

Basic Cat Health Care

Cats generally take good care of themselves, but sometimes they require a little help. With cats, discovering that the kitty is suffering can be a problem - cats typically don't let on when they don't feel well and often try to hide their illness. You, as the pet "parent," need to be vigilant to notice and respond when your kitty is not well.



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Colds

Cats are susceptible to upper respiratory illnesses (URIs). If your kitty is sneezing, she may have a cold. Cats can catch and pass around viruses just as humans do. Many never go beyond a few sneezes and get over it in a few days without treatment. Others can run a fever, become depressed and even quit eating for a few days before they are well again. Some cats develop bacterial infections and have runny noses, but these can be taken care of with antibiotics.

You can help your cats stay well by keeping their play, feeding and sleeping areas clean and by making sure the litter box is cleaned every day. Just as with people, a cold is not a life-threatening illness for a cat. Your cat needs rest, loving care, and a little time to get well. NEVER give a cat human medicine like aspirin, Tylenol or other medicines, as these are deadly to cats.

Vaccinations

Routine vaccinations protect your kitten from feline distemper, three respiratory organisms and panleukopenia. Feline leukemia vaccine (FeLV) is often recommended if your cat is ever outside or is with another cat that goes outside. Rabies vaccines are not recommended for kittens and are generally not necessary for indoor-only cats.

Your cat should have its baby shots at 8 and 12 weeks and will need a booster every year after that. If your cat is an indoor-only cat, which we highly recommend - and never comes into contact with strange cats, the decision to not vaccinate should be made only after careful consideration.

Worms

Intestinal parasites are fairly common in kittens and in cats that live outside or are allowed to go in and out. Newborn kittens can be infected with roundworms from their mother's milk. A microscopic inspection of a stool sample can usually detect the presence of intestinal parasites. Safe, broad-spectrum deworming products are available through your vet. Since they kill

only adult worms, they must be repeated once or twice. If the cat ever goes outdoors, periodic worming throughout its life is recommended.

Tapeworms are one of the most common intestinal parasites of cats. Kittens usually become infected when they swallow fleas. The eggs of the tapeworm live inside the flea and when the cat licks or chews its skin as a flea bites, it often swallows the flea. The tapeworm hatches in the intestinal lining, infecting the cat. Cats also can get tapeworms from eating mice or birds. Infected cats will pass small segments of the worms in their stool. The segments are white and look like grains of rice. They are about 1/8 inch long and may be seen crawling on the surface of the stool. They can also be seen under the cat's tail, where they will dry out, shrink and become pale yellow. You must examine stool for several days to be sure you find tapeworms, since they may not be passed every day. There are appropriate drugs to treat tapeworms and it is fairly simple to get rid of them.

Fleas

If you or another pet bring fleas into the house, they must be killed at once before they become established. Fleas are opportunistic - they will use any living being for a host. It is important to remember that some sprays or powders are not safe for kittens, so be sure to read labels carefully. Most flea products for dogs are not safe for cats. Always spray a kitten or cat lightly. Remember, they clean their fur by licking it.

Ear Mites

Ear mites are tiny insect-like parasites that live in the ear canals of cats or dogs. The most common sign of infestation is scratching of the ears. Sometimes the ears will appear dirty because of a black material in the ear canal. This material is sometimes shaken out. Your veterinarian can identify ear mites and provide a simple, safe treatment.

Diarrhea

Kittens are likely to have diarrhea if their food is changed or if they are given food meant for adults. They also may get diarrhea when they have colds. It can sometimes be a sign of a more serious illness. The great danger from diarrhea is dehydration. Just as in human babies, kittens can easily become dehydrated because they are so small. If your kitten has diarrhea for more than a day or two and you have not changed their food, there are medications available in pet supply stores which may help if your kitten is not too sick. If you suspect other illness, see your veterinarian.

Eye Problems

When cats have upper respiratory infections (URIs), there is often a discharge from the eyes. This will usually go away when the cat's health improves. A tiny dab of triple antibiotic in the corner of each eye twice daily for one or two days is one way to clear it up. If the eyes don't clear up, see your veterinarian.

Pet Poison Hotline

Call 1-800-213-6680 or visit www.petpoisonhelpline.com for a 24-hour helpline staffed by veterinary professionals trained in the field of toxicology.