



Penbode Pet Vets

Since 1840

All About Your New Kitten





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Introduction

Congratulations on the arrival of your new family member! These little bundles of fluff are cute, but they are descended from solitary wild cats, and equipped with tools to become fully fledged hunters. Cats and kittens are fascinating creatures, and they will bring you lots of fun times ahead but in return they will rely on you to help keep them fit and well from day one. Whilst these independent creatures are so tiny, they may find their new world quite a daunting place to be, so you will need to give them plenty of time and space to adjust to these changes.

Did you know?

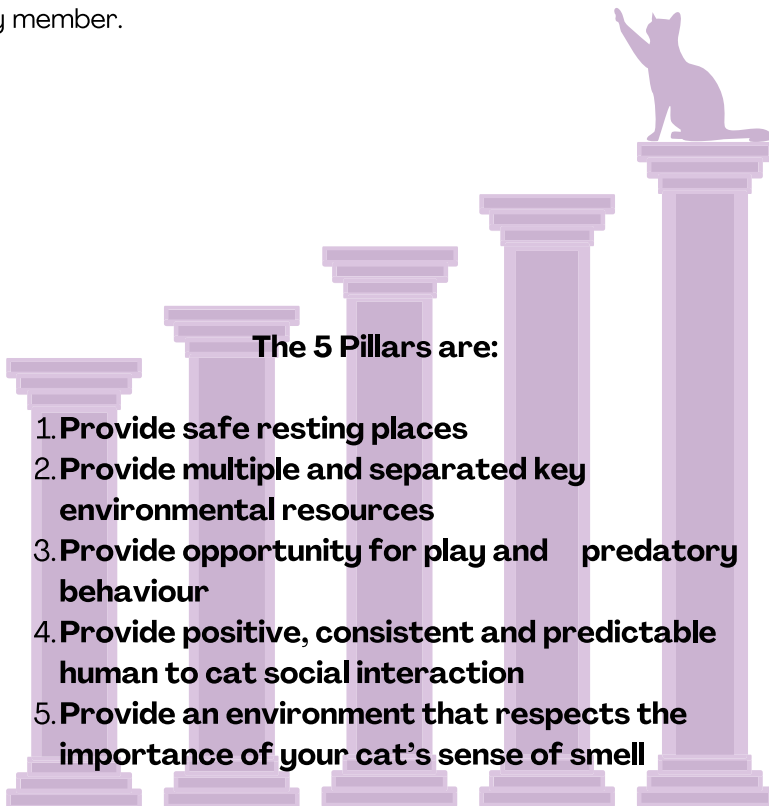
Dogs have owners... cats have staff!!



The 5 Pillars of Feline Environmental Needs

It is important to remember that cats are very different to us and, in comparison to dogs, have been domesticated for a much shorter period of time. The 5 Pillars of Feline Environmental Needs serve as a guideline to help us provide an optimum environment for this species.

This guide will aim to cover these 5 important needs in detail, in addition to giving you guidance on how to ensure the lifelong health of your new family member.



The 5 Pillars are:

1. **Provide safe resting places**
2. **Provide multiple and separated key environmental resources**
3. **Provide opportunity for play and predatory behaviour**
4. **Provide positive, consistent and predictable human to cat social interaction**
5. **Provide an environment that respects the importance of your cat's sense of smell**

Remember that we are always on hand to help you with each stage of your cat's life so please do not hesitate to ask for help. There is no such thing as a silly question!

1.The First Few Days with your Kitten

Before collecting your new kitten, have a room prepared for them with their food bowl, water bowl, litter tray, scratch post and bed **all spaced out around the room**. Ideally this will be a quiet area that is not used very regularly. This will allow your kitten time to settle into their new environment while also not disrupting the normal routine of any other pets in the home. A synthetic pheromone product will provide additional help while your kitten settles in see Chapter 13.

Check you know how to securely fasten your cat carrier before collecting your kitten and place a cosy blanket in the carrier. Covering the carrier with a light blanket will provide an extra feeling of security. See Appendix A for choosing a cat friendly carrier.

Some breeders may encourage you to take a blanket home with you that has been used with the litter. This will have a familiar and reassuring scent of mum and siblings to help your kitten adjust to moving into their new home.

Provide a couple of warm resting areas for your kitten. Igloo beds tend to be popular, but cardboard boxes are a cheap and cheerful option to start with until you learn what your cat prefers. Place a cosy pillow or blanket inside.

Top Tip!

Do not store your kitten's carrier away after getting them home. Keep it accessible so your kitten can use it as a den or a raised lookout. Make the carrier a positive part of the furnishings by regularly topping it up with treats. This will make travelling with your cat a much less stressful experience.



On arrival home with your kitten, place the carrier in this safe room and prop open the carrier door. Ensure the carrier is placed in sight of the litter tray. Allow your kitten some quiet time to investigate this area by themselves. Remember that their journey to their new home has involved lots of unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells, and they have just left the security of their mum and littermates, so they will need some space while they settle in.

Avoid the first few days being a huge family event. Allow your kitten to adjust to their new home and everything that comes with it in their own time. After a few hours sit down in their room and quietly chat to them. Allow them to come to you in their own time, remember less is more. Do not worry if your kitten chooses to run and hide, this is totally normal.


Be patient, allow them to sniff your hand and avoid touching them until they are calm and relaxed around you. Ideally your new kitten will approach you first. If they choose to sniff you then walk away that is fine; they have decided they are not quite ready, and by letting them walk away you are giving them the choice to approach again when they are ready. A cat that feels in control of its surroundings will be a happier cat.

Ensure their litter tray and food bowl contain the same litter and food that they have been used to from the breeders or rescue centre. See Chapter 6 about feeding your kitten and Chapter 7 about litter training. Your kitten may not eat on the day you bring them home, but they should once everything settles again, normally overnight.



Remember to take lots of photos as your kitten grows – they won't be this small for long!





2. Getting to Know Your Kitten

As your kitten settles in with you and your routine, observe how they move around, where they sit, how they jump or climb, and their normal resting position. Initially everything is likely to be either daunting or exciting for your new kitten so it may be difficult to know what is normal for them but as their character comes out, they will show you their individual traits.

How friendly your kitten is with people is down to two factors:

- Genetics. If the mum and dad were friendly and happy being handled, this calmness may pass down to their kittens.
- The amount of positive human contact your cat has had from an early age.

