

Scratching Post



Cat Rescue INC.

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CAT & KITTEN CARE PACKET

This packet includes information concerning:

- * OUR RETURN POLICY
- * KITTY COLDS
- * BRINGING YOUR NEW CAT HOME
- * SOME COMMON BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS
- * FACTS ABOUT DECLAWING
- * FEEDING YOUR CAT
- * COMMON HOUSEHOLD POISONS
- * HOW TO DONATE

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CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW CAT!

Please remember that, as our name implies, we are a rescue. We rescue cats and kittens from bad situations, many of which would have no chance at all if not for us. These cats and kittens have probably been exposed to many of the viruses common to all cats. The most common of these are calicivirus and herpesvirus. These viruses cause what is basically the common cold in cats and are not contagious to humans or dogs. There are vaccines that help prevent these but most of the cats coming into the rescue have not received any vaccines until they reach us. Immediately upon intake they are vaccinated, dewormed and treated for fleas. If you adopt a young kitten it is your responsibility to follow through to finish their vaccination schedule.

Although a series of vaccines help your cat fight off these viruses, viruses always remain in the body and may recur later in life. Most recurrences are caused by a weakened immune system or by stress, which can weaken the immune system.

We know how exciting it is to add a new cat to your family! Please remember that your cat is excited too, but may also be feeling some stress amidst all the change. Her whole life is changing as she all of a sudden has a brand new family and home. It is very common for the stress of moving to trigger an upper respiratory infection. Please read the following information on kitten colds.

RETURNS: It is our hope that your new cat will remain in your home for the rest of her life. We are always available to help you with any concerns you may have, and we hope you will utilize this help before making the decision to return your cat. If you are unable to keep your cat, the Scratching Post accepts returns of animals adopted from our shelter by appointment. We offer lifetime post-adoption support. If an issue arises with your cat, please contact us for advice as early as possible. We strive to help animals stay in their homes, but we recognize that sometimes this is simply not possible. Please understand that returns are very stressful on cats and should be considered a last resort.

Thank you for choosing to adopt from us.

Consider introducing your new cat to her new family members one at a time. It will ease her transition if you give your cat a few days to relax and get used to her new routine before inviting your friends over to meet her. Cats are creatures of habit and tend to become stressed as a result of change. Remember that if she is allowed to hide and come out at her own pace, she is doing what she needs to feel safe and will be happier in your home as a result. Do not be surprised if she spends the first few days or weeks hiding.

We encourage you to take your new pet for a checkup, as a cat entering a shelter environment is like a child attending kindergarten for the first time, and may be exposed to many different illnesses. Since your cat's transition to living in your home can be a source of stress and anxiety for her, it can weaken her immune system. As a result, viruses already present in your cat's system may cause her to become ill within the coming 1-2 weeks.

Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) is a very common and contagious viral infection in cats. It is similar to the human cold. Although it can look traumatic, URI is rarely fatal. Some cases can last up to a month, but the severe signs usually last for a week or so.

Viruses do not generally respond to antibiotics, so treatment is indicated only if there is a secondary bacterial infection. If your cat is showing "cold-like" symptoms, take the cat's temperature. Normal is 101-102 degrees. If the temperature is elevated or the cat is not eating, you should consult your veterinarian.

Home care includes "steam treatment." Humidifiers and cats don't always mix, but you can take the cat into the bathroom when you shower. Leave the cat in the room for about twenty minutes afterwards. If the cat isn't eating, open a can of stinky wet cat food, warm in the microwave, and serve. If the kitty still won't eat, he/she should be seen by a veterinarian.

KITTY COLDS

Colds are common in kittens because these little guys have developing immune systems and aren't as able to fight off infection as well as their adult counterparts. These colds are due to upper respiratory infections caused by either virus or bacterial infection.

A little kitten with an upper respiratory infection has symptoms similar to colds in people. You'll notice that he sneezes and coughs frequently. He may also have a runny nose and watery eyes. In some cases, the little one will develop a fever, become less active and lethargic and may eat less than usual. While colds are an annoyance for adult kitties, in kittens they can quickly become serious, leading to pneumonia, trouble breathing or ulcers on the nose, mouth or eyes, according to the Mar Vista Animal Medical Center. The simple loss of fluids caused by a runny nose in a tiny furry baby can also result in dehydration.

What to Do?

Visit your veterinarian if you notice cold symptoms in your little kitty to properly diagnose the condition. She'll be able to examine your furry friend and determine the cause of his sneezy symptoms. In some cases, a virus could be to blame, while in others a bacterial infection could be the cause. The two major causes of upper respiratory infections are either the herpesvirus or calicivirus, both of which account for 80 to 90 percent of all such infections, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. While viruses can't be cured and may recur later in life, bacterial infections can. These may occur as the primary or secondary cause of your little one's symptoms and can be treated with antibiotics to rid your kitty of them.

