



ANIMAL CLINIC OF NORTH TOPEKA, P.A.

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Congratulations!

We are so excited about the new addition to your family! We would love to partner with you to make sure your kitten grows into a healthy, active and happy cat for many years to come.

Here is what to expect at your first kitten visit:

- We will review your pet's previous health and vaccination history
- Your kitten will get a complete physical examination by our veterinarians
- We will begin or update vaccinations as appropriate
- We will discuss heartworm prevention, flea and tick control, and deworming
- You can ask any questions on feeding, litter box training, scratching and anything else!

Vaccination Schedule

Below is the vaccine schedule for kittens, based on recommendations by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP)'s Feline Vaccination Advisory Panel. Don't worry – if your kitten doesn't exactly fit this chart, our veterinarians will work with you to establish a protocol that is right for your pet!

Age	Vaccinations	Date Given
8 weeks	1 st Purevax RCP Fecal exam	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
12 weeks	Feline Leukemia and FIV test 2 nd Purevax RCP 1 st Purevax Leukemia	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
16 weeks	Purevax RCP booster Purevax Leukemia booster Purevax Rabies (1yr)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>



Why Vaccinate?

Vaccinations protect your kitten from many serious diseases, including all these listed below:

Feline RCP combination vaccine: This vaccine protects against three different diseases at once!

- *Feline Herpesviral Rhinotracheitis:* This virus is the most common cause of upper respiratory disease in cats. Almost all cats are exposed to the virus at some point in their lives, and the virus remains in their body but is kept at bay by the immune system. Sick cats may develop a fever, frequent sneezing, ocular and nasal discharge and inflammation around the eyes (conjunctivitis). Symptoms are often most severe in young kittens and immunosuppressed cats. Even in healthy adult cats, the virus can cause flare-ups during periods of stress and result in transient upper respiratory infections.
- *Feline Calicivirus:* Another respiratory virus, calici causes severe upper respiratory symptoms, oral ulceration, facial swelling, and hair loss around the face and feet. As with herpesvirus, this virus is spread mainly by direct contact with oral or nasal secretions, but it can also live in the environment for up to one month.
- *Feline Panleukopenia:* Panleukopenia virus is similar to canine parvovirus, causing lethargy, anorexia, vomiting, and diarrhea with a high mortality rate. If infected *in utero*, kittens are born with significant neurologic problems. The virus is shed in the feces, which can contaminate surfaces and remain infective in the environment for up to one year. Treatment is limited and those cats who are infected with this virus often succumb to it.

Feline Leukemia: Feline leukemia (FeLV) is a retrovirus, a specific type of virus that causes lifelong infection of a cat. Other retroviruses include feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The virus is spread by direct cat-to-cat contact, such as bite wounds, mutual grooming and from infected mothers to kittens *in utero* or during nursing. Infected cats either develop *regressive* infection (where they remain infected but do not shed virus or have any symptoms) or *progressive* infection (where the virus continues to replicate, be shed, and cause FeLV-associated disease). Cats with progressive infection can develop lymphoma or other cancers, chronic inflammatory conditions, various eye diseases, recurrent infections and/or persistent fever. A very effective vaccine is available and recommended for all kittens, while an annual booster is reserved mostly for cats who go outdoors or have contact with other potentially infected cats.

Rabies: 100% FATAL, 100% PREVENTABLE

Rabies vaccination is required by law and is the most important vaccination your kitten will receive. The rabies virus causes a fatal, incurable disease of the neurologic system of all mammals, including humans. Each year in Kansas, dozens of animals test positive for rabies including cats, dogs, horses, cattle and bats. Rabies vaccination protects not only your pet, but also your family by stopping the chain of transmission. Even indoor-only cats could be exposed if they escape outside or if bats or other wildlife sneak inside your home. Cats need a rabies booster vaccine annually to stay current.

Why Do the FeLV/FIV Test?

The feline leukemia (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency (FIV) viruses are among the most common infectious diseases of cats. We believe that all cats should be tested at least once in their lives because knowing the infection status of your cat is critical for proper care. Both of these can be life-threatening viruses, but proper preventive care can give infected cats longer, healthier lives. The test requires just a few drops of blood and can be run here at the clinic in under 20 minutes.