Handling

It is useful to know what your kitten has been used to seeing and doing in their previous home with their mum and litter mates. Continuing regular and positive handling of your kitten will increase their emotional and physical development, starting a lifelong bond with you.

When handling your kitten, begin with little and often. It is important kittens enjoy being handled as this will make veterinary examinations less stressful and will also ensure that you are able to check for any injuries. Handling should always finish on a positive note. Treats and play are normally readily accepted by youngsters.

These ideas have been shown to have a positive influence on handling kittens from a young age:

Type of Handling

- Gentle handling. Concentrate on stroking and gently scratching the areas your kitten finds pleasant, normally head, face and back.
- Chat calmly to your kitten and always go at their pace; if your kitten appears reluctant, let them move away and work at a slower pace next time or increase the reward on offer. Your kitten needs to feel safe and secure with you.
- When starting to pick your kitten up, securely hold underneath and behind the front legs, and support their bottom. Lift them gently then put them down and give them a treat. Repeat this little and often, moving on to lifting and cuddling your kitten into you, putting them down and rewarding. Some kittens find having an ear or chin rub a reward which could be carried out whilst being cuddled into you if they seem to be enjoying it.

Frequency of Handling

Handling should be broken down into several sessions of a few minutes at a time. Be guided by your kitten, the optimum total daily amount is thought to be 40 minutes to 2 hours, split into short sessions.

Number and Type of People Handling

Ideally your kitten will already have been gently handled by a range of different people at the breeders. The more positive experiences they have, the more well-rounded they will become as adults.

Health Checking Your Kitten

With these helpful tips in mind, when fussing your kitten, look and feel for any possible health concerns:

- Check for any signs of itchy, flaky skin, hair loss or for any lumps or bumps
- Check that the area around their bottom is clean and not matted
- Check that their nose and eyes are clean and clear
- Check that their ears are clean, without any obvious odour
- Check that their gum colour is nice and pink

Other areas of concern would be difficulty walking or straining to pass urine.

If you do notice anything you are concerned about, please contact your vet for advice.



3. Meeting Other Family Members and Pets

Meeting other family members, whether it be people, other cats, or other pets, can be challenging for a naturally solitary species. Time and patience are important during these introductions.

Other People

Only once your kitten is settled in its room and is keen to interact with you, should others be invited to meet them. Everyone should remain calm and quiet and children especially should sit on the floor and allow the kitten to approach them. Initial meetings should be kept short and sweet, and slow movements should be encouraged when stroking the kitten if it approaches. **Children need to be aware that your kitten is not a toy so no patting or grabbing of the kitten or its tail should be allowed.**

Other Pets

Animals use scent as a way of recognising one another. So, prior to your kitten meeting other pets face to face the swapping of their scent is recommended using a technique called **scent exchange**. Using a cotton glove, stroke your kitten and allow your other pets to investigate the glove. Repeat the process in the other direction so both parties have the scent of the other pet. Continue to repeat this process as many times as is practical, wiping over prominent scent areas. As both parties become more comfortable, try to swap a piece of bedding each. This will encourage a group scent to form. The next step is a face-to-face introduction with the added safety of a window or stair gate. This should only be done under supervision and stopped if either side is worried. Only remove the barrier once both sides are calm and settled. This point is recommended particularly if a dog or puppy is meeting the kitten for the first time. Have the dog on a lead so you can avoid any chase responses. Always ensure the kitten has multiple escape routes up high or under something safe.



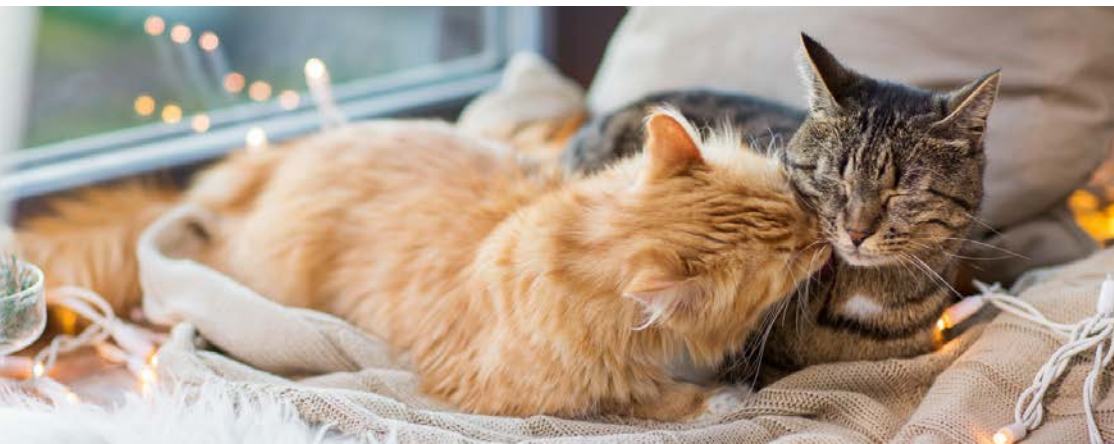
Caution: Cats are hunters by nature so do not allow your kitten access to small pets such as birds, rodents, rabbits or fish.

One Cat or Two?

Cats do not need other cat companions to be happy, they are not like us. Cats are descended from solitary hunters and will more likely see other cats, especially those it does not know, as a worry or a threat rather than an advantage. Two kittens from the same litter have more chance of staying friends but it is not definite. Once they reach maturity at 18-24 months the dynamics of the household can change so 2 cats that were initially friendly to each other may not be, for what appears to be no apparent reason.

Cats that see themselves as part of the same social group will greet one another with their tails held high and will participate in mutual activities such as 'allorubbing' and 'allogrooming'. They will also sleep snuggled up or with at least some body contact. Cats that do not see each other as part of the same social group will likely avoid each other, sleep in different places, and will only come into close contact with each other for something they deem necessary, such as a sunny place to sleep, for owner's attention or for food this is only provided in one location.

With your new kitten in a separate room that your existing cat does not use, allow your resident cat to investigate the kitten only once your kitten has settled in and you have performed some scent exchange. Give lots of praise if they sniff or rub and then walk away. It is likely to be a slow process but getting these introductions off to a good start will hopefully encourage both cats to be comfortable with each other. Always ensure both cats have separate feeding, resting and toileting areas. Cats that do not have to share items will see each other as less of a threat.