What to Expect

Kitty colds last around four to 14 days, although they may last longer in little kittens -- up to three or four weeks, according to the Cats Exclusive Veterinary Center. During this time, your vet may want you to administer an antibiotic or antiviral medication orally and may also give you eye drops or nasal drops. Drops help your little one breathe more easily by relieving his congestion or may help soothe his red, irritated eyes. Follow your vet's instructions and bring your little one in for regular exams, especially if his symptoms aren't improving.

Special Vet Care

A major concern of colds in kittens is a failure of them to eat or drink properly. This is because they can't smell their food and generally feel yucky, plus their throats might be sore as well. Feed your little one slightly warm human baby food, without any onion, or soft canned kitten food, to tempt him to eat if he's already weaned. If he doesn't eat or nurse properly, your vet may need to keep him for a few days to ensure he gets the proper nutrition and fluids intravenously or through tube feeding.

Considerations

While feline colds aren't contagious to people, they are contagious to other cats. Both virus and bacteria can become airborne through a simple sneeze, making your other pets sick. You may need to isolate your kitty while he's sick if you do have other animals in your home. During his recovery, make your kitty comfortable by keeping him in a comfy, warm bed and use a vaporizer to help ease his congestion. With lots of care and snuggling and a stress-free environment, your little one should be back to his bouncy, playful self in no time at all.

BRINGING YOUR NEW CAT HOME

INTRODUCING A NEW CAT: The first step in creating harmony between your new cat and the existing cats in your household is to pick the best possible new cat for your household and lifestyle. All cats are individuals, and some may merge into your household better than others. Cats who previously lived with another cat are more likely to get along with other cats than a cat that was an “only child.” Think about the things that the cats already in your home like to do. If they like to play, getting another playful cat is probably a good idea. If your cats prefer to lie in the sun all day, you’re probably better off adopting a cat that has similar habits. A young kitten or adolescent is probably not a good idea for a household with an older or grumpy cat.

REDUCING THE LIKELIHOOD OF PROBLEMS: Even if the cat you are adopting is good with other cats, there is always the possibility of problems when introducing strangers to each other. There are several steps that you can take to reduce the likelihood of problems.

Before bringing your new cat home, create a separate “territory” for her. This area should be equipped with food, water, a scratching post, a litter box, access to natural sunlight, and comfortable resting places. Your other cats should have their own separate territory. Make certain that both areas (the space for the new cat and the space for the other cats) contain multiple hiding places so the cats can easily retreat if necessary. Large cardboard boxes with holes cut in two sides make great hiding places. The second hole allows the cat to escape if cornered by another cat. The boxes will come into play once you start allowing the cats to interact directly, but it can be helpful to introduce the boxes first, so that the cats become accustomed to using them. Keep in mind that cats like to hide in high places, so remove fragile items from shelves or block access to the shelves.

Place your new cat in her space as soon as she arrives home, and spend a minimum of one hour with her (and the other cats in the household) per day. Play with them regularly and watch them closely for signs of stress or anxiety, such as hiding, aggressive behavior, decreased appetite, and/or excessive vocalization. If you see any of these signs, your cat could be suffering from stress. If the signs persist for more than several days and/or if your cat stops eating, consult with your veterinarian. If any cat is showing mild signs of stress, give him or her time to acclimate to the new situation. If all the cats appear comfortable in their spaces, place the new cat in a different room (equipped with the same amenities) after two days, and allow your other cats to enter the new cat’s original territory. This will allow each cat to become accustomed to each other’s scent in a nonthreatening way. Allow the cats to acclimate to their new areas for one day.

CAT PHEROMONES: Here’s another way to introduce cats to each other’s scent: Cats have glands in their cheeks that produce pheromones. When your cat rubs her cheek against a wall, chair, or your leg, she produces pheromones, which are chemical substances that can help to relieve anxiety and provide information about the cat producing those pheromones. Exposing each cat to towels that were gently rubbed on the new cat’s cheeks may be a good way to introduce them. Some cats respond very well to a synthetic pheromone (a spray or diffuser), a product that can be bought online or in pet supply stores.

Next, you can start allowing the cats closer access to each other by placing them on either side of a closed door so that they can smell each other directly.

The next step is to allow them to see each other through a baby gate or a door that is propped open two inches. If the cats are interested in each other and seem comfortable, allow them to meet. Open the door to the rooms between the cats and observe them closely. If any cat shows signs of significant stress or aggression, separate them again and introduce them more slowly. Once the cats have acclimated to being allowed to sniff each other through a door, bring each cat into a large room, on

opposite sides. If you have a willing helper, each person should play, pet and/or give food treats to one of the cats. If you do not have a helper, place the more comfortable cat in a cat carrier with a bowl of canned cat food to keep him occupied and play with the other cat. Over multiple sessions, gradually bring the cats closer to each other. This exercise teaches the cats that they get special rewards in each other's presence, and that nothing bad is happening. With time, the cats will learn that they are not a serious threat to each other.

