



New Cat Owners' Guide

Highlights

- Supplies
 - o Cat carrier for transport
 - o Litterbox, litter, scoop, litter trap mat
 - o Plastic waste bags (doggie bags trap litter well) or a Litter Genie (like a Diaper Genie)
 - o Kitten or cat food, bowls - glass, metal or ceramic - NO plastic, breeds germs/skin issues
 - o Catfood and cat treats
 - o Scratch pads and posts, toys, laser pointer, catnip
 - o Cat collar - start with a kitten collar with a bell so you can track the munchkin's movements; monitor size and loosen collar as your kitten grows; **always use a Breakaway collar**
 - o Tiny nail clippers - use infant clippers, get one with a light to make it easier to see
- If you were given medicine to take home, read instructions and refrigerate if needed.
- The first couple of hours, rather than overwhelm it with attention, place her in a small area where it can get used to its surroundings. Leave water and a litterbox (no food yet). After a couple of hours, go back in and get acquainted. Give her food and treats and pets and hold her after feeding. The food helps your cat bond with you as the caregiver. Always have clean litter and water available.
- If the cat is not eating regularly by the 3rd day, contact your vet or your adoption coordinator.
- Monitor your cat's litterbox. Normal poop should be solid and look like large green beans. If your cat's poop seems lumpy and soft, this may indicate digestion or infections caused by worms/coccidia.
- Your cat is inserted with a microchip. **Register your microchip to you.** We like www.FoundAnimals.org because there is no annual fee. Be sure to update your contact information if it changes.

These are recommendations and suggestions by Dexter's Kitties volunteers. Please do your own research before proceeding.

- Teach your kids to pet your new cat gently, talk softly, don't force it to cuddle if it's not in the mood, and **always keep outside doors closed.**
- Remove Lilies (flowers) from your home; they are **poisonous to cats.**
- Cat proof your home. Assume cats will jump up on shelves and high places. Move breakable items to a safe place. Kittens especially may want to chew your chords and bat at window blind chords. Monitor them in early days/weeks. If you want to discourage them from jumping on specific spots, try a combination of aluminum foil, spray bottle and a stern rebuke each time they jump up. It is also helpful to redirect them consistently (i.e. to a toy or scratch pad). You can also try a 'cat scat mat'.
- Schedule a check-up appointment with a trusted vet, take medical papers with you.
- Take lots of photos and videos, you will cherish them later. Send us your favorite ones! DextersKitties@gmail.com / 321.231.0804 or post on our Facebook page.

Transitioning your cat to your home

- Cats need time to adjust to change. The key is to go slowly to allow his personality to bloom. - Provide a small, quiet, safe room for the cat to get used to its new environment. Ideally it is the room that will hold the litter box long term. You want your cat to know where to find the litter box at ALL TIMES. Try to minimize the spaces that the cat can hide (outside of your reach).
- Provide a small box or carrier where the cat can 'hide' to feel safe, but easy enough for you to access.
- Spend time with your cat in its safe space. Speak softly, blink slowly (big eyes show aggression). If it's not ready to interact with you, just sit in the room to read, work and let it get used to you. Your new cat is trying to determine if you are friend or foe. Make sure it sees you putting out food, so that it knows you are the source of goodness. Some cats take several days to acclimate to a new home. Kittens are quicker to adjust.
- Give your cat regular alone time to get settled.
- It's OK and normal for a cat to act shy and eat small amounts for 1-2 days. If they are not eating and not starting to act social by the 3rd day, call your vet or your adoption coordinator for advice. - If you're fortunate, you'll have a cat that enjoys sitting on your lap and snuggling with you. Don't force it. When it seems relaxed, put the cat on your lap or in a snuggle position and see how it does. - Once your cat lets you pet it, is purring, and seems happy to come to you, THEN slowly introduce other parts of the house on a supervised basis. If you do this too soon, the cat will likely feel overwhelmed and hide under the sofa or bed. But if he feels safe with you, he'll come out no matter where he is. Return the cat often to the litter box so she knows where it can be found.

- For the first several months, maybe even a couple of years, out of curiosity, your cat may try to run outside. Be diligent when opening doors, and use your voice to let it know that it is not allowed outside. In time your pet will feel safer inside and likely stop trying to 'escape.'
- Do not allow your cat to go out on your balcony or deck. They WILL jump off.
- Introducing Other Animals
 - o Wait until your new cat is comfortable with you. Then begin the introduction process to other animals. First introduce bedding between the animals daily to help familiarize with each other's scents.
 - o Next place your resident animal in a secure room, and let your new pet explore the home for 30-60 min daily. You can also put your new pet in a larger dog crate in the main room and let it interact with your resident animal on a limited basis. It will also give the cat a chance to get used to the sights and smell of a new room.
 - o When it seems your new pet is familiar with your home, put it in a carrier and let your resident animal sniff through the carrier.
 - o Once you are comfortable there are no signs of aggression (a little hissing is normal), then crack the door open to the safe room and let them visit each other. Have a bottle of water handy in case you need to break up a tussle.

Food

- In early days try to feed the cat the same food it is already used to.
- It is your choice whether to do dry, wet or both kinds of food.
- Dry food is easier to manage and better for cats' dental health.
- If your cat is overweight, wet food has less calories and will make him feel more full on less calories.
- Never use plastic for water, they breed bacteria and can lead to cat acne (been there done that). Keep the water fresh (a film of bacteria will form if left sitting for days).
- There are automatic dry food dispensers that allow you to time your feedings.