4. Safety In and Around Your Home

Kittens are very inquisitive, they find moving objects fascinating, and they can squeeze through surprisingly small spaces. Therefore, kitten-proofing your home is crucial to keeping them safe indoors while they get to know their new environment.

- Initially make sure all windows and doors are shut to the outside world
- Check where your kitten is before opening any doors - they can move quickly
- Securely close your cat flap if it is not being used by other cats. If it is, you'll need to keep your kitten away from the cat flap
- Think like a cat when checking your house for dangers. Secure or remove any dangling electrical cables and fill, or board up any tiny gaps behind appliances such as washing machines, ovens, and freezers
- Tie up any window blind cords and perhaps avoid using tablecloths on tables for now
- Keep doors shut on washing machines and tumble dryers when not in use. These can look intriguing for a young kitten. It is important to double check your kitten is safe before putting these appliances on
- Remove any objects that may become choking hazards such as children's toys, marbles, building bricks, plasticine, string, wool, needles, and cotton



Caution: Check that your cat is not in the washing machine or tumble dryer before use





5. Toxins / Poisons

There are several potential hazards in our homes that can cause serious health problems for our cats. Cats may not even have to consume these hazards to have problems, ingestion of toxins from just rubbing against them then cleaning themselves using their rough tongue can cause intoxication. Familiarise yourself with the most common toxins for cats and avoid having them in your home or avoid using them in the areas that your cat has access to. If you are ever in any doubt whether your cat has been exposed to a potential poison, please get in contact with your vet as soon as possible.



Try to provide information to your vet about:

- What the toxin is called and even better a list of ingredients
- How long since it may have been ingested
- How much they have had access to
- Any concerns with how your cat is or has been, since exposure

Medicines:

Antidepressants

Vitamins

Cancer medications

Any products containing
paracetamol including
cold and flu medicines

Diet pills

Pain relief

Dog flea treatment



Plants:

Aloe

Avocado plant

Azalea

Castor oil plant

Rhododendron

Clematis

Cyclamen

Daffodil

Foxgloves

Rubber plant

Lilies

Geranium

Hyacinth

Ivy

Tulip

Mistletoe

Poinsettia

Household products:

Copper coins

Mothballs

Pot Pourri oil

Fabric softener sheets
and liquids

Dishwashing tablets and
liquids

Homemade playdough

Cleaning products e.g.
bleach, Jeyes fluid



Shed/Garage/Outside

Lead-based paints

Caulking compounds

Creosote

Fertilisers

Herbicides and
pesticides

Rat and mouse baits

Antifreeze

Oil



Human foods:

Alcohol

Chocolate

Caffeine

Onions and garlic

Dairy products

Fat trimmings

Raw meat, eggs and
fish

6. Diet and Nutrition

Kittens need a kitten-specific diet to support this important growth stage between weaning and 8-12 months old. Initially find out what your kitten has been eating and aim to keep this the same whilst they are settling into their new home. If you wish to change your cat's food then once you are happy that they are settled and eating well, start to offer your chosen new food. Always offer new things separately in a separate bowl and not too close to the original food.



Cats are very sensitive and have unique sensory systems. By mixing foods or offering several near each other we can confuse them and put them off eating any of them, so ensure there is plenty of space between the new food and the old. Gradually reduce the amount of the old food and increase the new food over about a week, assuming that your cat is eating the new food. Kittens form taste preferences when young so trying your kitten on different flavours will hopefully help to avoid a fussy older cat.

Cats need a high protein diet to keep them well. They are unable to synthesise some essential nutrients, specifically taurine, so they need this in their daily intake of food. Kitten food comes in many forms; dry, wet, raw, complete, complimentary, semi-moist. Complete food does not need anything added. The wet and semi moist foods tend to be complementary so would need to be fed alongside a complete food. Avoid colourful dry foods, they are colourful for us but have no benefit to your kitten. **Feed wet and dry foods in separate bowls.**

Eating is a solitary activity for cats so offer your cats separate areas to enjoy their food. Many cats will eat together, but not through choice. Cats have small stomachs, so will benefit from smaller meals fed more frequently, rather than a couple of large meals a day. Provide food and water in wide brimmed bowls or saucers. This will allow them to keep a lookout while eating and drinking and will avoid them having to pull their whiskers back so they don't touch the sides of the bowl.

Cats would not normally drink at the same time as eating, so **avoid having a water bowl by their food.** Offer water in separate locations, they are opportunistic drinkers so are more likely to have a drink whilst they are passing rather than make a special trip to the bowl. Encourage your cat to drink by offering water in several locations. Avoid plastic bowls as smells can linger on this material, altering the taste of the water. Some cats do not like stainless steel bowls either, as they can see their reflection. Cats do like moving water, so you may find your cat drinking water directly from the tap. If this is your cat, you may wish to invest in a drinking fountain.

Avoid food and water bowls being tucked into the corners of the room. Moving bowls away from the wall will allow your cat to see around them whilst drinking, increasing their feeling of security and safety.



Feeding requirements will reduce slightly once your cat has been neutered, therefore foods designed specifically for neutered cats, where the nutrient quantities have been changed, will help avoid weight gain. It is also important to monitor the weight of indoor cats as a reduced activity level will put them at greater risk of obesity.



7. Litter Training

Cats and kittens are naturally clean so when the right equipment is provided your kitten will quickly learn to use the litter tray. Some may already have learnt this from watching their mum.

Litter tray tips:

- Cats will prefer a private place to toilet so place litter trays somewhere quiet, away from noisy appliances, windows and doors or high traffic areas.
- Make sure trays are well away from feeding areas, resting areas and water bowls.
- **Provide one litter tray for every cat in the household, plus one extra, in separate locations.** Many cats prefer to use one tray for weeing and another for pooing.
- For young kittens or older cats ensure that trays are low-sided to allow easy access in and out of the tray.
- Trays should be big enough. The tray should be 1 1/2 times the length of an adult cat, many manufactured litter trays are not big enough for the average adult cat. Compost/potting trays from the garden centre are a great alternative.
- Litter trays should have two to three inches of litter in them so your cat can dig prior to toileting allowing enough litter to cover over the soiled area afterwards
- Initially use the same litter your kitten is used to. If you wish to use a different type of litter it is better to add another litter tray with the new litter in, rather than mixing it. Generally, the softer, sandy litters are preferred, but many cats prefer litters they have used previously.
- Avoid using soil from the garden with a young kitten as neighbouring cats may have used it already, increasing the risk of disease being transferred to your unvaccinated kitten.