CREATING A HAPPY HOME: Remember, an anxious cat is much more likely to behave aggressively than a cat who is comfortable and relaxed. If you use patience in the initial stages of the introduction process, you will probably increase your chances of a harmonious household. The above recommendations are guidelines to increase the likelihood that your new cat will get along with the existing cat(s) in your household. If you have tried these techniques and your cats are still not getting along, please seek the help of your veterinarian or a behaviorist.

INTRODUCING CATS AND DOGS: Cats and dogs don't have to be mortal enemies. Although a few dogs may never truly be safe around cats, properly introducing your dog and cat will go a long way towards bringing peace to your household.

KNOW YOUR DOG: Dogs usually fall into one of 3 categories when meeting a new cat:

1. They ignore it completely.
2. They are very excited and interested at first, but learn to get along with the cat, or quickly become bored with it
3. They never quit chasing the cat and may even hurt it. Dogs that fall into the third category should not be kept in homes with cats. Certain breeds such as the sight hounds (Greyhounds, Afghan Hounds, etc.), northern breeds (Akitas, Huskies, etc.) and some Terrier breeds are generally not recommended with cats.

BEFORE THE INTRODUCTIONS: If you are bringing a new dog or puppy into a home with a cat, make changes in the cat's environment well in advance of the dog's arrival. This way, your cat won't blame the dog for what she sees as unnecessary upheaval. For instance: move the cat's bowls onto a counter or the washing machine where the new dog can't reach them. Dogs are very attracted to cat food, due to its higher fat content and flavor. They are also attracted to cat feces. Make certain that both the cat's food dish and litter box are well out of your new dog's reach, but still accessible to your cat. Your cat won't get as stressed if these changes in her surroundings occur gradually. If you are bringing a new kitten or cat into your dog's home, get the supplies for the cat or kitten in advance, and teach your dog that these items are off limits. Your cat will need a safe spot up high where she can get away from the dog and watch what's going on. This could be on top of the fridge, dresser, or cat tree. Once the cat is comfortable watching from a distance, she will gradually get curious and come down to investigate. Do not try to rush this process. Your cat's comfort depends on being able to adjust at her own pace.

HEMCOMING: When you first bring your new cat home, confine her to a private room with the door shut. Let the old and new pets sniff each other under the door. Do not allow the dog to dig at the door, or to stand and bark constantly. If the dog will not stop, this may not be a good candidate for a cat-owning household. Place towels or beds that smell like the cat in the dog's area, and vice versa. When the dog is outside, allow the cat to roam the dog's area, investigating the dog's scent. Return the cat to her area before the dog comes back in. Then the dog will be able to smell the scent the cat left in his area.

SOME COMMON BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

REFUSAL TO USE THE LITTER BOX: Health problems, such as urinary tract infections, are a common reason for cats to not use their litter boxes. Take your cat to the veterinarian if he is consistently urinating or defecating outside of the litter box. Refusal to use a litter box may also be caused by litter preference, box cleanliness, inability to get into the box, being bullied by another cat in your household, litter box placement, or a number of other factors. Be sure to clean soiled areas thoroughly with an enzyme cleaner to eliminate offensive odors and reduce the chance of your cat returning to that area.

The first step (after ruling out medical causes) to determining why your cat is not using the litterbox involves experimenting by variety. Purchase additional litterboxes which can be used while you troubleshoot this issue.

Once your cat has resumed regular use of the litterbox, you can most likely reduce the number of litterboxes. Experiment with the size and shape of the box, type of litter used, and box placement. If there is a specific area that your cat is using instead of the litterbox, do what you can to keep her away from that spot, or make it less appealing.

A shower curtain or tarp draped over a spot which a cat is using to relieve herself will change the surface. Cats, being very clean creatures, do not like relieving themselves on surfaces which risk splashing back up at them. If your cat is urinating near a door, window, or other threshold to your house, she may feel that her territory is being threatened. Sometimes it is impossible to determine why a cat may suddenly feel territorial, because this can be sparked by very subtle events. For example, if your cat views a strange animal across the street from her window perch, it could cause her to feel threatened. Try putting a scratching post near the location which she is inappropriately urinating. Cats release pheromones through the pads of their paws when they scratch, so the scratching post will give her an appropriate outlet to assert her territory

SCRATCHING WHY CATS DO IT: In the wild, cats scratch to signal their presence to other cats in the area. Cats also use scratching as a form of physical therapy for the muscles and tendons in their paws, as well as to help shuck off old nail husks.