Litterbox

- Keep the litterbox clean. Cats will not use a dirty box.
- If cat poops or pees away from the litterbox, place them in the room with the litterbox for a day to remind them where it is.
- Clean all mess surfaces with a pet odor neutralizer, it's important to remove the smell completely so that the cat does not go back to the same spot.
- If the litterbox is clean, try placing a second litterbox in the same area, with a different kind of litter.
- If the cat continues to go outside the litterbox, take cat to the vet to ensure she does not have a URI. She may be in pain and associating the litterbox with that pain.
- Consider doggie bags to hold the waste, great for odor control.

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- A litter genie also does a good job of storing waste and managing odor.
- You may want to consider an automatic litter box. I like the litter-robot (warning it is expensive upfront, but no refill cartridges to pay for).
- If you change litter boxes for any reason, place some of the old litter (with cat's smell) in the new box to help him make the adjustment.

Behavior

- The kitten stage is a critical time to train your cat what is acceptable and 'normal'. After six months of age it becomes much more difficult to change a cat's temperament. Examples of good practices include:
 - o Take your cat for short car rides regularly (always in a carrier) so it gets used to this experience.
 - o Give kittens bath if that's something you want to do as an adult. Most cats are excellent groomers and will not require this.
 - o Expose your kitten to as many new people as possible, have them hold the cat, etc so that they trust all humans.
 - o If you will be trimming her nails, gently rub and touch her paws while holding and cuddling so she gets used to her paws being handled.
 - o Reward good behavior with rubs and treats and sweet talk.
- If they are scratching furniture, try trimming nails regularly (need to start early as a kitten), add scratch posts, bitter spray areas you don't want scratched, or temporarily place aluminum foil on surface. Cat scat mats with small spikes can also be placed where you don't want them to walk or hide. Another option is double sided tape (search for something like "cat scratch deterrent tape").
- Every cat will have a hiding spot where they go when they are stressed or need alone time. If you want to be able to reach her in that spot, you may want to put blankets/boxes to limit her hiding spots. - Try not to wrestle or play fight with the cat with your hands because then you are telling her that it's ok to bite human hands.
- Never use physical punishment to discipline your cats. This may make them aggressive or afraid of humans which will be nearly impossible to undo. A stern voice (once in a while) is OK when you really need to get the cat's attention. But never hit a cat.

Health

- We recommend you take your new pet into a vet soon so that you have a good baseline understanding of your cat's health.
- Most of our rescue cats have been Fixed (spay or neuter), had rabies shot, and one FVRCP distemper vaccine if adult, two if a kitten. If we did not give you medical paperwork validating this, please remind us. - If your kitten was adopted at under 3 pounds (or less than 3 months), he was too young for rabies and this will need to be done when he is a little older.
- Kittens should have had two FVRCP distemper shots. If she has only had one, it is a good idea to get a 2nd one to boost its immune system within 3-4 weeks of the first shot.
- We recommend another check up at one year of age
 - o If your cat is purely indoors, a general guide is to do a one year booster for FVRCP distemper at 12 months of age, and then every 3 years thereafter. If your cat interacts with outdoor cats, an annual vaccination should be considered.
 - o Ask for the 3 year rabies shot (there is a 1 year and 3 year vaccine). This way after the 12 month check up, you can generally go back for check ups every 3 years. It's a good idea to do bloodwork when they go for their check ups (catch signs of illness early on).
 - o If your cat is FIV positive, you may want to consider more frequent check ups and blood work and regular teeth cleaning. Please discuss your pet's needs with your veterinarian.
- Ask your vet to give vaccinations and rabies in an appendage like a paw, not near the neck or chest. A small but significant % of vaccination spots can turn into cancer growths. An appendage will be easier to deal with if it requires an operation to remove. Google "vaccine-associated sarcoma" for more information.
- Fleas - if your pets are strictly indoors, this should not be an issue. If your cat goes outside or interacts with a dog that comes in and out, consider a regular flea treatment routine. It's normal for your cat to scratch itself occasionally. If you suspect fleas take a flea comb through its fur. If your cat does have fleas be sure to treat your home as well, especially if you have carpet.
- Fleas lead to worms. So if your cat has fleas, treat for worms. You can buy a dewormer on amazon called "Pyrental Pamoate Suspension" which will handle roundworms and hookworms. Roundworms look like spaghetti. If it looks like rice flakes, that is tapeworm and you will want praziquantel (type in tapeworm dewormer cats in amazon or google). Pet stores may have these meds as well.
- If you have to give a cat a pill, assuming you don't know how to 'pill' a cat, you can either crush the pill and mix it in wet food or a treat, or hide it in a pill pocket (Greenies pill pockets cat treats).

If your cat gets outside

- We hope your cat will be a strictly indoor pet. Outdoor cats are prone to get fleas, fight, catch disease, and their lifespan is half of indoor cats. If your cat escapes, immediately put the cat's litterbox outside so that he can 'smell' their way back home. Borrow a trap from a local cat rescue and put its favorite food and some of the cat's favorite toys and blankets and other things that reminds the cat of home.
- Call the chip company to report your cat lost, in case someone reports your cat through the chip registry. - Try to always have a collar on your cat. This helps people know your cat is not a stray. When the cat is big enough, consider ordering a collar from Amazon that lets you
- As a deterrent you can put a 'cat skat mat' near the front door (mat with small spikes). In time the cat will stop trying to escape, preferring the safety of indoors.