Feline leukemia was discussed on the previous page because we do have a very effective vaccine that we recommend in all test-negative kittens. Below is more information on FIV. Unlike the leukemia vaccine, the FIV vaccine is not routinely recommended for cats because of efficacy and safety concerns.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV): Transmission of FIV is most often associated with a deep bite wound from an infected cat. Some FIV-infected cats can go on to live a relatively normal life, but others succumb to diseases related to a dysfunctional immune system such as chronic inflammatory conditions and various cancers. All FIV-positive cats should be indoor-only, both to prevent transmission to other cats as well as to prevent their exposure to other infectious diseases to which they are especially susceptible.

Litterbox Tips

A huge benefit of kittens over puppies is that for the most part, kittens come litterbox trained! There are a few things to keep in mind to make your kitten's litterbox experience a positive one and avoid problems in the future.







- Get litterboxes that have a large area but low walls so it is easy to get in and out of the box
- You should have one more litterbox than there are cats in the home (ex – 4 boxes for 3 cats)
- Have at least one litterbox on every level of your home
- Clean the litterbox once to twice daily
- Our favorite litter types are the clumping litter or pine pellets because they are easy to clean, low odor, and low dust. Once you find a type your cat likes, it is best not to change frequently.



Intestinal Parasites

We recommend collecting a fecal sample to test for any intestinal parasites in your kitten. There are numerous intestinal parasites but no universal dewormer, so it is the most economical and safest for your kitten to test first, then only treat them with what they need.

Most Common Intestinal Parasites

Parasite Name	Description	Picture
Roundworms **ZOOBOTIC**	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Most common parasitic worm of cats- Can be several inches long- Spread by eating contaminated soil or from an infected mother to her young- Can also infect humans!	
Hookworms **ZOOBOTIC**	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Small red worms that feed on blood- Severe infections can be fatal- Migrating larvae can penetrate skin and cause a rash in humans!	
Tapeworms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Worm is made of many segments that look like cooked white rice.- Spread by ingesting fleas or rodents- Humans are rarely infected	
Giardia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- One-celled parasitic organism- Spread by contaminated water or direct fecal-oral transmission- Symptoms vary from no outward signs to severe diarrhea	
Coccidia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- One-celled protozoal parasite- Spread by fecal-oral transmission- Often associated with bird droppings	
Physaloptera	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Small stomach worm- Spread by ingesting insects such as crickets, beetles and grasshoppers- Just one worm can be enough to cause chronic vomiting in cats	

Most intestinal parasites are spread by fecal contamination, so in addition to deworming medication, also be sure to clean the litterbox frequently to prevent re-infection! Roundworms and hookworms are zoonotic, meaning they can be spread from cats to humans, so always wash your hands!

Heartworm Disease

Myth: Only dogs are susceptible to heartworm disease, not cats.

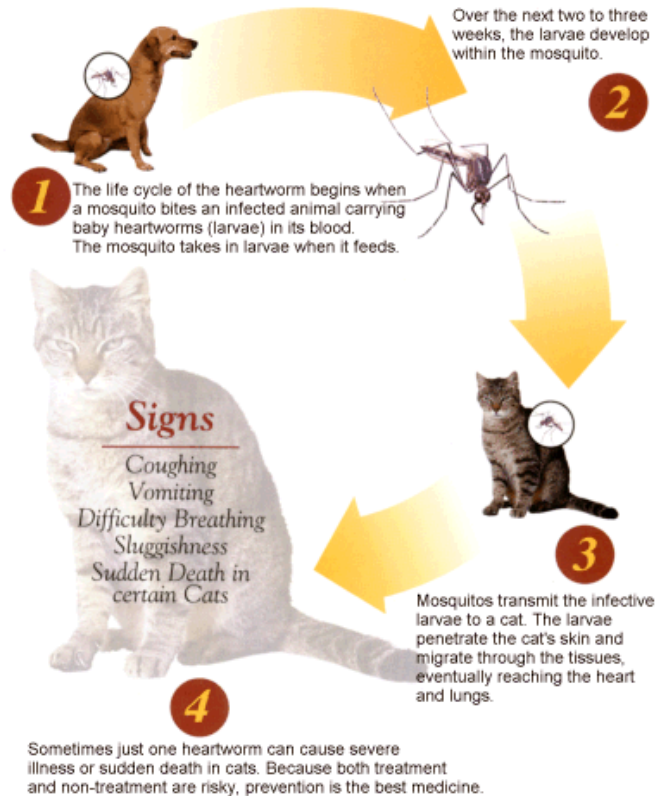
Truth: Actually, cats can get heartworm disease too! Cats also get infected from mosquito bites, but their bodies respond to the parasite much differently, and often more severely, than in dogs.