- Give your cat as many different scratching posts as you are able. Cats prefer variety, and your cat may have a preference to a particular type of scratcher. Ideally, you should have at least one scratcher that lies flat on the ground, and one that is vertical. Most cats are happy with a corrugated cardboard scratcher. Avoid using scratchers which are similar in material to upholstery which is used in your household. This can be confusing for your cat, as she can not distinguish what is and is not meant for scratching if the surfaces appear similar to her.
- Put the scratchers in areas your cat likes to spend time in. Position them in obvious areas at first (or near places your cat has scratched before) and gradually move them to less obvious places later.
- Praise your cat for using the post. Put treats on it, rub it with catnip, and attach fun dangly toys to it to make it more attractive.
- If your cat is scratching on inappropriate surfaces, make that surface an unappealing place for her to scratch. The most simple method of doing so is by spraying a citrus scent on the area. Cats do not like the smell of citrus, and this will cause her to find a more preferable place to scratch (such as her cardboard scratcher which smells like catnip and tuna). Cayenne pepper and sprays made specifically to repel cats are also effective.
- Feliway®, a pheromone-containing spray, has been touted as a scratching repellent. The idea is that the scent will alter the significance of the previously marked (scratched) area and cats will no longer be interested in scratching there.

LYING IN THE LITTER BOX

Anxiety: If you have recently adopted your cat, he may spend a lot of time hanging out in the litter box because he is unsure of his surroundings and feels safe in there, especially in an enclosed box. While this may seem unacceptable to humans, the litter box smells like your cat and the scent of his urine; cats actually mark their territory with their urine and its scent can sometimes be comforting to an anxious cat. Your cat should begin to explore his new home after a few days, but if he continues to spend time in the litter box, provide him with a separate box that contains a blanket instead of cat litter. This way, he has a spot to cuddle and sleep in as his refuge.

Stressful Situations: A cat who is under stress from the addition of a new animal, such as a second cat, may sit in the litter box to claim it as his own and prevent the other cat from using the box. The cat may also stay in the litter box for safety if he feels threatened by another cat or dog. Provide multiple cats with a litter box for each cat plus one extra to prevent territorial issues involving litter box guarding, recommends the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. If you have a dog, place your cat's litter box in an area that your cat can easily get to without being bothered by your dog, or set up a special room for him that your dog can't access. A few sprays of a synthetic cat pheromone or a pheromone diffuser can also put your cat at ease, reducing his desire to hide and lie in the litter box. In serious cases, you may want to consult with your vet about the use of an anti-anxiety medication to curb your cat's desire to hide in the litter box.

Dysuria: A cat who lies in the litter box may do so because he is unable to urinate properly due to a condition called dysuria, which may prompt him to stay in the litter box to continually try. Dysuria results in painful urination, blood in the urine, the frequent urge to urinate and unproductive urination. There are several causes for this condition, including a urinary tract infection, the presence of crystals in the bladder and tumors in the bladder or urethra, according to PetPlace. Because these conditions give your cat the urge to urinate, but he is unable to, he may lie in the box to continue to try. They also cause fatigue, weakness and nausea; this is part of the reason why you find him lying in the litter box—he may be too exhausted to move.

Urinary Conditions: Urinary tract infections are caused by the presence of bacteria in the bladder and cause pain when the cat urinates. When a cat's urine is too acidic, calcium oxalate crystals in the kidneys or bladder may form; when it's too alkaline, struvite crystals form. These crystals not only irritate the bladder, causing an infection, but can lead to a blocked urethra. A cat with a blocked urethra cannot urinate, leading to a buildup of potassium in the body. This is medical emergency and can result in kidney or heart failure if not treated within 24 hours, according to the 2nchance.info website. Visit your veterinarian for a proper diagnosis and treatment. Another possible cause of a cat lying in a litter box is feline interstitial cystitis, a neurological condition that increases your cat's need to urinate more frequently. It is a painful condition that is also a medical emergency, according to the ASPCA.

Other Medical Causes

Chronic diarrhea or gastrointestinal upset may cause your cat to lie in the litter box due to the constant urge to defecate. A number of intestinal conditions, including internal parasite infestation, colitis and megacolon can cause diarrhea, according to Cat Channel. If you've recently changed your cat's diet, this could also be the cause of stomach upset that propels your cat to lie in the litter box. An exam by a veterinarian can determine if there is a medical cause for your cat's behavior.

The 10 Most Common Poisons That Affect Cats



by Dr. Lorie Huston, DVM

What are the most common cat poisons—do you know? Back in 2006, an article published in *Veterinary Medicine* reported "The 10 most common toxicoses in cats" based on the 10 most common feline poisons reported to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) Animal Poison Control Center.

The top poisons reported in this article included:

Canine permethrin insecticides

These are flea and tick products made specifically for dogs that were used mistakenly on cats.

