



## Kitten information and health plan

Bringing a new kitten home is an exciting time and the start of a new adventure for both you and your kitten. Your life will change when the pitter - patter of tiny paws are heard and suddenly you will be responsible for all aspects of the care of a living, breathing animal. We've put together this pack to give you some guidance and help with questions you may have.

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*If you'd like to ask us a question about your new kitten please call us we will do our best to help!*

## Gold standard cat friendly care

Acorn House Veterinary Hospital is the only veterinary practice in Bedfordshire to have been awarded the highest level award for cat friendly care by the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM). This award is in recognition of the outstanding facilities and service that we are able to provide to our feline patients. For example:

- Completely separate cat ward (so that cats can recover from illness or surgery in peace and quiet)
- Completely separate isolation ward so that stray or infectious cats can be cared for without any risk to the other patients
- Very generously sized cat accommodation with igloo style beds
- CCTV to enable remote monitoring of the cat ward for particularly shy cats
- Separate cat waiting area with elevated basket resting places and cat carrier covers for additional privacy
- The entire practice team has undergone specific training in cat friendly handling techniques



## Vaccinations

Vaccinations are vital for both kittens and adult cats. Vaccination involves an initial course followed by boosters every year. This will protect your cat against a whole range of distressing and life-threatening diseases.

Kittens receive some natural protection from their mother if she has been vaccinated, but this wanes with time. They should be vaccinated initially from 9 weeks of age, and then again 3-4 weeks later. After the initial course your kitten should receive regular booster injections on a yearly basis.

Once your kitten has had the primary course of vaccinations you will be given a certificate of vaccination. If you ever put your cat into a cattery you will need to produce a valid vaccination certificate before your cat is accepted, as the risk of cat flu is very high when cats are kept together.

The main diseases that kittens and cats are vaccinated against are:

- Feline Infectious Enteritis (Panleucopaenia)
- Cat Flu (feline calicivirus and herpesvirus)
- Feline Leukaemia

## Other vaccinations

It is possible to vaccinate your cat against rabies if you are considering taking your cat abroad. Please ask any of our staff if you require further information about the PETS Travel Scheme.

## Worming

Almost all kittens are infected with roundworms as these are passed on from mother to kitten. We recommend regular monthly worming until your kitten is 6 months old.

Following this, you will need to decide upon a permanent worming strategy for your cat. This will depend on factors such as outdoor access, hunting and the presence of children or other vulnerable people in the household. Your veterinary surgeon will make a specific worming recommendation for your kitten following assessment of their health and lifestyle. Both spot-on and tablet options are available.

Roundworm eggs are very prevalent in soil and because they are microscopic and sticky, they are easily carried into the house on your shoes or your animal's fur. When your cat licks himself he swallows these eggs and becomes infected with roundworms. One type of roundworm, *Toxocara*, can spread from animals to people and is very occasionally responsible for health problems in people, including blindness.

Cats catch tapeworms either by eating fleas (fleas often contain tapeworm eggs) or by eating mice / birds / raw meat.

We are happy to discuss your cat's individual situation with you, explain the different products available, and help you decide on a worming and flea regime.

## Flea treatment

Fleas commonly cause itchiness and annoyance to cats (and can also bite people!). Some cats become allergic to flea bites and this can lead to very severe skin damage even if only one or two fleas are present. It is quite unusual to find live fleas on your pet as they will often be removed when the cat grooms himself. However, it is common to find flea dirt in the coat of a cat with fleas – these are tiny, dark, crumbly particles that may fall out of your cat's coat as you brush it. The adult fleas are just the tip of the iceberg and make up less than 5% of the flea population in your home. The eggs, larvae and pupae will be developing in the carpets, soft furnishings and between the floorboards! Fleas can hop a mile in an hour and you may bring them into the house on your shoes. A female flea can lay 40 eggs every day and once in your house, the larvae can live for up to 2 years.

Fleas are commonly caught from grass/vegetation, carpets/furniture and from other animals (cats, dogs, hedgehogs, rabbits).

We strongly believe that prevention is better than cure and recommend using flea control products every month to prevent your cat ever picking up fleas and bringing them into the house. Again, a wide variety of products are available and we would be happy to help you select the most appropriate option for your cat.





## Microchipping

It is possible to inject a tiny microchip (size of a grain of rice) into the scruff of your cat's neck. This can be done at any age but we recommend doing this at the second vaccination.

If your cat goes missing and is taken to a veterinary surgery, police station or rehoming centre, staff will scan the cat and read the unique microchip code. This identifies your cat on a central database so that you can be contacted and your pet returned.

You can also buy a cat flap that works on your cats microchip to stop unwanted visitors from entering your house.

From June 2024 it will be compulsory for all owned cats to be microchipped and this microchip must be registered to the current owner.

## Teeth

Cat's teeth accumulate tartar and become infected and/or loose just like people's teeth. To some extent it is possible to slow down the development of these problems by providing crunchy biscuits or dental chew treats in addition to tinned food.