Cat-Specific Disease

Cats are atypical hosts so heartworm disease manifests completely differently than in dogs. Testing is based on antigen from adult worms, but cats rarely have more than 1-2 adult worms, so definitive diagnosis is very difficult. Immature worms cause the most damage in the form of heartworm-associated respiratory disease. Symptoms may include coughing, asthma-like episodes, vomiting and weight loss. Sadly, sometimes the first symptom is sudden collapse and death.

Prevention is critical!

Because testing is so difficult and no treatment exists for cats, prevention is your best (and really only) option. Ideally, all cats should be on a preventive such as Revolution® once a month to prevent this dangerous disease. Mosquitoes come inside, so even indoor cats are at risk.



Flea and Tick Control

Fleas are easy to pick up and very difficult to eliminate your home, so we recommend your kitten start on flea control as early as 8 weeks of age. To keep fleas out of your home, even indoor-only cats should be on monthly flea control if you have other pets that spend time both indoors and outdoors.

Ticks are not only disgusting, they can also spread a variety of diseases including hemobartonellosis, tularemia and cytauxzoonosis. These are very serious diseases that are often fatal. Products for ticks will cause biting ticks to die before they are attached long enough to spread disease or eat a full blood meal. The Serestro collar is currently the most effective tick prevention product for cats, but Revolution also has some effect. Frontline is not currently recommended due to decreased efficacy in recent years.



Product Name	Type	Kills Fleas	Kills Ticks
Revolution	Topical	X	
Serestro collar	Collar		X



Spaying and Neutering

We strongly recommend spaying and neutering your pet around 4-6 months of age if you do not plan to breed them. Here's why:

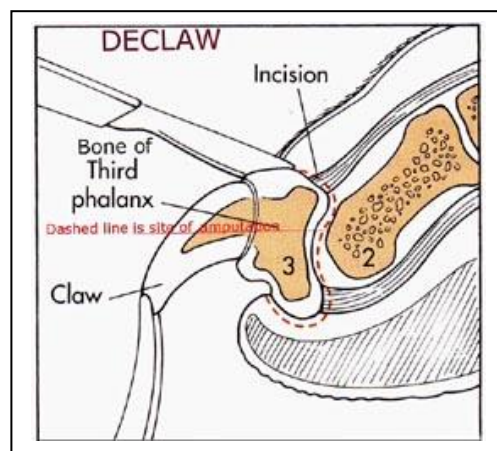
- Spaying a female cat before her first heat cycle virtually eliminates the risk of mammary cancer later in life, as well as eliminating the risk of developing a life-threatening uterine infection (called a pyometra) which can occur after going through a heat cycle.
- Neutering a male cat can reduce unwanted behaviors such as roaming, intercat hostility, and urine spraying. Neutering outdoor cats can significantly reduce territorial aggression, thereby reducing the frequency of fighting, wounds, abscesses and the transmission of viruses such as leukemia and FIV.
- Every year, millions of animals are euthanized because of pet overpopulation. One female cat can produce 8-15 kittens every single year. The drive to mate in intact animals can be surprising - spaying and neutering eliminates the risk of accidental pregnancy and unwanted litters!

Declawing

Declawing cats is a controversial subject and should be discussed in detail with your veterinarian on a case-by-case basis. Declawing is considered a major elective surgery. In past decades, antiquated declawing procedures more often resulted in serious and long-term complications for cats. However, updated surgical techniques have greatly improved both short- and long-term outcomes for cats and we believe that, done properly, declawing can be a humane procedure.

Declawing involves the surgical amputation of the last digit of each toe, including the entire claw. Cats undergoing this procedure are under full anesthesia and also receive a local nerve block to control pain. Bandages are applied to control bleeding and patients are kept overnight for observation before being discharged the next day.