Other topical insecticides

Most of these products are relatively safe when used according to label directions but can be dangerous when directions are not followed carefully.

Venlafaxine (Effexor)

This is a prescription medication; an antidepressant used in people. The poison control center reports that cats readily consume this medication when given the opportunity.

Glow sticks and glow jewelry

These products are not terribly toxic but have an extremely unpleasant taste that can cause drooling and agitation for the unsuspecting cat that bites into one. Watching the cat's reaction can be a frightening experience for a cat owner and prompts many inquiries about these products and their potential for adverse effects.

Lilies

These beautiful plants can be lethal for your cat. All parts of the plant are considered toxic and even getting pollen on the fur from coming too close to one of these plants and then grooming can be enough to cause illness.

Liquid potpourri

These products may contain both detergents that are corrosive to the lining of the throat and *esophagus* as well as essential oils that can be very toxic for cats.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) This includes canine formulas that are not labeled for use in cats because of sensitivity and dosing issues as well as over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen. Often these are administered by well-meaning pet owners who mistakenly believe they are helping their cat. (It should be mentioned that there are some NSAIDs that are labeled for cats and are safe when used appropriately, though NSAID usage in cats remains a controversial issue in the veterinary profession.)

Acetaminophen (Tylenol)

Like NSAIDs, this drug is most often administered to a cat by a well-meaning but misinformed cat owner.

Anticoagulant rodenticides (rat poison)

These products are toxic not only to rats, mice, and other rodents, but also to pets such as your cat if ingested. They work by preventing blood from clotting normally, causing bleeding deficits.

Amphetamines These may be human prescription medications or illicit drugs. They can be dangerous if ingested by your cat.

The Pet Poison Helpline reports their top feline poisonings as the following (quoted directly from their website):

- **Lilies**
- Canine pyrethroid insecticides (topical flea and tick medicine designed for dogs but erroneously placed on cats)
- Household cleaners
- Rodenticides
- Paints and varnishes
- Veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (Rimadyl®, Deramaxx®)
- Glow sticks/glow jewelry
- Amphetamines (such as ADD/ADHD drugs)
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol® in brand name or generic form)
- Ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin® in brand name or generic form)

If you believe your cat has ingested or been exposed to a potential toxin, contact your veterinarian for advice immediately. Many poisons are fast-acting and even a small delay can make a difference between life and death for your cat.

Declawing cats: Far worse than a manicure

People often mistakenly believe that declawing their cats is a harmless "quick fix" for unwanted scratching. They don't realize that declawing can make a cat less likely to use the litter box or more likely to bite. Declawing also can cause lasting physical problems for your cat.

Many countries have banned declawing. The Humane Society of the United States opposes declawing except for the rare cases when it is necessary for medical purposes, such as the removal of cancerous nail bed tumors.

People who are worried about being scratched, especially those with immunodeficiencies or bleeding disorders, may be told incorrectly that their health will be protected by declawing their cats. However, infectious disease specialists don't recommend declawing. The risk from scratches for these people is less than those from bites, cat litter, or fleas carried by their cats.

The truth about cats and scratching

Scratching is normal cat behavior. It isn't done to destroy a favorite chair or to get even. Cats scratch to remove the dead husks from their claws, mark territory, and stretch their muscles.

Cats are usually about 8 weeks old when they begin scratching. That's the ideal time to train kittens to use a scratching post and allow nail trims. Pet caregivers should not consider declawing a routine prevention for unwanted scratching. Declawing can actually lead to an entirely different set of behavior problems that may be worse than shredding the couch.

What is declawing?

Too often, people think that declawing is a simple surgery that removes a cat's nails—the equivalent of having your fingernails trimmed. Sadly, this is far from the truth.

Declawing traditionally involves the amputation of the last bone of each toe. If performed on a human being, it would be like cutting off each finger at the last knuckle.

It is an unnecessary surgery that provides no medical benefit to the cat. Educated pet parents can easily train their cats to use their claws in a manner that allows everyone in the household to live together happily.

How is a cat declawed?

The standard method of declawing is amputating with a scalpel or guillotine clipper. The wounds are closed with stitches or surgical glue, and the feet are bandaged.

Another method is laser surgery, in which a small, intense beam of light cuts through tissue by heating and vaporizing it. However, it's still the amputation of the last toe bone of the cat and carries with it the same long-term risks of lameness and behavioral problems as does declawing with scalpels or clippers.

If performed on a human being, declawing would be like cutting off each finger at the last knuckle.

A third procedure is the tendonectomy, in which the tendon that controls the claw in each toe is severed. The cat keeps their claws, but can't control them or extend them to scratch. This procedure is associated with a high incidence of abnormally thick claw growth. Therefore, more frequent and challenging nail trims are required to prevent the cat's claws from snagging on people, carpet, furniture, and drapes, or from growing into the cat's paw pads.