Tom cats are at an increased risk of suffering a blocked urethra. If your cat cannot pass urine, is straining to pass urine, or is passing small amounts of bloody urine, then contact your vet immediately!



In the first few days of their arrival, you may need to watch for any signs your kitten needs to go to the litter tray as they may not have yet sussed out where it is or how to get there. Signs to look out for are crouching down, sniffing the floor or scratching the ground. If this occurs place them in the tray. After feeding, playing or waking up encourage them into the tray. Once they have been, positively reinforce this behaviour by praising them or offering a treat to encourage them to use it again.

If any accidents occur outside of the tray do not punish your kitten.

They will not understand what you are saying, they will just learn that their new owner is quite unpredictable! Clean any accidents up using a 10% solution of biological washing powder with warm water to completely remove the smell. If your kitten continues to toilet in a particular place, you could either place a tray in this spot or spray this area with Feliway® Classic daily for a month (See chapter 13).

Once the litter trays are in place and being used, avoid moving them as this may cause confusion for your cat. If you want to move a tray then place an additional tray in the house and once this one starts being used routinely then remove the old tray.

Good litter tray maintenance is paramount to encouraging your cats to continue using a tray rather than seeking less desirable latrines:

- Ideally scoop all soiled litter from the tray 1-2 times daily.
- Wash the tray weekly with a dilute detergent such as **washing up liquid**, as it is not strong smelling. Using strong smelling cleaning products may prevent your cat using the litter tray. Take care when selecting your cleaning product as many disinfectants are toxic to cats!

To encourage your cat to eventually toilet outside, create an outdoor toilet for them. This should be easy to dig, kept clean by removing faeces and made appealing by adding some of your cat's litter. Do not move or remove litter trays indoors at this stage as it is likely to cause more indoor accidents.

Top Tip!

Do not use litter tray liners as these can hinder your cat in covering the soiled areas effectively

8. Insurance

Modern day veterinary medicine is a highly sophisticated and technological branch of science, but this comes at a cost. MRI and CT scans are increasingly being used for diagnosis and this has a high price tag – we regularly see cases that cost well into the thousands. At some point during their life, your cat may fall ill or have an accident, requiring medical attention. If you are unlucky, your cat may have a lifelong problem which requires regular ongoing treatment. One of the most distressing situations arises when a pet's illness is curable or an injury repairable but unfortunately the owner cannot afford to pay for the treatment, resulting in the pet being put to sleep. We always advise owners to have sufficient insurance in place to cover these unforeseen events. Choosing the right health insurance for your pet can seem very daunting when you start browsing through comparison websites. For a detailed guide to choosing an insurance plan for your kitten, please see Appendix B.



9. Collars and Microchips

Currently there is no legal requirement for your cat to be identified with a collar and tag, or microchip; but it is advisable. Microchipping is a permanent method of identification that can help reunite owners with their cat. The chip is implanted with a needle under the skin in between the shoulder blades. Most cats will not notice the implant if suitably distracted with food, however microchips can be painlessly implanted under anaesthesia when your cat is neutered.



It is important to remember to keep your microchip contact details up to date.

Collars are more controversial. Collars with bells on are thought to alert wildlife to the presence of a cat nearby but there is a safety risk with collars. Many cats have endured awful injuries from their collars if they get caught up outside. Only ever buy quick release collars so they release if your cat gets caught anywhere, ensuring they get back home unharmed.



Microchip
and grain of
rice for
comparison



10. Vaccinations

There are a number of fatal diseases that can affect cats in the UK. Having your kitten vaccinated is the only safe way to provide immunity against these diseases and if carried out, regular boosters can protect your cat for life. As long as their mother is immune, kittens will usually be protected for the first few weeks of their life. The vaccination is a two-part course with vaccinations being given 3 to 4 weeks apart. The first vaccination can be given as early as 9 weeks of age depending on the brand used. The second vaccination is given at 12 weeks of age at the earliest. Annual boosters will ensure that the protection is effectively maintained. When your vet gives your kitten the initial vaccination course, they will give you a certificate and a record card. Keep this safe as you will need it if you ever need to put your cat into a cattery.

Remember, when you vaccinate your cat, not only are you protecting your cat, but you are helping to stop the spread of disease to other cats.

What diseases can we vaccinate against?

Feline Panleukopenia (FPV)

Also known as feline infectious enteritis or feline parvovirus, this disease can cause severe vomiting and diarrhoea causing irreparable damage to the intestinal lining. This disease will also attack the lymph glands and bone marrow and is often fatal. This vaccine is repeated every 3 years.

Feline Rhinotracheitis (Feline Herpes Virus, FHV) and Feline Calicivirus (FCV)

Both diseases cause symptoms often described as cat flu. Cat flu affects the eyes, mouth, and airways, and can be fatal in kittens. This vaccine is repeated yearly.

Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV)

This virus is spread via the blood or saliva during catfights. This disease suppresses the immune system, leaving the infected cat highly vulnerable to other diseases. This vaccine is repeated every 3 years.



11. Parasites (Fleas, Ticks and Worms)

When it comes to parasites, prevention is better than cure. At Penbode Vets we offer the **Protect4Life** health plan which will help you spread the cost of veterinary supplied parasite-prevention medication and provide discounts on other treatments. There are different ways to treat your pet. The important thing is planning. Your veterinary surgeon will work out a parasite protection plan specifically for your cat, depending on their tendency to hunt and your family's lifestyle.

Protect4Life 

Fleas

Fleas are tiny wingless insects that feed on the blood of animals. They reproduce rapidly, by laying eggs, so if you spot one on your cat, it is likely your house will already be harbouring flea eggs. The flea eggs lie dormant in the soft furnishings of an owner's home and when conditions are right, develop to adult fleas which then lay more eggs, which soon leads to an infestation. Due to their life cycle and modern heating keeping our homes warm, fleas are a year-round problem. Some cats are allergic to flea saliva and can get dermatitis as a result of being bitten. The irritation causes the cat to scratch and overgroom, resulting in sores and scabs. Humans can also be bitten by fleas, usually lurking in the carpets, resulting in raised itchy lumps. Fleas are also the intermediate host for a type of tapeworm. During grooming a cat can ingest these fleas and develop a tapeworm burden. We offer complimentary flea checks with our qualified nurses so please make an appointment.