Except in rare cases, we recommend only declawing the front feet. Young cats recover faster than older or overweight animals. Declawing kittens at the same time as their spay or neuter results in the best surgical outcome.



Scratching is a normal feline behavior, and even declawed cats benefit from having a scratching post to use for marking territory and stretching. Ensure that scratching posts are sturdy and tall enough to allow a full-body stretch without toppling over.



Kitten Behavior and Training – Play and Investigative Behaviors

Kittens have a reputation for being playful. Why is play so important to them?

Animals of all ages can benefit from opportunities to play. Young developing animals typically engage in play more frequently over the course of their day than adults do.

During play, kittens learn to coordinate their motor skills, including skills that can help with hunting (e.g., chasing and pouncing behaviors). Through play, kittens learn important communication skills needed for healthy relationships with other cats throughout their life.



The nature of kitten play changes as they develop. Before weaning, kittens primarily play with their littermates and mother. As they approach their time of weaning, kittens show more interest toward objects in their environment. They begin to demonstrate behaviors associated with hunting, such as batting at, chasing after, and stalking objects that move. This “object play” supports the development of strong eye-paw coordination as well as good hunting skills.

Physical play is important for the development of balance and agility – all kittens need appropriate outlets for play.

I have a 6-week-old kitten that is very playful. How can I channel his play onto toys rather than the curtains and furniture?

Kittens do not recognize that curtains and furniture are not toys, and damage may occur in the name of fun. All kittens need careful supervision to learn how to play appropriately within your home.

Provide a wide variety of toys so your kitten can practice important play skills. Rotate the toys so they remain interesting. Kittens should have toys they can “hunt”, pounce on, and bat around. Toys can be hidden inside play tunnels or cardboard boxes to satisfy the need to explore. Also, be sure to provide plenty of interactive play (games in which you participate). Create “prey” using a wand or by wriggling toys so they move erratically. Most kittens try to climb as they explore their world. Be sure to provide acceptable surfaces for climbing or accessing vertical vantage points – cat trees are ideal options.

When your kitten starts to engage in unwanted play behavior, distract them and immediately offer a suitable substitute behavior. If your cat playfully climbs curtains, consider closing off the room except when you are available to supervise. When you are unable to supervise at all, confine your kitten in a safe area to prevent her from establishing unwanted play preferences. Her confinement area should have plenty of toys, scratching posts, resting places, a litter box, food, and water.

Why is my kitten always getting into mischief?

It is normal for young, developing kittens to use their paws, claws and teeth to interact with their environment. In the course of exploring and learning, kittens may inadvertently damage items or injure themselves. Furniture and books may be nibbled or scratched by a kitten's sharp claws, and valuable objects may be broken if they are batted about.

It is difficult to anticipate a kitten's moves – kittens are fast. Try putting your valuable or fragile items away when your kitten is in the area. Child locks and secure containers can be used to keep your cat out of cupboards or garbage cans.

Remember, even small kittens can jump and climb, reaching fragile or dangerous items that are above floor level .



Be sure to provide plenty of opportunities to play with appropriate toys or objects that are interesting yet unbreakable. If you notice your kitten is about to engage with something valuable or fragile, lure her away with an appealing treat or toy. See the handout "Behavior Management Products for Cats" for further information.

When you can't supervise, confine your kitten in a safe room with toys, a scratching post, cozy places to rest, food and water, and a litter box. (See handout "Life Skills for Pets: Crate Training and Confinement for Kittens and Cats" for details).

What is the best way to play with my kitten?

Kittens routinely play with a variety of objects that mimic their prey. Do not allow your kitten to play with any objects small enough to be ingested as an intestinal blockage could occur. Similarly, do not allow your kitten to play with string or yarn unless you are supervising carefully and can remove the string before it is ingested.

"Do not allow your kitten to play with any objects small enough to be ingested as an intestinal blockage could occur."

There are plenty of fun toys that can be used for playing with kittens. Interactive wand toys such as the Feline Flyer™, Cat Dancer™, and Da Bird™ allow you to play safely with your kitten. A small fleece toy is great for creating a game of fetch.