Because of complications, a cat who has been given a tendonectomy may require declawing later. Although a tendonectomy is not actually amputation, a 1998 study published in the "Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association" found the incidence of bleeding, lameness, and infection was similar between tendonectomy and declawing.

Some negative effects of declawing

Medical drawbacks to declawing include pain in the paw, infection, tissue necrosis (tissue death), lameness, and back pain. Removing claws changes the way a cat's foot meets the ground and can cause pain similar to wearing an uncomfortable pair of shoes. There can also be a regrowth of improperly removed claws, nerve damage, and bone spurs.

For several days after surgery, shredded newspaper is typically used in the litter box to prevent litter from irritating declawed feet. This unfamiliar litter substitute, accompanied by pain when scratching in the box, may lead cats to stop using the litter box. Some cats may become biters because they no longer have their claws for defense.

Try our tips for stopping unwanted scratching

If you are worried about your cat damaging your home, or want to avoid unwanted scratching, start with these tips:

- Keep their claws trimmed to minimize damage to household items.
- Provide stable scratching posts and boards around your home. Offer different materials like carpet, sisal, wood, and cardboard, as well as different styles (vertical and horizontal). Use toys and catnip to entice your cat to use the posts and boards.
- Ask your veterinarian about soft plastic caps (like Soft Paws®) that are glued to the cat's nails. They need to be replaced about every six weeks.
- Attach a special tape (like Sticky Paws®) to furniture to deter your cat from unwanted scratching.

Don't subject your cat to unnecessary procedures

Declawing and tendonectomies should be reserved only for those rare cases in which a cat has a medical problem that would warrant such surgery, such as the need to remove cancerous nail bed tumors.

Feeding Your Cat: Know the Basics of Feline Nutrition

Lisa A. Pierson, DVM catinfo.org

Diet is the brick and mortar of health. This paper lays out some often-ignored principles of feline nutrition and explains why cats have a much better chance at optimal health if they are fed a canned food diet instead of dry kibble. Putting a little thought into what you feed your cat(s) can pay big dividends over their lifetime and very possibly help them avoid serious, painful, life-threatening, and costly illnesses.

An increasing number of nutrition-savvy veterinarians are now strongly recommending the feeding of canned food instead of dry kibble. However, many veterinarians are still recommending/condoning the feeding of dry food to cats. Sadly, this species-inappropriate source of food only serves to promote disease in our cats as discussed below.

Like medical doctors for humans, veterinarians receive very little training in school regarding nutrition. And what is discussed is often taught by representatives of large pet food companies, or the curriculum is sponsored - and heavily influenced - by members of the commercial pet food industry. This represents a significant conflict of interest. After we leave veterinary school, the most commonly available source for our nutrition 'education' continues to be the large pet food companies that manufacture so-called 'therapeutic/ prescription' diets. Unfortunately, the result is that veterinarians are not always the best source of nutrition advice.

Dry food addicts

If your cat is a dry food addict, please see **Tips for Transitioning Dry Food Addicts to Canned Food** in the sidebar at catinfo.org. All cats can be switched to a water-rich, low-carb diet if their caregivers are very patient and try enough tricks.

What's wrong with dry kibble - including any 'prescription' diet that is sold by your veterinarian?

The three key negative issues associated with dry food are:

- 1) **water content is too low** - predisposing your cat to serious and life-threatening urinary tract diseases including extremely painful and often fatal (and very expensive to treat) urethral obstructions.
- 2) **carbohydrate load is too high** - possibly predisposing your cat to diabetes, obesity, and intestinal disease - note that low-carb dry foods are NOT healthy diets since they are still water-depleted and are harshly cooked resulting in nutrient loss/alteration
- 3) **type of protein** - too high in plant-based versus animal-based proteins - cats are obligate carnivores and are designed to eat meat, not grains/plants - grains only serve to enhance the profit margin of the pet food company and do not promote the health of your cat

Other negative issues include:

- ◆ bacterial contamination (can lead to vomiting and diarrhea),
- ◆ fungal mycotoxins (contained in grains and are extremely toxic),
- ◆ insects and their feces (can cause respiratory problems),
- ◆ ingredients that often cause allergic reactions, and
- ◆ all dry food is harshly cooked which destroys/alters vital nutrients.

My Cat is Doing Just "Fine" on Dry Food!

I often hear people make the above statement. However consider the following:

Every living creature is "fine" until outward signs of a disease process are exhibited. That may sound like a very obvious and basic statement but if you think about it.....