Ticks

Ticks are oval shaped insects which attach themselves to a host animal to feed. They look like greyish/brown warts. Most cats pick up ticks when moving through long grass and thick vegetation. Tick saliva contains an anaesthetic, so your cat will not feel the bite and neither will you! Ticks can transmit a number of serious diseases to cats and humans, such as Lyme disease. This can cause serious health issues.

Top Tip!

Never pull a tick off as you may leave its head under the skin which can then become infected. Use a tick removal tool which, when used correctly, ensures that all the tick is removed. Remember to kill the tick afterwards so that it cannot attach itself to another animal.



Worms

There are two common types of worm that can infect your cat - roundworms and tapeworms. Due to the life cycle of the roundworm, it is fair to assume that all kittens are infected with roundworm at birth. Cats can pick up roundworm eggs from soil that has had cat faeces on it. The eggs can lie dormant in the soil for up to two years. Eggs can also be present in a cat's coat, so it is important that you wash your hands after touching your pet, as worm larvae can cause permanent damage to human eyesight.

Cats can become infected with tapeworms by eating infected mice, birds or fleas. If your cat has tapeworms, you may notice little egg-filled segments of the tapeworm's body on your cat's bottom.

12. Socialisation and Habituation

Socialisation is an important part of learning for every species. For kittens, it is learning about the world around them and learning the skills they will need to become independent cats.

Your kitten is most likely to accept new and unknown things in the first 8 weeks of its life. This is when all the things your kitten is likely to encounter in their adult life should be introduced to them in a positive way. This includes different sights, sounds, smells, people, and animals.

Your kitten will continue to learn about their surroundings after 8 weeks old so continue to monitor their response in new situations. If at any point your kitten appears worried, then remove them from the situation and start again another day at a slower pace.

Familiarise your kitten with:

- **The cat carrier.** Do not hide this away, use treats or toys to encourage your kitten to play around or in the carrier.
- **Car journeys.** Once your kitten is happy going into the carrier and being carried around, take them into the car, switch the engine on, then come back indoors for fuss and treats.
- **Household appliances.** Switch appliances on when the kitten is out of the room. Play with your kitten in the other room so they can start to get used to these noises from a distance.
- **New items that are brought into your home.** To make new items more familiar to your cats use a technique called scent exchange. Wearing a cotton glove, fuss your cat around its face and then wipe the glove over the new items. This will create scent on the new item making them more familiar to your cat and less worrying.

Top Tip!

Subscribe to

International Cat Care



on YouTube for tutorials on getting your cat used to handling and transportation





13. Understanding your Kitten

As lovely as it would be if dogs and cats could speak English sadly, they do not, so we need to try and understand the clues our cats are sharing with us. These clues come in the form of various sounds, body positions and body movements.

Sounds

Cats have the amazing ability to make a whole array of sounds including meowing, yowling, hissing, spitting, purring, and chirping amongst others.

- Meowing is generally thought to be a call for many things... help, attention, asking to be fed or if cats are worried or anxious.
- Chirruping is something kittens are heard doing towards their mum, some cats use the chirrup as a greeting to their owner and will enjoy their owners chirruping back!
- Yelling and crying are noises heard during cat fights, or if male cats are trying to get near to a female in season.
- Purring is one of the most common noises cats are known to make. Purring is thought to be used for many reasons. Kittens will purr when they are contently feeding from their mum and happy cats will purr when fussed by their owners. **Stressed and injured cats however will also purr.** This is thought to be their reassuring, calming response to help settle themselves in unknown situations. There is some indication that purring helps heal cats too.



Body Positions

Cats use many techniques to avoid other cats and reduce any chance of getting injured. When we consider their solitary descendants, if cats were fighting and becoming injured, they would not be able to hunt for food to survive or get out of the way of any danger. Therefore, they will tend to avoid crossing paths with unknown cats.

If they do come across another cat, they will fluff up their tail and make the hair on their back spike upright by arching their back, to give the impression they are much bigger and scarier than they really are. This normally occurs with some hissing and yowling to scare the other cat away and so avoid any physical confrontations. This is not a happy cat. Kittens may also do this when they are playing while moving sideways, they are likely to just be practising.

A scared cat may make itself look smaller by pressing their ears flat, with their body position welded to the floor. They will likely try and hide underneath something. This is a cat that is very anxious. Give them space and somewhere safe to escape to. Make changes to the situation to try and make them feel more at ease.

If a cat is coming towards you with their tail held high and then rubs on you, or an item nearby this is a friendly greeting. Offering an outstretched hand for them to rub on is a way of accepting their greeting.



Tail Position and Movement

A cat's tail is a very expressive feature on a normally subtle creature.

- **Held up high.** If the tail is held up high your cat is likely to be feeling happy and confident. It is used in a friendly greeting towards familiar cats, animals, and people.
- **Slowly twitching tail tip.** A slowly twitching tail tip is shown by curious cats and when cats are about to pounce on a toy or prey.
- **Quickly wagging side to side.** This cat is likely to be cross or highly irritated.
- **Fluffed up tail.** This tends to be shown by scared cats that perhaps have just run away from another cat or dog chasing them.
- **A tail tightly curled right underneath body.** This cat is likely to be very worried or uneasy about their surroundings.
- **Rapid whipping or flicking of whole tail.** This is a very cross and agitated cat that is likely to lash out to try and escape.
- **Severe thumping of the whole tail.** This cat is extremely cross and about to lash out to escape from the situation.

If your cat is showing signs of being unhappy, stop handling them and give them the space they need to be able to escape to their safe place. Ideally if you could pinpoint what occurred just before these signs were shown, this will help to avoid your cat having to be in the same situation again and reduce the risk of you being injured as a result of your cat's defensive behaviour.

Kneading

Kittens and some adult cats can be seen kneading with their front paws. This is normally a sign of contentment and is thought to originate from kneading whilst feeding from their mum as young kittens. The kneading is thought to help with milk flow but some adult cats will knead soft bedding or pillows prior to sleeping. Kneading and purring are often seen and heard together.