Always use a toy when playing with your kitten. Do not allow your kitten to bat at your hands or any other part of your body. As your kitten grows stronger, there is a risk her claws or teeth will penetrate your skin and cause injury. Any injury caused by a cat, even when accidental, is considered serious, as cat bites and scratches often lead to infections.

How can overexuberant play and play attacks toward people be managed?

Many kittens playfully pounce on people. They may stare at a hand or foot, anticipating a slight movement, and quickly pounce and grasp. Kittens have been known to crouch, frozen in position, waiting to pounce on a person walking by.

To reduce the risk of your kitten targeting your body, always use a toy during planned play sessions and never use your body. Do not tease your kitten with your hands, feet, or clothing and avoid running away if they do chase.

It is only natural for you (the “prey”) to quickly retract your hand or foot (in pain), thereby further stimulating the kitten to pursue. Once the behavior has started, it may continue, as it is innately rewarding for kittens to pounce.

To avoid this reinforcement, it is important to be prepared and anticipate your kitten’s next move. If you notice your kitten staring at your hand, try to use your other hand to toss a toy or treat in the other direction. If your kitten likes to ambush you as you walk, carry ping pong balls that can be tossed for your kitten to chase. Soon, instead of pouncing on you when she notices your movement, she will likely get ready for the toy or treat toss.

If you are playing with your cat and the play becomes too rough, quietly disengage and allow the kitten to play on her own. If needed, step out of the room briefly to give your kitten a chance to unwind.

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Cat Behavior and Training – Play and Play Toys

What should I look for when I am buying toys for my cat?

Cats are natural hunters and will stalk, chase, pounce on, and capture things that move. Most cats enjoy a variety of toys which they can hunt, seek, attack, and carry.

Mouse toys or other small stuffed options, ping pong balls, crinkle balls or crinkled paper, motorized chase toys, and balls housed in tracks or loops can provide hours of entertainment for cats.

Monitor your cat during play to ensure they do not consume any non-food toys. For times when you are not available to play with your cat, your cat may enjoy chasing a battery-operated toy or batting at a toy that hangs from your doorknob.

Providing novelty can help build interest and value in toys. Keep an assortment of 20 cat toys on hand, but give your cat only 4–5 options at a time. Rotate the toys weekly to hold your cat's interest. Cats also tend to have short bursts of energy and play, followed by longer periods of rest. If your cat plays for just a few minutes then appears to lose interest, it doesn't mean he dislikes his toys.

"Providing novelty can help build interest and value in toys."

Wand or fishing pole toys are favorites of many cats. You can purchase these toys or make them yourself. Store-bought options often come with a variety of tips (feather, cardboard, felt) that can be rotated for variety. Never leave cats unattended with wand- or fishing pole-style toys. Cats can get tangled in the toy or ingest the string and become dangerously ill.

Should I buy catnip toys for my cat?

Several cat toys are advertised as being filled with catnip, an herb that contains nepetalactone. Cats that respond to catnip exhibit short-lived behavior changes ranging from relaxation to excitement. The response to catnip is determined by a cat's genes – approximately 50% of cats do not respond at all. If your cat is a responder, giving access to catnip can add another dimension to his life. However, if your cat becomes agitated when under the influence, it is best to avoid products containing catnip.



My kitten loves to play a game that involves chasing my fingers as I run them across the back of the sofa or pouncing on my toes as I move them under the covers. Is it okay to play these games with her?

Chasing and pouncing are elements of feline predatory behavior and your cat may spend hours engaging in these activities. Though rapidly moving toes and fingers might attract your cat, this type of play can be problematic. Once your kitten matures into a larger, stronger cat, pouncing on hands, feet, and other body parts could become painful or cause injury. Even superficial cat bites and scratches can become infected. Interaction with human hands should be limited to the context of affection and to being stroked and petted.



As a basic rule, it is best to only play predatory games with toys that your cat can eventually catch and “kill”, such as toy mice, pieces of food on the end of string, or balls of rolled-up paper. Be certain to offer several play sessions with chase toys each day. When possible, try to schedule play at times when your cat is most active.

I have heard about cat toys that dispense food. Are these a good idea?