- ◆ Every cat on the Feline Diabetes Message Board was "fine" until their owners started to recognize the signs of diabetes.
- ◆ Every cat with a blocked urinary tract was "fine" until they started to strain to urinate and either died from a ruptured bladder or had to be rushed to the hospital for emergency catheterization.
- ◆ Every cat with an inflamed bladder (cystitis) was "fine" until they ended up in pain, passing blood in their urine, and missing their litter box - soiling the home through no fault of their own.
- ◆ Every cat was 'fine' until the feeding of species-inappropriate, hyperallergenic ingredients caught up with him and he started to show signs of food intolerance/IBD (inflammatory bowel disease) or asthma.
- ◆ Every cat was "fine" until that kidney or bladder stone got big enough to cause clinical signs.
- ◆ Every cancer patient was "fine" until their tumor grew large enough or spread far enough so that clinical signs were observed by the patient.

The point is that diseases 'brew' long before being noticed by the living being.

This is why the statement "but my cat is healthy/fine on dry food" means very little to me because I believe in preventative nutrition. I don't want to end up saying "oops.....I guess he is not so fine now!!" when a patient presents to me with a medical problem that could have been avoided if a species-appropriate diet (low-carb canned or balanced homemade food - not dry food) had been fed to begin with.

Of course, in order to be on board with the 'preventative nutrition' argument, a person has to understand the following facts:

- ◆ All urinary tract systems are much healthier with an appropriate amount of water flowing through them. Painful, life threatening, and very expensive-to-treat urinary tract obstructions commonly occur when cats (especially males) are fed dry food. Again, see Opie's pictures at catinfo.org (Urinary Tract Diseases). These obstructions are serious medical emergencies but are extremely uncommon among cats fed canned food - especially if extra water is added to the canned food. Also, cats (males and females) that are fed a water-rich diet of canned food are much less likely to end up with painful cystitis.
- ◆ Cats inherently have a low thirst drive and need to consume water *with* their food. A cat's normal prey is ~70 - 75% water; dry food is only 5-10% water. Contrary to the wishful thinking of cat owners, cats do not make up this deficit at the water bowl. Several studies have shown that cats on canned food consume double the amount of water when compared to cats on dry food when all sources (food and water bowl) are considered.
- ◆ Carbohydrates wreak havoc on some cats' blood sugar/insulin balance predisposing them to diabetes. Dry foods, as well as some canned foods, are high in carbohydrates with some much worse than others. Note that "grain-free" does not always mean "low-carb" since potatoes and peas are often used instead of grains.

It is very important to remember that not all proteins are created equal.

Proteins derived from animal tissues have a complete amino acid profile. (Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins. Think of them as pieces of a puzzle.) Plant-based proteins do not contain the full complement (puzzle pieces) of the critical amino acids required by an obligate carnivore. The quality and composition of a protein (are all of the puzzle pieces present?) is also referred to as its biological value.

Humans and dogs can take the pieces of the puzzle contained in the plant protein and, from those, make the missing pieces. Cats cannot do this. This is why humans and dogs can live on a vegetarian diet but cats cannot. (Note that I do not recommend vegetarian diets for dogs.)

Generally speaking, the protein in dry food, which is often heavily plant-based and always harshly cooked, is not equal in quality to the protein in canned food, which is (in most instances) meat-based and more gently cooked. The protein in dry food, therefore, earns a lower biological value score. Because plant proteins are cheaper than meat proteins, pet food companies will have a higher profit margin when using corn, wheat, soy, rice, etc. Most canned foods, when figured on a dry matter basis (not by using the values on the can or bag which are wet weight values), contain more protein than dry food. But remember, the protein amount does not tell the whole story. It is the protein's biological value that is critical.

We Are Feeding Cats Too Many Carbohydrates

In their natural setting, cats would never consume the high level of carbohydrates (grains/potatoes/peas, etc.) that are in the dry foods (and some canned foods) that we routinely feed them. In the wild, your cat's normal prey (rodents, birds, lizards, etc.) provides a high protein, high-moisture, meat-based diet, with a moderate level of fat and with less than 2 percent of her diet consisting of calories from carbohydrates.

The average dry food contains 35-50 percent carbohydrate calories (think *profit margin*) which can severely alter the sugar/insulin balance in some cats. (See Diabetes at catinfo.org.) A high quality canned food, on the other hand, contains approximately 3-5 percent carbohydrate calories. Please note that not all canned foods are suitably low in carbohydrates since they can also contain high levels of grains, potatoes, and peas. (See the Protein/Fat/Carb Chart linked in the sidebar at catinfo.org.)

Cats have no dietary need for carbohydrates and, more worrisome is the fact that a diet that is high in carbohydrates can be detrimental to their health. You would never feed an herbivore (horse, cow, etc.) a diet of meat, so why feed a carnivore meat-flavored cereals?

Think 'fresh'!