However, the best way to protect your cat's teeth is by brushing them every day. Not all cats will tolerate this but if you start whilst they are young, many cats will accept it. You can purchase special pet toothbrushes that fit over the end of your finger, or use a soft child's toothbrush. Human toothpastes are not suitable for cats but you can buy non-foaming, poultry or meat flavored toothpastes.

Any of the vets or nurses will be happy to demonstrate how to brush your cat's teeth please ask for further information, or find the products in reception if you want to try yourself!



## Insurance

Unfortunately cats suffer from accidents and illness just like us and there is no NHS for animals, the cost of treatment has to be met by the animal's owner.

For example, if your cat was unlucky enough to have a collision with a car and need emergency treatment these costs can really add up and sometimes run into thousands of pounds. As your cat gets older, he or she may develop a chronic illness such as diabetes requiring medical care and treatment for the rest of his or her life.

We strongly recommend that pet owners take out insurance so that if your cat is unlucky enough to become unwell, we are able to offer the best possible care without you having to worry about how to pay for it!

There are lots of different companies offering pet insurance, so it is worth taking the time to research them. At Acorn House we recommend Petplan's Covered For Life insurance for the following reasons:

- Petplan's Covered For Life policies guarantee your veterinary fees cover is renewed each year no matter how often you claim (providing you renew your policy each year with no break in cover).
- Petplan doesn't place exclusions at renewal on their Covered For Life policies so on-going conditions such as eczema continue to be covered year after year.
- Petplan won't increase your premium or excess just because you make a claim.
- Petplan is a pet insurance specialist so they understand pets and work closely with vets, charities and breeders.

Make sure that you read the small print carefully when deciding which policy to choose. Some insurance companies will cover any condition for the rest of the cat's life, whilst others will only pay out for the first twelve months of each condition.

## Diet

Kittens are different from adult cats, so their nutritional needs vary. Any kitten food labelled as 'a complete pet food for cats' will be nutritionally balanced for your kitten. Dried food tends to help reduce tartar accumulation on the teeth, but a completely dry diet has been associated with a higher incidence of urinary problems. We recommend to include some dried and some tinned food in your cat's diet for these reasons.

To figure out how much to feed your kitten, use the feeding guide on the label of your kitten food as a starting point and adjust the amount to maintain optimum body weight. Amounts may vary depending on your cat's age, size, activity level, temperament, environment and health. Kittens should be fed three or four times daily up until six months of age when two meals daily are appropriate.

Many cats are sensible about the amount of food that they eat but some cats are too greedy and will become overweight if allowed unrestricted access to food so it's best to keep an eye on their weight.

Kittens can suffer from diarrhoea and/or colitis if they are suddenly changed from one diet to another. Find out from the breeder what your kitten was fed with and either continue with this diet or change it very gradually over a week or so.

## Neutering - female cats

Kittens usually come into season for the first time when they are approximately six months old. They tend to come into season every few weeks if they are not mated. Cats may become more vocal and roll about on the floor a lot when they are in season but this is perfectly normal!

We very strongly advise that all female cats are spayed unless you wish to breed from them. This prevents unwanted pregnancies and reduces the risk of transmission of infections such as feline leukaemia virus.

The spay operation involves removing the ovaries and womb under a general anaesthetic. We can do this from four to six months of age and most cats do not need to stay in overnight.

If you do wish to breed from your cat we recommend that you wait until she is a year old and fully mature herself, so keep her indoors to prevent pregnancy prior to this.

Your cat should be fit and healthy before you breed from her - she should be fully vaccinated and free from any health problems. It is unwise to breed from cats with an aggressive temperament or any genetic disease.

## Neutering – male cats

We very strongly recommend that all male cats are neutered unless they are specially kept as stud cats at a breeding establishment.

If an entire male cat is kept indoors it is likely that he will begin to spray urine in the house and if he goes outside, he is much more likely to fight with other cats, and will tend to roam much further than a castrated male cat.

This leads to a high incidence of fight wounds, life threatening infections (such as Feline Leukaemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) and road accidents.

Male cats enter puberty at between six and ten months of age. We recommend castration is carried out when your cat is four to six months old. The castration is carried out under a general anaesthetic, but is a very short procedure and most cats do not need to stay in overnight.



## Pre-visit advice for pets visiting Acorn House Veterinary Hospital

### Making an appointment

Appointments can be made using the online booking system or by telephoning Reception. Clients are free to select an appointment with any of the veterinary surgeons with consultation slots at the time that is convenient to the client. However, wherever possible it is recommended that clients make appointments with one particular vet to allow for case continuity and rapport building between the patient, client and vet.

In an emergency please do not use the online booking system but telephone the practice directly instead, so that an urgent appointment can be made.

### Travelling to the hospital

Cats and small pets should travel to the practice in a safe and secure carrier. This should be large enough for the pet to turn around inside. Pets should be transported in individual carriers rather than sharing (newborn litters of puppies and kittens are an exception to this). Carriers should be well-ventilated but primarily opaque so that the inhabitants are not “on display”. A blanket can be draped over the carrier to assist with this.