Toys that dispense food are often referred to as puzzle feeders, food toys, or foraging toys. Food-filled toys can provide enrichment and exercise for indoor cats, particularly those that tend to be sedentary. Foraging toys and puzzle feeders also give cats a wonderful outlet to fulfill their innate desire to hunt, with the bonus that they are able to eat their “prey”.

Foraging toys and puzzle feeders are available in many pet shops. When your cat bats at, rolls, or manipulates the toy, food is delivered through openings in the toy. The Indoor Hunting System by Doc & Phoebe’s is a good example of this type of toy. It is also easy to make your own foraging toys from a plastic bottle or container. You can create small holes (be sure there are no sharp edges) that are just big enough to release pieces of dry cat food placed inside.

Does my cat need to climb?

Many cats seek high resting places, favoring locations that allow them to relax while still keeping an eye out for possible threats. Having access to an elevated resting spot may be especially important for cats that occasionally need a break from other pets or young children tempted to chase after them. Some cats appear quite relaxed when resting on the top of the refrigerators or on a bookcase. Be sure to put a soft, non-skid bed in your cat’s favored location.

Note: It is important to ensure your cat can walk around the house safely without being chased. It is okay for cats to choose elevated spots for a comfortable bit of shut-eye; however, it is not okay if they are up high because they are too frightened to join the rest of the family.

Many commercially available cat shelves and wall-mounted climbing or resting areas are available. With some imagination, there is no limit to the fun you can have building a dream house for your cat. More information is available in the handout “Cat Behavior and Training – Enrichment for Indoor Cats”.

Does my cat need an indoor cat tree?

Cat trees provide secure, elevated resting spots. Many are also designed with climbing, hiding and playing opportunities to help create an enriched environment – which is particularly important for indoor cats. Activity trees should be placed in areas where the family spends time, rather than hidden away in a back room or garage. Secure the tree in a spot away from a wall if possible, so your cat can hop on from a number of angles.



What is a scratching post, and why is it important?

All cats need to scratch. Scratching shortens and conditions the claws, marks territory (both visually and with scent), and provides an effective whole-body stretch. See the handout “Cat Behavior Problems – Scratching Behavior” for details about selecting an appropriate scratching post for your cat.

When my cat was a kitten, I played with her every day, but surely as an adult these playtimes are no longer necessary?

It is a common misconception that cats only play when they are kittens. Adult cats also benefit from regular playtimes and playful interactions with people. Even as cats get older, they maintain their ability and drive to hunt. Cats will readily engage when offered a game that allows them to chase and pounce.

When should I play with my cat?

The best time to play is when your cat appears to be naturally interested. Predatory activity naturally occurs around dawn and dusk, so morning and evening playtimes are likely to be the most successful. The length of each play session should be adjusted based on your cat’s interest. Most cats can benefit from having several 10-minute play sessions every day. Be sure to provide a variety of toys to help maintain novelty and keep your cat’s attention.

What is the best way for me to play with my adult cat?

When playing with your cat, avoid having your hands close to the toy. Use a wand toy to encourage your cat to stalk, chase, and “kill” the prey. With practice, you can keep the prey “alive” for a long period of time – but be sure your cat does not become frustrated. Cats need to be successful or they will lose interest. Another game to try is “fetch”, as some cats are natural retrievers. Training “tricks” can be fun and, if your cat is interested, the training counts as play. Have fun!



Houstraining for Kittens and Cats

Learning to eliminate in the chosen area is a crucial skill for pet kittens and cats. Elimination outside the litter box is the most common problematic behavior reported by cat owners, so a proactive approach is critical for a successful life shared by people and their pets.

Getting Started: What Cats Like and Need

Abundant research has been done about what most cats prefer when it comes to a latrine. Most cats prefer:

- unscented, fine grit clumping style litter
- a deep box with at least 3" of digging material
- a large area inside the box with
 - enough room to walk in and turn around without touching the sides or top
 - enough room to eliminate and dig without touching the sides or clumped waste
- boxes located in quiet areas that are easily accessible
- uncovered boxes, but this can vary by individual



Storage containers with an entry door or large sweater boxes often make excellent litter boxes, but keep in mind that kittens and senior cats need lower sides to enter and exit boxes easily. Larger homes and homes with multiple cats will need multiple latrine locations; multiple boxes together in the same area or same room count as one box. And finally, cats who eliminate while standing may need a box with high sides to prevent urine or feces falling outside the box when the cat is inside the box.