Ear Positions

Your cat's ear positions are good indicators when observed alongside other body positions shown at the same time.

- Ears standing up right. This cat is listening and alert to everything around them.
- Ears pointing forward. This cat is curious and listening to its surroundings.
- Ears back and low to head. This cat is very worried and is trying to hide.
- Ears pointing outwards from head. This cat is not comfortable in its surroundings.
- Both ears are rotated fully backwards with insides showing clearly. This cat is feeling really threatened by its surroundings and will be eager to escape.





Eyes

Cats may slow blink at each other and at us. This is a nice thing to do back to them as it can be reassuring when they are worried. Cats find direct staring threatening so by slowly blinking, we can convey that we are not a threat. The slow blink should be nice and subtle, ideally with your glance directed slightly past the cat rather than directly at them.

Whiskers

Your cat's whiskers are very sensitive and completely mobile. Cats are generally unable to see very close objects clearly, due to their vision being adapted to seeing prey at a distance, so they use their whiskers to investigate all things close to them, and to ensure they can get through small spaces.



Scent and Scratching

Cats are well known for rubbing their heads and bodies on prominent objects or their owners. They do this in order to share their scent messages, known as pheromones, from the scent glands along their face and body. This is normal cat behaviour used both indoors and outdoors. It is likely that if they are sniffing areas outside before rubbing, then another cat has scented there first, leaving a message for other cats to find. If your cat repeats this indoors you may find a slightly oily patch. Try to avoid washing this area, as this unique method of sharing scent will be helping your cat to feel safe and secure. Avoid using strong smelling sprays, air fresheners or incense around your cat as it will mask this important method of communication.

Scratching is a normal cat behaviour. It helps keep their claws in tip-top condition and encourages good stretching. It also allows cats to share more scent messages from the scent glands between their toes. When they scratch, they are not only producing a visual clue that they have been there, but also a scent message too.



Scratching Tips

- Cats generally feel the need to scratch and stretch once they have woken up. Place a scratch post near resting areas.
- Scratching is used as a territory marker so place scratch posts near boundaries such as doorways, the bottom of the stairs or by a cat flap or window.
- There are many options of scratching material available. Posts need to have a heavy base to keep the post sturdy against your cat's adult weight and they need to be tall enough for your cat to fully stretch up the post.
- Commercially available corrugated cardboard scratch boards normally contain catnip which some cats adore.
- Sisal rope wrapped around a tall cardboard roll, old carpet cut-offs and door mats are easy DIY options, and can be placed over pieces of furniture for protection.
- If your cat is not too keen on using a new scratch post, firstly consider its location and suitability. If it is in pristine condition you may then need to score some scratch lines in it with a screwdriver to signal to your cat its intended use.





Synthetic Pheromones

Some companies have made synthetic versions of the feline pheromones that cats live by every day. These can be used to help cats cope when things change in their environment.

Feliway Classic® is the synthetic version of a cat's facial pheromone that they use as a territory marker. When this is used in the diffuser style or spray it can help make any changes easier for your cats to adapt to. The spray can be used in your cat's carrier before transporting your cat anywhere. **Spray 20 minutes before your cat goes into the carrier.**

Feliscratch® is a synthetic version of the pheromone from the scent glands between your cat's toes. It is a blue liquid to visually encourage scratching behaviour onto a preferred area.

Feliway Friends® is synthetic version of an appeasing pheromone that is designed to help diffuse situations of increased tension, whether that is between cats or between cat and owner.

Feliway Optimum® is the newest pheromone therapy on the market which contains a blend of various synthetic components of a number of natural feline pheromones creating a pheromone complex. It can be used in all cases of feline stress related behaviours.

Feliway.com 

There is a **FELIWAY®** solution for every situation



URINE MARKING



NEW HOME



MULTICAT
CONFLICT



HIDING AWAY



SCRATCH
MARKING



TRAVELLING

14. Grooming

Most cats will spend a significant part of their day grooming. Cat's tongues are covered in spines specifically designed to groom their coats effectively, removing loose hair and dirt. Regular brushing can help keep your cat's fur in top condition and is of particular importance in long haired cats.

Introducing Grooming to your Kitten

Initially leave grooming brushes lying around for your kitten to investigate at their own pace. Have some treats available and as soon as your cat shows interest in the brush offer a treat. Once your kitten is comfortable, move on to alternating between stroking your cat and running the brush over them. Start with more stroking and gradually increase the number of times you run the brush over them. Keep offering treats as you do this. Ensure your kitten is able to move away from you if they are not comfortable and keep these sessions short and positive. Aim for 2-3 minutes 3-4 times daily and go at a pace your cat is comfortable with.



You should never have to bath your cat unless advised by your vet or if their fur has been contaminated with a toxic substance.

Both overgrooming and under-grooming can be a sign that something is not quite right. Overgrooming can be a sign of stress, skin problems or pain. Under-grooming could also signify stress as well as decreasing mobility in your cat due to factors such as obesity or arthritis.

15. Neutering

Neutering your cat is strongly recommended to help control the large population of cats in the UK. In addition to preventing unwanted pregnancies, neutering will also reduce the risk of your cat contracting infectious diseases and will help to curb unwanted behaviours.

Males

This is a simple surgical procedure called castration, where both testicles are removed. It is carried out under a general anaesthetic and can be carried out from 12 weeks of age. A neutered male cat is less likely to wander as far away from home as an entire male who would be looking for a mate, thus reducing the number of roads he is likely to cross. A neutered male is also less likely to get into cat fights due to the reduced areas he wanders, thereby reducing his risk of contracting disease. Neutering can also reduce any unwanted, hormonally-led behaviours such as spraying indoors to mark territory. A neutered male cat is likely to be happier, more content and more playful.

Females

Also known as spaying, neutering a cat is a fairly quick surgical procedure where the ovaries and uterus are removed, usually through a small surgical incision on the cat's side. Carried out from 12 weeks old under general anaesthetic, spaying a cat will stop any unwanted pregnancies and will greatly reduce the risk of health problems such as life-threatening womb infections, and mammary cancers.

Once your cat has been neutered their food portions may need to be reduced to avoid any excessive weight gain. For indoor cats in particular puzzle feeders may help to keep your cat active by increasing the amount of time they are working for their food



Did you know?

A female cat can become pregnant by more than one male at each season so the same litter of kittens could have different dads!