### Arriving at the hospital

Clients should “check in” at the reception desk. The practice has separate waiting areas for dogs, cats and small mammals and these are clearly marked.





## Information

At the start of the appointment the vet will talk to you about any problems you have noticed with your pet and their general health and routines. It will be very helpful if you are able to bring information regarding your pet's usual diet, any medicines they are taking, the symptoms that you have noticed, and any vaccination or other documents for pets that are new to the practice. This is particularly important if another person is bringing your pet to the appointment on your behalf.

## Examination

The vet is likely to start the consultation with a discussion and then move onto examining your pet. Sometimes examination is "hands off" (watching the way a pet moves around the consulting room, for example). Often it is necessary for the vet to handle the pet to examine problem areas or listen to the heart, for example. The practice provides a variety of food rewards to offer pets during the appointment, which it is hoped will build a positive association with the practice. If your pet has a favourite treat or a special diet, please feel free to bring this with you for the vet to use instead. Pets that are attending for surgery, sedation or digestive problems should not be offered food during the consultation.

## Pets that are fearful of the veterinary practice

It is hoped that pets will learn to associate the veterinary practice with friendly staff, gentle handling and plenty of treats. However, we understand that the practice can be an overwhelming place for some patients. Please speak to your vet about your pet's particular circumstances. Sometimes "hands off" observations and a detailed conversation about the problem can avoid a stressful examination for nervous pets. Other times, using anti-anxiety medication before an appointment can help. In other situations sedation may be the most sensible option, rather than physically restraining a nervous cat.





## Going Outside

Vaccination protection is complete ten days after the second vaccination, so technically it is safe for your kitten to go outside and have contact with other cats from this point onwards. However there are other points to consider when deciding whether to let your cat out or not:

**Bullying** – a young, small kitten is vulnerable to bullying from other cats

**Traffic** – all cats are at risk from road traffic accidents. The risk is higher if you live very close to a busy road. Younger cats are likely to be less traffic wise

**Other infections** – vaccinations only protect against the specific diseases described at the start of this booklet. Once your cat is going out and about he or she will come into contact with more bacterial/viral infections and also parasites such as fleas and worms than they would if they stayed indoors

It is sensible to consider your home and kitten's situation before deciding when and how to allow your cat to go outside.

- size/age/general health of cat
- enclosed garden
- busy road nearby
- other cats nearby

Try to get your kitten used to being in the garden for short periods under your supervision and perhaps do not allow unsupervised trips outside for several weeks or months. You may even wish to purchase a harness and lead for those first few outdoor adventures. Another good idea is to allow your kitten outside in the garden for a few minutes just before feeding time, so that he or she is encouraged to return to the house to be fed.

Most road traffic accidents and cat fights occur after dark, so many cat owners prefer to keep their cats indoors once darkness falls.

## Catteries

It may become necessary for your cat to stay at a boarding cattery at some point. Local catteries are listed online. They will require that your cat's booster vaccinations are kept up to date.

We recommend that you visit the cattery and speak to the owner/manager before booking your cat in.

### *Check list:*

- The sizes of the pens
- Type of sleeping area
- Feeding arrangements
- Designed so that your cat does not have direct contact with any other cat, as this reduces transmission of disease.
- Check what the arrangements would be if your pet became ill whilst in the cattery
- Does the cattery have insurance to cover the vet bills or would you be liable?
- Would the cattery bring the animal to the veterinary surgery or would you have to pay for a veterinary visit out to the cattery?
- Is the cattery willing and able to administer any medication that your cat may require?

## Emergencies

In the event of an emergency you will either be seen by a member of our team, or by a member from our partner practice at the Queen Mother Hospital for Animals. We are proud to offer this unique service to our registered clients which offers the following benefits for your pet in an emergency.

- During opening hours (**8am -8pm Mon-Fri and 8am-4:30pm Sat**): A member of our client care team will offer you an appropriate appointment at the usual Acorn House premises in Bedford.
- During closed hours before 11pm (**8pm to 11pm Mon-Fri;4:30-11pm Sat and 8am-11pm Sun**): Emergency service at the usual Acorn House premises in Bedford (please telephone before setting off).
- During closed hours after 11pm (**11pm-8am Mon-Sun**): Emergency service at the Queen Mother Hospital for Animals, Royal Veterinary College, Hawkshead Lane, North Mymms, Hatfield AL9 7TA (please telephone before setting off).

In case of an emergency at any time of day please telephone 01234 261839 and your call will be diverted to the relevant team.

Patients staying in the hospital at Acorn House will receive 24-hour hospital care on site from our own team of vets and nurses.

Further information regarding the emergency service provided by the Royal Veterinary College at the Queen Mother Hospital is available at the following link:

[Out-of-hours veterinary emergencies \(rvc.ac.uk\)](http://rvc.ac.uk)

