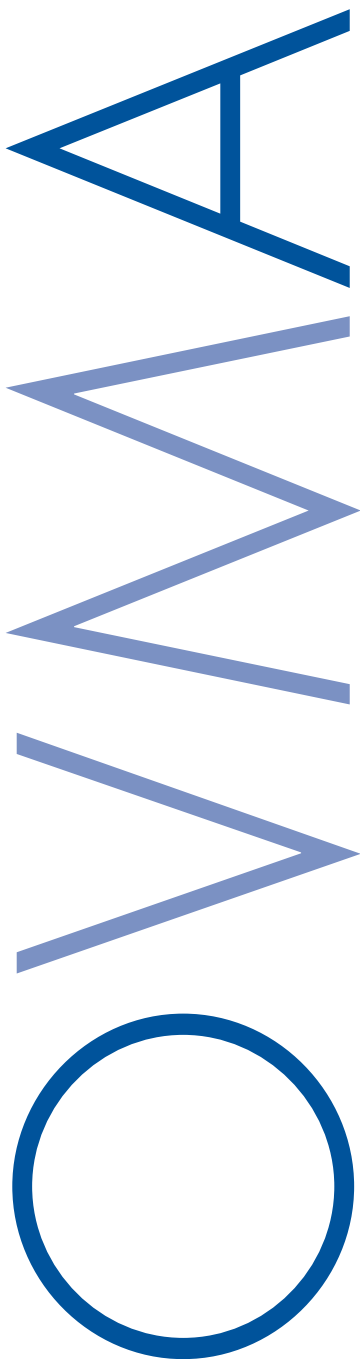
Rabies vaccinations protect your pet for one to three years, depending on the vaccine used. Talk to your veterinarian about the vaccine that's best for your pet.

## MY CAT ENCOUNTERED A WILD ANIMAL THAT I'M CONCERNED MIGHT BE RABID. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you suspect your pet may have been exposed to a rabid animal, contact your veterinarian immediately.







# PET HEALTH INSURANCE

Pet insurance is one of the best ways to plan for unexpected illnesses or injuries. It's estimated that half of all pets will have a major illness in their lifetime. Veterinarians can now offer advanced treatments to help your pet recover from illness or injury, but these treatments can be costly, and veterinary bills can climb to several thousand dollars or more. Pet insurance can help protect you from unexpected costs while providing the best veterinary care for your pet.

OVMA Pet Health Insurance is the first pet health insurance designed and backed by Ontario's veterinarians. Features include:

- Transparent coverage, with the program covering 80 per cent of the cost of treatment, including the examination and taxes.
- A unique, independent review process for any claims disputes.
- Reimbursements can be sent directly to the veterinary practice, so pet owners don't have to pay the entire bill upfront.
- Quick (often same-day) claims processing.
- A portion of the proceeds from each policy goes to support the Farley Foundation, which helps low-income pet owners pay for the cost of veterinary care.



For more information about the **OVMA Pet Health Insurance Program**, visit [www.ovmapetinsurance.com](http://www.ovmapetinsurance.com) or speak to your veterinarian.



Established by the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association in 2002, the Farley Foundation is a registered charity that assists people and pets in need by subsidizing the cost of veterinary care for the pets that mean the world to them.

**TO LEARN MORE, VISIT:**

**[www.farleyfoundation.org](http://www.farleyfoundation.org)**

 @farleyfoundation

 @farleyfndation

 @thefarleyfoundation



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This brochure is provided by the member veterinarians of the OVMA and your local veterinarian:



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