16. Play and Enrichment



Play is a really important part of learning for your kitten, but remember adult cats enjoy playing too! As your cat ages just adapt the play sessions to the individual's ability. Playing allows kittens to use the amazing tools they were given to be successful hunters and they will enjoy a selection of toys and games to chase, chew and pounce on. Avoid encouraging your kitten to chase or play with your hands and feet. As cute as this may seem as a kitten, your cat will grow up, and will continue to seek out people as an outlet for their hunting instincts. Setting aside some play opportunities between you and your cat will help strengthen the bond between you and will encourage them to exercise. Cats will naturally make multiple hunting attempts during the day, they do not need to be hungry to hunt. They are built for short bursts of energy rather than endurance. Therefore, short play sessions of no more than 5 minutes, several times a day will keep your cat at the top of their game.

Toys suitable for kittens to hone their hunting skills are:

- **Fishing rod toys.** This will keep all of your kitten's sharp accessories away from your skin! If it is safe to do so, dangle these toys in an area where they will move as people walk past. This will attract your kitten's attention and they will enjoy the spontaneous movement.
- **Small ball type toys.** Cats will roll, batt and chase these around.
- **Bigger soft toys.** These have been designed, sometimes with catnip, to encourage your cat to pounce on and wrestle with often kicking with their back feet.



Top Tip!

Avoid laser toys, they seem fun, but they can cause frustration as the cat cannot catch its 'prey'. If used, finish the laser on a toy so your cat has the satisfaction of catching something.



Some larger scratching trees have many compartments that toys could be added to. Cats will enjoy finding toys and food in different places which will encourage seeking activities.

As with many species, rotating the toys that are free access will keep toys more exciting. Pick half a dozen toys up and keep them stored out of sight for a week, then rotate these with the ones that have been freely available.

Adding catnip to some toys can encourage play, although not every cat responds to catnip.

Cardboard boxes, shoe boxes and paper bags will also provide places for your kitten to explore, rest or hide. Sensory boxes containing leaves, twigs and feathers will also help to stimulate your cat's senses and provide enjoyment

In addition to cat nip (*nepeta cataria*) there are other plants that your cat will enjoy. Try creating a cat friendly garden. [See appendix 3.](#)

Enrichment

All cats, but particularly those without access to the outdoors, will benefit from some environmental enrichment in the form of activity feeding. Activity feeding involves using intuitive ways of providing your cat their daily food requirement meaning they have to put a bit of extra effort and thought into getting their meal, much like they would in the wild.

Examples include:

- Scatter food across a hard floor or make it more difficult by scattering onto a fluffy rug
- Place food into a mug and lie it on its side
- Put dry food in a paper bag, add scrunched up tissue paper to add a layer of excitement
- Cut holes into a crisp tube and add dry food. The food will drop out as your cat bats it around. Commercial feeding balls are also available.
- Leave dry food around the house overnight to give your kitten something to do instead of waking you in the early hours. Interactive cat feeders are great for this (see image)



Doc & Phoebe cat feeders
Available to purchase from
Penbode Pet Vets



17. Rest and Sleep

Young kittens need plenty of sleep, up to 20 hours a day! So, ensure they have plenty of opportunities to rest. Cats will feel more secure if these resting places are raised off the ground, cats prefer higher vantage points; they do not generally find floor space advantageous. A cosy doughnut bed on an armchair, a blanket in a cardboard box, or a fleece blanket on a bed upstairs could all be appealing to a tired kitten. Ensure these areas remain accessible and encourage your kitten to use these familiar places to settle and rest. Remind all members of the household that when the kitten is resting, they are to leave them be, there will be plenty of opportunities to play once they are awake.



Older cats will still prefer raised resting areas but may need an additional ramp or steps in order to access them



18. Letting your Kitten Outside for the First Time

Once you are happy your kitten is settling in and appearing more confident in their surroundings, you can start to think about letting them outside. Before your kitten has access outside ensure they are microchipped, vaccinated, and neutered. Choose a dry day to let your kitten out for the first time and go outside with them. Let them out before a mealtime to make it easier to get them back indoors using food as a temptation. The outside world is likely to be quite a daunting place so ensure there are places your cat can hide under or on to assess their new surroundings. A garden chair makes an ideal raised lookout, and a plant pot will give your cat something to hide behind. Let your kitten investigate everything in their own time. Keep the door or window open so they can dart back indoors to safety if they need to.

Fitting a Cat Flap

A microchip chip reading cat flap is worth investing in, as this will stop any other cats entering your house, and so keeping the indoors safe for your kitten. Introduce the cat flap to your kitten by initially propping it open. Start by encouraging your kitten to go through both ways with food. You may need a raised step initially for your kitten to be able to pass through more easily.

Top Tip!

Place hiding areas and raised lookouts near the cat flap so your cat can hide or assess their surroundings before proceeding to venture further outdoors.

Appendices



Appendix A - Choosing a Cat Carrier



Appendix B - Choosing the Right Health Insurance for your Pet

Choosing the right health insurance for your pet can seem very daunting when you start browsing through comparison websites, but it is important you choose a policy wisely to ensure the very best treatment is provided throughout your pet's life.

You are more likely to claim on your pet insurance than on your home insurance so at Penbode Pet Vets we strongly recommend insuring your pet for illness and injury in order to provide you with peace of mind that the best treatment can be given if the unthinkable was to happen.

Types of pet insurance:

1. Lifetime cover

A lifetime insurance policy will cover for a condition throughout the life of your pet. There will still be a policy limit, paying out a set maximum either per condition, or across all conditions that a pet may have in a year but this amount will reset every year to ensure cover for the life of your pet. This is the most comprehensive cover, and the type that we recommend.

2. Maximum benefit

A maximum benefit policy will have a set limit per condition but will not renew each year so once that set amount is reached, that condition will no longer be covered and you would have to fund any treatment for the rest of your pet's life. The limit for these policies can vary greatly between insurance companies- so do your research.