Every cat is an individual, so if you find that your cat does not prefer these suggestions, talk with your veterinarian about what to try.

How often do I need to clean the litter box?

Most cats are by nature fastidious. Cats spend a lot of time grooming themselves, and naturally prefer a tidy bathroom as well. Consider a human going into a public restroom: if someone before you fails to flush, do you proceed and use the toilet? Doing our best to keep the litter clean and appealing to cats is one of the most important factors in maintaining good elimination habits in our pets.

Every Day: Scoop all clumps. Some cats prefer the litter to be scooped even more frequently.

Every Week: Empty all litter and any residue from the box, refill with clean litter.

Every Month: Empty all litter and thoroughly scrub the box with hot water and mild soap before refilling. Some cats prefer this to be done weekly.

Every Year: Completely replace the litter box.

How do I train my kitten or cat where to go?

Most kittens and cats will naturally eliminate in litter, as they tend to prefer loose granule substrates.

When you come home with your new kitten or cat, introduce them first to the room where the litter station is. Close the door to the room and stay with the cat and interact calmly, encouraging them to explore the room. Once they have explored the room, open the door and let them begin to explore larger areas of the home under supervision. If you see the cat sniffing, pawing at the floor, circling, or looking for a private area, quietly carry or entice them back to the litter station to help them remember where it is.



It is not usually necessary to confine cats to the room with the litter box, as long as it is readily accessible. Make sure the cat can easily get to and from this location without having to pass other cats, jump, go up or down flights of stairs, etc. Ensure the door to the room with the litter is kept open unless the cat is confined there so they always have access to the bathroom.

What do I do about mistakes?

If you are supervising your kitten or new cat and they start to eliminate outside the litter box, interrupt them using a cheerful voice, a whistle, or clap your hands. Guide your kitten or cat quickly to the right spot and then allow them quiet and privacy to finish eliminating.

If you find a mistake after the fact, simply calmly and quietly clean the area, and resolve to better supervise the kitten in the future. Make sure to clean the area thoroughly, as cats have a very acute sense of smell and will be more likely to use the same area in the future if any odor of urine or feces remains on the surface.

"Do not punish your kitten or cat for making a mistake."

Do not punish your kitten or cat for making a mistake. Never rub a cat's nose in an elimination, strike, or swat your cat. Punishing your pet for a natural act can make them think they should never toilet near a person and cause them to become secretive or fearful about elimination.

If your cat repeatedly eliminates outside the litter box:

- Discuss this pattern with your veterinarian promptly, as eliminating outside the box is a common symptom of many different illnesses.
- Double check your cleaning schedule and consider increasing your cleaning efforts.
- Ensure the box is big enough, in a quiet but easily accessed area, and that enough elimination locations are available.
- If you have more than one cat, ensure there are enough litter stations spread out through the home that each cat can use them undisturbed without "waiting in line." The rule of thumb is to have at least one more litter box than the number of cats in the household (2 cats = at least 3 litter boxes).
- Consider a "Litter Box Cafeteria." Set up several litter boxes side by side, each containing a different litter texture. Monitor the litter use for a few days. Your cat will use the substrate they prefer most often. Whichever litter is used most frequently should be provided on an ongoing basis.

In addition to the above suggestions, keep a journal where you track your cat's mistakes. The journal should include:

- Where the elimination occurs (right beside the box, in another room, near a door or window, etc.).
- The type of surface used to eliminate on (vertical or horizontal, smooth, carpet, dirty laundry, etc.).
- If the mistakes are urine or feces or both.
- The quantity of urine or feces (nickel- or dime-sized spot, full bladder, stream down the wall, etc.).
- The frequency that mistakes are occurring.
- When the mistakes are occurring (in the night, when you are out, etc.).

These details can offer great insight for your veterinary team in helping resolve litter use troubles.

Lastly, if your cat is ever seen frequently going to and from the litter box, standing or squatting in the litter for prolonged periods, posturing or standing in the litter box and vocalizing, these are all urgent concerns and require immediate veterinary attention.