Many of us have heard nutritionists recommend that we 'shop the perimeter' of the grocery store since that is where fresh, unprocessed foods (fruits, vegetables, meat, etc.) are found. Needless to say, dry pet food is very highly processed (e.g., cooked at a high temperature for a long time) and would certainly not be found anywhere near the perimeter of the store.

Why do we feed dry food to cats? The answers are simple. Grains are cheap. Dry food is convenient. Affordability and convenience sells.

◆ Cats are strict carnivores which means they are designed to get their protein from meat – not from the high level of grains/peas/potatoes found in dry food.

◆ Contrary to a popular myth, dry food exerts no beneficial effect on dental health and has no scientific support for its use in preventing dental disease. It is often swallowed whole but even if it is chewed, it is brittle and simply shatters – providing no abrasive force against the teeth. That said, canned food also does not provide any abrasive force and is no better (but no worse) for dental health when compared to dry food. Brushing your cat's teeth daily is the best way to keep their mouth healthy. Also, supplying chunks of meat to chew on is also helpful. See Making Cat Food – Dental Health section at catinfo.org

Feeding cats correctly is definitely a 'pay me now or pay me later' issue. Cat caregivers often state that canned food is too expensive. However, considering the cost to treat the illnesses that arise from feeding dry food, most people re-think this issue after they receive their vet bill.

Consider practicing preventative nutrition before your furry buddy ends up in a diseased state that could have been prevented with proper nutrition.

Read on if you would like more details regarding a feline species-appropriate diet. Some information will be repeated from above to reinforce the critical points.

Cats Need Plenty of Water With Their Food

This is a very important section because it emphasizes why even the low-carb, grain-free dry foods are not optimal food sources for your cat. Keep in mind that the cheapest canned food is better than any dry food on the market.

Cats do not have a very strong thirst drive when compared to other species. Therefore, it is critical for them to ingest a water-rich diet.

Cats are designed to obtain most of their water from their diet since their normal prey is approximately 70 percent water. Dry foods are harshly cooked down to only 5-10 percent water whereas canned foods contain approximately 78 percent water. It is clear that canned foods are better suited to meet the cat's water needs. A cat consuming a predominantly dry-food diet does drink more water than a cat consuming a canned food diet, but when water from all sources is added together (what's in their diet plus what they drink), the cat on dry food consumes approximately half the amount of water compared to a cat eating canned food. This substantially lower water intake sets cats up for significant kidney, and bladder diseases, as well as urethral obstructions which are excruciatingly painful, costly to treat, and can be fatal.

Think of canned food as flushing your cat's urinary tract several times a day. This is a very important tool to keep your cat from developing urinary tract problems including life-threatening urethral blockages, infection, inflammation (cystitis), and possibly chronic kidney disease which is a leading cause of death in cats.

Cats Need Animal-Based Protein

Cats are obligate (strict) carnivores and are very different from dogs in their nutritional needs. What does it mean to be an 'obligate carnivore'? It means that your cat was built by Mother Nature to get her nutritional needs met by the consumption of a large amount of animal-based proteins (meat/organs) - not plant-based proteins (grains/vegetables).

Do many cats survive on water-depleted, high-carb, plant-based, harshly-cooked, bacteria-laden dry kibble? Yes, many do. However I choose to feed a diet to my cats and my patients that will promote optimal health - not just survival. There is a significant difference between *thriving* and *surviving*.

'We are what we eat' is not just a useless cliché. As noted above, diet is the foundation for optimal health of any living being - including our four-legged friends.

If you would like to read more about optimal feline nutrition, please visit catinfo.org where you will find this article in its entirety, as well as other writings on feline care including litter box issues and preparing a balanced homemade diet.

Dr. Lisa A. Pierson
catinfo.org
November 2013 4

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Emergency Care Contact List (24 hours clinics)

VCA Northwood Animal Hospital

3255 N St Rd 9

Anderson IN 46012

(765) 649-5218 or (800) 341-6111 FREE TELEPHONE CONSULTS

**Northeast Indiana Veterinary Emergency & Speciality
Hospital (NIVES)**

5818 Maplecrest Road

Fort Wayne IN 46835

(260) 426-1062

FREE TELEPHONE CONSULTS

Purdue Veterinary Teaching Hospital

625 Harrison Street

West Lafayette IN 47907 Regular Hours: Mon-Fri 8am-5pm

(765) 496-7911 For Emergencies open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

Animal Emergency Clinic

2324 Grape Road

Mishawaka IN 46545

(574) 259-8387

FREE TELEPHONE CONSULTS

North Central Veterinary Emergency Center

1645 U.S. 421

Westville IN 46391

(219) 785-7300

****Poison Hotlines****

ASPCA Emergency Poison Hotline (888) 426-4435 (fee charged)

Animal Poison Hotline (888) 232-8870 (fee per incident)

Pet Poison Hotline (800) 213-6680 (fee per incident)