3. Time-limited

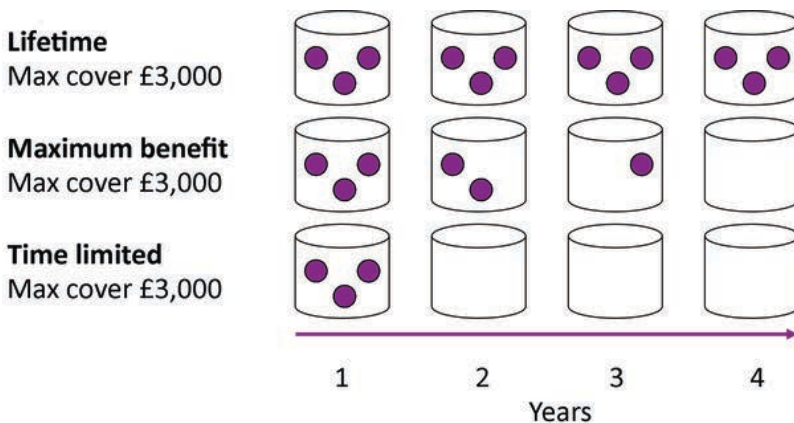
A time limited policy will again have a set limit in pounds that the insurance company will pay out per condition but it will also have a time limit, typically 12 months. So even if the cash limit wasn't reached after a set period of time the condition will still be excluded from further claims. These policies are also known as annual policies. These tend to be one of the cheapest types of policy, so look quite inviting, but take care, if you pet is diagnosed with a condition that may reoccur this policy won't cover it after a set period.

4. Accident only cover

What it says on the tin. They will cover for accidents up to a set limit, for example a broken leg, but not for illness, for example a skin condition. Please be careful with these policies, as most pet insurance claims are for illness

Confused?

Here is an example: Archie the Doberman has a heart condition, and his medication costs £1,000 per year and your policy limit covers up to £3,000 worth of treatment per condition. The illustration below describes how much cover the different types of policy provide with the diagrams representing pots of gold coins. With lifetime cover your pot will refill every year; with maximum benefit, your pot will eventually empty and with time-limited your pot will empty after a year even if you didn't reach your limit in the first year of claiming.



Remember that with advances in veterinary medicine, we are now able to do more to help your pets, this does however come at an increased cost. The above example is not an exaggeration, we are now able to keep our pets alive and healthy for longer than we ever could before and some bills for ongoing medicine for a large dog can exceed £100 per month. Another example is the care of a cat following a road traffic accident. The bill, which could include hospitalisation and initial patient stabilization, pain relief, nursing care, x-rays and a complicated fracture repair may total over £2,000. Our pets really do become part of the family and without an NHS for pets, we do need to plan ahead and ensure we have something in place should our furry friends fall ill.

Please also bear in mind:

Pre-existing conditions

Be very careful if you decide you want to switch to another pet insurance provider. Very few policies will cover pre-existing conditions, which means whether you have made a claim or not and decide to switch, your new provider will exclude that condition. A lot of insurance companies will not allow you to take out a new policy if your pet is over a certain age, usually 8 years old (which is middle-aged for some cats!)

Excess

As with most insurance there will be an excess to pay to your vet before claiming back any money from an insurance company. Some insurance companies may also ask you to cover your excess plus a set percentage of your vet bill. Remember that if you make a claim, most insurance companies will increase your premium the following year so think about whether it is worth claiming for a small bill.

Extras

Look out for any extras that may be beneficial to you such as covering the cost of kennelling your pet should you go into hospital, providing a reward if your pet is lost or stolen or for prescription food, supplements or physical/behavioural therapies. It is also very important to ensure your dog has third party liability cover in the event that they cause damage to other people or belongings.



Dental treatment

Many insurance companies will only pay for dental treatment if it is a result of an accident. Some may pay for the first dental procedure but not subsequent treatments.

Preventative care

Pet insurance will not pay for flea and worming treatments, vaccinations or for elective procedures. At Penbode Pet Vets we have the **Protect4Life** scheme that will allow you to spread the cost of preventative care and provide discounts on procedures. Please see our leaflet or the website for more details.



Making a claim

If you feel you need to make a claim you will need to obtain a claim form from your insurance provider and complete the first section which contains your personal details, details of your pet and when you first noticed your pet was unwell. It is usual policy to ask you to settle your bill with us and claim the money back from your insurer. We may be able to do a direct claim from your insurer in some circumstances. Once we have your insurance form we will complete the rest of the form and send it to your insurance company along with a copy of your invoice and pet's clinical history. We do not charge for this service. Please remember that your pet insurance policy is an agreement between yourself and the insurance company. Whilst we do complete and send in claim forms we are not able to speak to your insurance company directly about your policy. We will however be happy to speak to you if you have any concerns regarding a claim.

Appendix C - Creating a Cat Friendly Garden

Despite enjoying some home comforts, the majority of our cats just love exploring the outdoors. Why not create a garden with your cat in mind so that they can enjoy an environment resembling a mini jungle, much like the natural habitat of their feline ancestors.

Providing cats with an enriching outdoor environment is not only beneficial to their welfare, but may also help to stop them from wandering too far from home, potentially reducing their likelihood of being exposed to various hazards and dangerous roads.

Key features of a cat friendly garden include:

- Places to hide to help them feel safe
- Places to get up high so they have a good vantage or look-out point
- Places where they can toilet in a suitable type of 'substrate'
- Comfortable sunny spots where they can sleep and relax
- Plants and other vegetation they can sniff and explore in
- Shelter from the wind, rain and cold
- A source of fresh drinking water (preferably rain water)
- Something good to scratch on

Cats will enjoy hiding in plants but there are some plants in particular that are more attractive to cats. These include:

Cat Grass – Cats may often eat grass as it is thought to help with digestion. 'Cat grass' is the perfect type of grass for cats to munch on.

Catmint – and other members of the mint family

Catnip – Whilst we're not really sure of the exact effect catnip has on the brain of cats, many cats (around 50-70%) may find the chemicals that the leaves of this plant produce to have a stimulating or hallucinogenic effect.

Honeysuckle – Thought to have a similar effect on cats to catnip (although only about 30% of cats are responsive to it).

Valerian – Depending on the amount of exposure, this plant is thought to have either positively stimulating or calming effects on cats and can be another very welcome addition to your cat-friendly garden.

Top Tip!

Head over to
International Cat Care online
for expert advice on all things
feline!

icatcare.org



international
cat care

NORTH ROAD
HOLSWORTHY
DEVON
EX22 6HB

Tel: 01409 253822

Email:

holsworthy.pets@penbodevets.co.uk

ASHLEIGH HOUSE
THE SQUARE
BRADWORTHY
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